

Standby tow truck program approved

BY KIM GUTTORMSON, CALGARY HERALD JANUARY 21, 2010

Tow trucks could be on standby to clear collisions and stalled cars from major city roadways by early March, after a city committee on Wednesday approved a year-long test run.

If it gets the final go-ahead from council next month, the trucks would be stationed at five choke points to quickly remove problem vehicles.

Over the past three months, the city has logged more than 1,400 incidents when disabled vehicles held up traffic.

For example, one stalled car on Crowchild Trail where it crosses the Bow River can back up traffic north to 32nd Avenue during the morning rush hour, said Troy McLeod, the city's manager of traffic.

Running the program for a year will allow city staff to determine how many incidents were attended and how quickly a scene can be cleared.

"We'll get a better sense of how effective it is," McLeod said.

The city ran a previous pilot project along Glenmore Trail in 2005 and 2006, when interchanges at Elbow Drive and 5th Street S.W. were being built.

On Wednesday, the land use, planning and transportation committee agreed to take \$636,000 from the city's rainy day fund to pay for the trial run, after hearing the transportation department has no extra money in its budget to cover the cost.

Director of roads, Ryan Jestin, said if the program lives up to expectations, the cost could be added into next fall's budget talks, when a new three-year document will be set.

The tow trucks would cost \$84.80 an hour to be on standby during morning and afternoon rush hours.

The locations would be Macleod Trail between Anderson and 162nd Avenue, Crowchild where it crosses the Bow River, Glenmore between Crowchild and 14th Street S.W., and Memorial Drive between the Deerfoot and Edmonton Trail. A fifth truck would be a rover on Deerfoot.

City staff will ask the province to look at changing the Traffic Safety Act, which would allow the city to recover the cost of towing from motorists, and investigate other ways to have the program pay for itself.

Ald. John Mar said funding options need to be explored immediately, because the longer it runs as a "free" service, the harder it will be to change.

"Once it becomes practice, it will remain," he said.

McLeod said the difficulty with cost recovery is drivers may object to being towed off the road by a city truck and charged if they are already paying for that service through, for example, an Alberta Motor Association membership.

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