

Deerfoot upkeep may return to city

BY JASON MARKUSOFF, CALGARY HERALD FEBRUARY 8, 2010 7:14 AM

Ten years after the province took responsibility for Deerfoot Trail from the city, it is looking to return the urban freeway to Calgary's control.

Transportation Minister Luke Ouellette doesn't foresee the move until at least mid-decade, but his interest in a handover is catching Calgary aldermen by surprise.

Assuming control of Deerfoot Trail would leave the city dependent on provincial grants, or its own coffers, for safety upgrades and repaving the 50-kilometre ribbon.

The city would also face maintenance and snow-clearing costs, which can run up to \$8 million annually.

"All of those things have a significant consequence on city taxpayers," Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart said.

Both sides say any talk about a handover is still far off.

It would come sometime after the further planned Stoney Trail extensions provide a north-south bypass for motorists.

Construction on the southeast leg, expected to begin this spring, would complete a bypass option for provincial traffic by fall 2013.

"Once we have our new highway, which is the ring road all the way around the city, we will be negotiating with them to take (it) back," Ouellette said in a recent interview. "The Deerfoot Trail won't be our highway."

The province took over Deerfoot in 2000, along with the then-puny Stoney Trail, as part of a new infrastructure strategy and its efforts toward establishing a trade corridor to Mexico.

Calgary kept responsibility for policing its main roadway, and reaped money from speeding and other traffic fines. But the province became responsible for the welfare of the infrastructure, including a contract with Carmacks for winter and summer maintenance that runs between \$5 million and \$8 million a year, according to Alberta Transportation.

The province's \$170 million in Deerfoot upgrades over the decade included extending it past Marquis of Lorne Trail, and in 2005 finally making it a free-flow corridor by removing the last set of traffic lights at Douglasdale Boulevard S.E.

Trent Bancarz, a spokesman for Alberta Transportation, could not explain how the return would work,

given that negotiations haven't started. But he pointed to a similar move with Okotoks's Northridge and Southridge Drives about seven years ago, after the Deerfoot extension took pressure off the town road that connects with Highway 2A.

"It's typically been a matter that the road no longer serves a highway function, so it is, for all intents and purposes, a local road," Bancarz said. "So the thought is that it should be a local responsibility."

Giving the Deerfoot back to the city as a local road apparently wasn't part of the 2000 agreement that saw the province take jurisdiction over it, Bancarz said. It certainly had never been discussed with council members including Colley-Urquhart, who pushed the province to work with city hall and Calgary Police on a Deerfoot safety audit, and then to actually follow the review's findings.

Ald. Bob Hawkesworth, whose northwest ward borders the freeway, said that while who does what has sometimes been confusing, he has few complaints with the Tory government's management of Calgary's key artery.

"Especially with all the issues around snow removal and everything, the province has done a pretty good job at handling the Deerfoot," he said. "I can understand if they think that Stoney Trail is the substitute, but I think council would want to know what the benefits are for us to take it back."

The negotiations would include whether the province compensated the city for ongoing maintenance costs, and the condition of the road, now 39 years old.

Talk of relinquishing control of the freeway certainly hasn't stalled the government's construction work there. Improvements should be complete this year on the section between Beddington Trail and 64th Ave. N. Work to ease the notorious bottleneck at Glenmore Trail is also supposed to come in the next few years.

"We'll give it back to them in good condition," Ouellette said. "We always bring it up to a higher standard where they won't have to spend any money on it for a while."

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History Of The Freeway

Deerfoot Trail was named after Api-kai-ees, a Siksika (Blackfoot) long-distance runner from the 1880s who went by the name Deerfoot. He was the son of Chief Crowfoot's nephew.

Deerfoot Trail was constructed in four stages:

- - The first stage, completed in 1971, stretched from the city's north boundary to 16th Avenue N.E.
- - The second stage, finished in 1975, continued south to 17th Avenue S.E.

- - The third stage, which reached Glenmore Trail, was completed in 1980.
- - The last segment, finished in 1982, wound up at Highway 22X.
- - The province took over responsibility from the city for highway maintenance and upgrades.
- - An 11-kilometre extension linking Deerfoot Trail to Highway 2 near Okotoks, was opened Nov. 28, 2003.
- - Became a fully free-flow road with removal of last traffic lights in 2005. As part of the North American north-south trade route known as the Canamex corridor, the extension was built to alleviate truck traffic and the commuter gridlock on Macleod Trail.

Source: Calgary Herald Archives

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