

**Mayor Don Iveson's Presentation**  
**Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

4th floor, Legislature Annex  
Committee Room A  
Feb 4, 2014 (1 pm)

On behalf of my fellow City Council members and the City of Edmonton, thank you for the invitation to present on the feasibility of establishing a high-speed rail system in Alberta.

Edmonton is transforming. Downtown's renaissance continues with confidence. Job openings exceed labour supply. Forecasts for 2014 project continued growth in the province's economy and employment. A key contributor is the growth of Alberta's big cities.

In 2013, the Edmonton region created one of every 10 new jobs in Canada. Migration will continue to be strong in the coming months and years, adding to the labour force and population. The Conference Board of Canada forecasts that our region will be Canada's fastest-growing between now and 2017.

Strong migration into the region from elsewhere in Canada and around the world ... expansion of existing businesses, attraction of new investment ... you will agree that this is a great time to live here.

I applaud this standing committee, in anticipating and planning for further rapid growth, for its consideration of more efficient connectivity and transportation links in Alberta.

After all, the efficient movement of people, goods and services will be key to ensuring that our cities, our economy, our province remain competitive globally. And, to be competitive globally, we must dare to be bold, to dream big — think transformative.

We have one of those rare opportunities to do it right ... to ensure that all of Alberta benefits and that the investment in a high-speed transportation network in Alberta provides maximum return on investment.

After all, when Alberta succeeds, we all succeed.

However, in an environment of finite financial resources, considering options and weighing priorities are part of our decision-making.

In the case of creating a province-wide high-speed rail system that works and makes Alberta more globally competitive, we suggest that the city's urban light-rail transit network be prioritized and developed further in order to feed into any high-speed rail connection being contemplated by the Government of Alberta.

In order for that high-speed connection from one point to another to succeed, those endpoints feed the necessary passenger volumes into the high-speed connection. The current state of Edmonton's transit network is not at the stage of its development to fully support such a rail connection.

The gap lies with the need of a timely expansion of our LRT network, which Edmonton's City Council has unanimously declared is the city's number-one priority.

Voters told us that as the city and region grow ... as we continue to attract rapid growth in newcomers who want to make this area home for them and their families, we need efficient ways of moving people around the city and region.

The benefits of a build-out of Edmonton's LRT system are germane to a capital city whose best days are ahead of us.

We know from recent history that there is an appetite for expanding our LRT system. For example, ridership doubled when it was extended from the University of Alberta to Century Park.

Less motor vehicle congestion on roadways enable the easier movement of goods and services so key to an economy like ours. By spending less on motor vehicles, households have access to increased disposable income for expenses on life's needs, which in turn grow the economy and gross domestic product.

Our region's air quality improves. Greenhouse gas emissions lessen. There is an endless list of other benefits ... but the end result is a connected capital city and region that we can all be proud of with the partnership and leadership of the Government of Alberta.

Committee members, we have a shrinking window of opportunity to fully develop the city's light-rail transit network. Timing is critical, while we can proceed without missing a construction season and while low interest rates remain. Further deferral may incur cost increases. It is essential we continue building a public transportation system befitting Alberta's capital city.

I understand that you have heard from other presentations and submissions, including Edmonton International Airport and Edmonton Economic Development, which have suggested that while high-speed links have a future, investment in the expansion of urban light-rail systems is the number-one priority. Edmonton, Alberta's capital city, is speaking with one voice.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to address the committee, and I look forward to your questions.