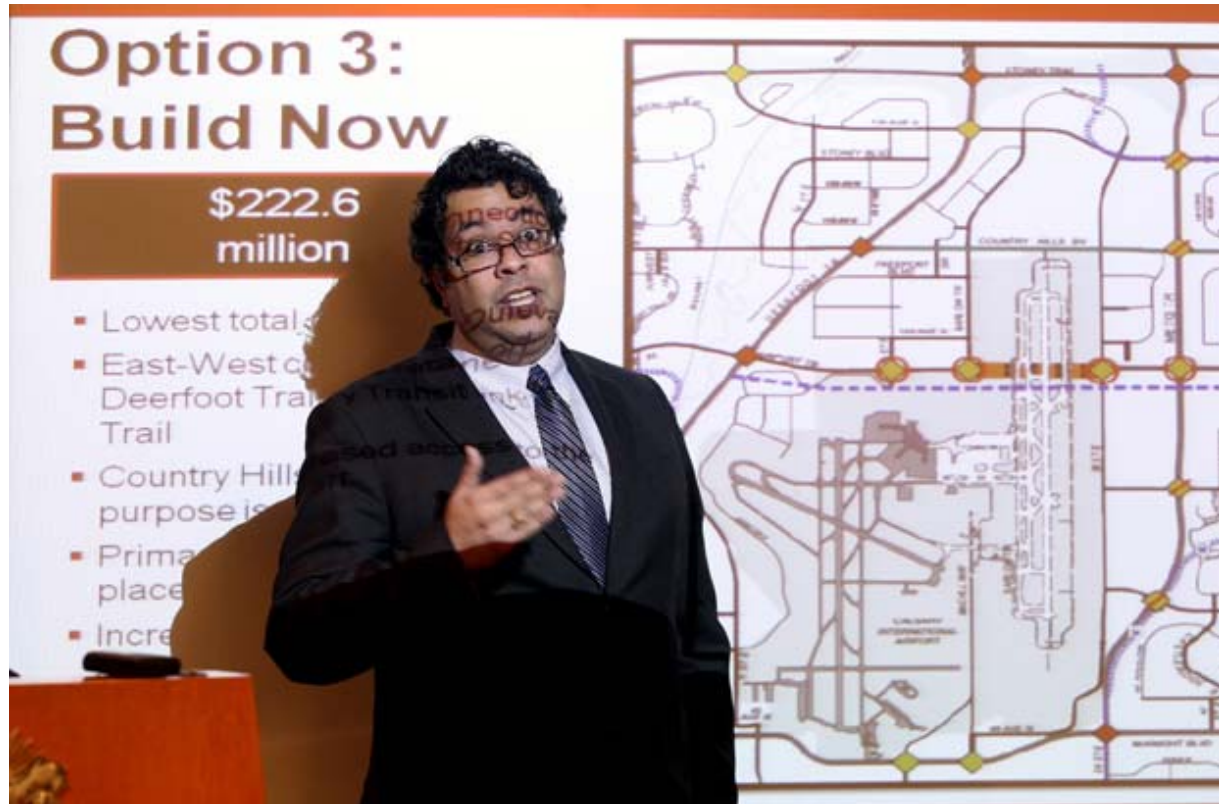


# No tunnel vision

## Council should approve the airport tunnel today

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Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi speaks about the airport tunnel project during a press conference on Thursday, February 3, 2011 at City Hall.

**Photograph by:** Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald

The proposed airport tunnel is hardly the "wee, tiny piece of infrastructure," suggested by Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart. She, and those planning on voting against it today at city council, fail to see how this "tiny" project is critical to the future direction of the city's transportation network.

The Herald editorial board has expressed arguments in favour of building the tunnel many times before. We are even more convinced, now that city administration has finally delivered a realistic cost estimate for the project. The \$295 million estimated cost includes a healthy 30 per cent contingency. Also included are financing charges and the cost of building a road to connect the tunnel to the existing Stoney Trail airport exit.

The choices before council include a "do nothing" option. There are 30,000 vehicles a day that travel the stretch of Barlow Trail that will be closed for a new airport runway. When that happens, traffic will need to be rerouted around McKnight Boulevard, Metis Trail and Country Hills Boulevard. The cost of increasing the required road capacity by "doing nothing," according to the city transportation department report, equals between \$325 million and \$425 million in today's dollars.

Do the math. As Mayor Naheed Nenshi told the editorial board Friday, "It's a no-brainer."

To recap for those aldermen still scratching their heads, there are numerous reasons why we need the tunnel now.

It is a significant missing link that would allow traffic to flow unimpeded from Centre Street east to the Stoney Trail ring road. That would significantly reduce congestion on Deerfoot Trail by creating an alternative route for thousands of commuters a day. Without it, an existing airport exit on Stoney Trail would be useless -- a "bridge to nowhere" standing as a testament to bad planning.

The tunnel also provides a sensible LRT option to the airport. The current plan calls for an airport station on the future North Centre LRT line up the west side of Deerfoot Trail. It would include a "people mover" to the airport that has never been costed. The proposed tunnel has room to run C-trains to the existing northeast line. The city could immediately create a bus rapid transit lane through the tunnel, and eventually lay down rails for an LRT airport feeder.

Not building the tunnel would require a return-trip detour of up to 15 minutes along a "hat-shaped" route around the north end of the airport. It is the same distance, according to Nenshi, as going from City Hall to Heritage Drive.

The tunnel is a critical link that never should have been erased from the city's long-range plans. Council needs to approve the tunnel project today.

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