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WARD 7 - DRUH FARRELL

# Green Line Update

High quality public transit is essential to the success of any city. It creates jobs, it stimulates and supports the economy, it connects people with employment and amenities, it helps us curb suburban sprawl, it combats congestion, it helps us tackle the climate crisis, and it helps build a more equitable city. The Green Line will do all of this and more. After years of technical review, public engagement, and cost-benefit analysis, the project team is bringing a revised alignment to Council for decision in

June. This approach keeps the project in budget, is technically achievable, and continues to deliver on the city-shaping vision of the project. This is the right time for the Green Line, and I support this new alignment.

I know this is a passionate topic for many Ward 7 residents and Calgarians in general. I also know this is a long blog and that you may not agree on all of my points, but I want to share with you my thought process. For years I have considered community and stakeholder perspectives, considered the technical challenges, been cautious about the budget, and kept an eye on the long-term success of the project, all while pushing the team to do better every step of the way. After all of that, I am confident in the revised alignment.

### **Why is there a new alignment again?**

Cost and technical challenges forced the project team to recommend changes to the previous alignment to stay on budget and within our means to deliver. Detailed review revealed the previous alignment had cost and technical challenges that put the project at risk. The biggest change here meant switching away from an underground alignment between Beltline and 16 Av N. This meant the move to surface running on Centre St N, a bridge over the river, and then underground into Eau Claire/Chinatown.

I shared my thoughts on this change at the time, identifying a number of concerns that I had and was hearing from residents: [Greenline update and engagement opportunities](#).

My main objective was, as it has always been, to ensure the Green Line makes the communities it goes through better. It cannot be just a commuter train. It must be an amenity for the communities it travels through and it must support their continued success as great places to live, work, and play.

### **What changes were made since then?**

Since the announcement of the revised alignment, I have been meeting with the Green Line team frequently and pushing them incredibly hard to deliver on the details I needed to move forward with the new alignment. They also listened intently to the concerns and aspirations of residents, businesses, and stakeholders along the Green Line. For my part, I knew the alignment could be done well based on first-hand experience from cities around the world. The team worked overtime to deliver those details and I am pleased with how they addressed my concerns and those of community stakeholders.

To see the up-to-date plan, learn how the plan was revised based on previous engagement, and read answers to frequently asked questions, visit: <https://engage.calgary.ca/greenline>

### **9 Av N station is back in the plan**

I wanted to see a station at 9 Av N in Crescent Heights and the team has revised the alignment to include this station. I saw this was critical to treating this area as a community and not just a commuter through route. I also heard from many residents that they regretted the loss of the 9 Av N station when the previous underground alignment forced the station too far underground to be cost-effective. I am confident the station will be a valuable amenity for local residents, support local business, and support redevelopment of the many rundown properties along Centre St N.

### **The Centre St N public realm plan is much improved**

Centre St N today is terrible. Almost everyone recognizes it is unsafe, unattractive, unpleasant for pedestrians, and that it struggles to support local businesses. The Green Line is an opportunity to redesign Centre St N to be a more community-focused street with safer crossings while creating a better public realm. It does not have to be a speeding commuter through route and it should not be. The project

team’s updated designs are a massive improvement over the existing conditions on Centre St N and I am confident the redesign will serve Crescent Heights well.

Combined with the reintroduction of the 9 Av N station, I am satisfied with the new Green Line alignment for Centre St N in Crescent Heights.

**The Eau Claire/Chinatown area was redesigned**

Originally the revised alignment had the station located at-grade on 2 St SW. This was not a problem in itself, but it meant that cross avenues needed to be closed and that a tunnel portal entrance would sit in the middle of 2 St SW. It also limited the potential of 2 St SW to become a better street for walking and cycling because of the constrained street width. I knew there had to be a better design option here. Fortunately, the project team delivered. The station and the portal are now both located fully in the Eau Claire community on the site of the Eau Claire Market. The Market is scheduled for redevelopment anyway. The project team worked hard with the Market owners to design a station that works for the Green Line and supports future redevelopment of the site. This change encases the station within the redeveloped Eau Claire Market, leaves all cross avenues open, and opens up more opportunities for a better 2 St SW for both adjacent communities. This station, in general, is also key to finally pushing the redevelopment of the Market forward and helping Eau Claire reach the residential density it needs to become a complete community.

One unfortunate element of this alignment is that it still requires the purchase or expropriation of the River Run condominiums that sit along the Bow River Pathway. I really struggled with how these residents would be forced to move for the project. I empathize with their unenviable situation. At the same time, I am in the unenviable position of having to weigh the interests of these residents with the interests of the hundreds of thousands of Calgarians who will be positively affected by the Green Line. I am also reminded of when the Red Line was originally built through Sunnyside. It meant homes needed to be demolished and that too was a shame. Today, though, the Red Line is a tremendous benefit to the community and the people who opposed the Red Line at the time couldn’t think of Sunnyside being any different. While I feel for these residents, I see that the benefits for Calgarians overall are worth it.



**How does the Green Line interact with the Bow River Pathway?**

The Bow River Pathway is one of Calgary’s busiest places for recreation and transportation. A pre-requisite for me on any Green Line alignment is that it maintains or improves this key amenity. The revised alignment will still affect the existing pathway. However, the pathway is being rebuilt anyway as part of a flood mitigation and pathway improvement project. This gives us the opportunity to align that project with Green Line and improve the area. The project team provided additional details on how Green Line and a rebuilt Bow River Pathway can co-exist. I am satisfied with their commitments and that this intersection of pathway and LRT can be done well. With the loss of River Run, we also have the opportunity to provide more public and park space at this narrow pinch point in the pathway system. A silver lining, to be sure.

Combined with the changes made south of the pathway, I am satisfied with the new alignment through Eau Claire and Chinatown.

**What about the bridge?**

First, the bridge now includes a walking/cycling pathway on its deck next to the LRT line. This is something that I wanted to see in any bridge alignment and I am pleased to see it included now. This pathway will improve mobility options for Calgarians and more cost-effectively connects communities north and south of the river by active mobility. This is a clear win.

Otherwise, I will freely admit that how the Green Line travels from McHugh Bluff, over

the Bow River, and across Prince's Island remains the Green Line's biggest challenge. The project team provided visuals on how this can be done well, and I believe it can be done well, but the proof will be in the results. The design needs to be beautiful, it needs to be environmentally sensitive, and it needs to have a light footprint on these natural spaces. The project team's preliminary designs show this can be done well and I will continue to push them hard on this throughout detailed design.

### **And the BRT?**

The new alignment still includes improved BRT service along Centre St N. This is key to improving transit service on Centre in advance of the Green Line extending north. Recent changes now allow buses to run on top of the Green Line tracks, allowing the train and buses to share space. This will provide better priority for transit users and moves more buses off the remaining travel lanes on Centre.

Recent changes also mean that BRT lanes will continue along the Centre Street Bridge as the Green Line peels off to the new bridge. Given that Centre St north of the bridge will have two general travel lanes regardless, this provides an opportunity to reallocate space on the Bridge to better support transit users. After all, more people already take transit than drive on Centre St N today. We should support those Calgarians in their choices and make those choices easier for more Calgarians.

### **What about not building to 16 Av N at this time?**

This idea was floated by several different stakeholders and I considered it carefully. Ultimately, I see that it is the wrong approach. On its own, the 16 Av N station will be the third busiest station on the system. It has a strong connection with the MAX Orange line and will help support redevelopment of the rundown properties along Centre St N and 16 Av N. That said, hitting 16 Av N is not just about the station itself.

Reaching 16 Av N in this stage of the project is essential for further extensions north. The portion between the Downtown and 16 Av N is the most complex portion of the Green Line and waiting only makes it more expensive. We have an unprecedented funding agreement between all three orders of government that means we can reach 16 Av N now. We may not have this opportunity again and further delays mean the north leg of the Green Line may never happen. Once we reach 16 Av N, further extensions north will be relatively easy, relatively affordable, and can likely start construction soon after 16 Av N station's opening day. Like we do with the Red and Blue Lines, we will keep expanding to serve communities that have been desperate for better transit for decades. This is also a key move to accelerate the long desired train connection to the Calgary International Airport. Reaching 16 Av N in Stage One is critical to making all of this happen.

### **What about COVID-19?**

Transit has suffered from COVID-19 around the world. However, the pandemic is a moment-in-time. Transit projects, on the other hand, are built for 100+ years. Even in the short-term, projections show we will be out of the pandemic by the time of opening day for the Green Line in several years' time. While Council's attention is rightly focused on COVID-19 at the moment, we also need to keep an eye on the future. I am confident that the Green Line is the right choice for the long-term resiliency of our city and that its economic stimulus will be key in helping us as we emerge from the pandemic.

### **Are there conditions on your support?**

Yes, absolutely. I am confident in the revised alignment but success will still be in the details. I will advocate for the following at Council:

1. A traffic calming and mobility study that considers the effects of the Green Line. Driving volumes have declined on Centre St N for decades and are now below what the street saw in the 1960s. Nonetheless, there are valid concerns that some traffic

will be redirected to other major streets and into the adjacent communities. The team has already committed to this study to ensure that parallel routes like 10 St NW, 4 St NW, and Edmonton Tr NE do not become overwhelmed with traffic. While the Centre Street Bridge was completely closed between 1999 and 2000, these parallel routes fared well, despite a complete shutdown of Centre and higher trip volumes at the time. I am confident we can make Centre St a great people-and-transit-first street, while ensuring those other Main Streets are community-focused too. Communities along the Green Line need traffic calming and active mobility improvements regardless, so this is a good opportunity to combine that work with Green Line.

2. A streetscape improvement plan for Centre St S in Chinatown. While Green Line will improve Centre St N through Crescent Heights, Centre St S through Chinatown also needs a boost. Presently the street has sunken and narrow sidewalks penned in by concrete barriers. It has unsafe pedestrian crosswalks where multiple people have died in recent years. It acts as a commuter through route, rather than a street that should stitch together the two sides of this crucial cultural community. The Green Line is a great opportunity to redesign this stretch of Centre and make it a better community street that supports local residents and businesses.

3. The bridge must be brilliant. This remains my biggest area of focus for the Green Line. As I said earlier, the design needs to be beautiful, it needs to be environmentally sensitive, and it needs to have a light footprint on these natural spaces. I have been incredibly clear with the project team that I will hammer this point home until trains are rolling on the tracks. I will be on them day and night to ensure that this bridge is the best it can be.

4. Taking care of business. Several years ago, Council approved my motion to support businesses affected by the Green Line construction. The Green Line will benefit businesses once operational, but there will always be challenges during construction. Other cities have implemented strong plans to provide stability to local businesses during major transit construction and business even went up in some cases. We can learn from their successes and failures to help keep businesses healthy and successful during Green Line construction. We need to reinforce this as a top priority, especially as businesses struggle to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession.

I want to thank everyone who has participated in the Green Line project to-date and encourage all of you to continue to be involved as the detailed design rolls out. The Green Line is a tremendous opportunity to improve the lives of Ward 7 residents and Calgarians in general. It is time to make it happen.

**Categories:** Green Line LRT, Planning & Development, Transportation



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