

City urged to install standby tow trucks

'We've got to get traffic moving, says alderman

BY KIM GUTTORMSON, CALGARY HERALD OCTOBER 31, 2009

Keeping tow trucks on standby off major roads during rush hour to help clear stalled vehicles involved in accidents should be considered, says Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart.

"One day last week, there were three accidents on Deerfoot," she said. "Certainly today the traffic is worse than four, five years ago when the pilot project was done.

"No tow trucks is really problematic."

In a notice of motion going to council Monday, Colley-Urquhart asks her colleagues to investigate updating a pilot project, launched in 2005 to deal with congestion caused by construction on the Glenmore Trail-Elbow Drive-5th Street interchange.

She wants city staff to look at where it might make sense to have tow trucks standing by, including the Deerfoot, even though it's a provincial road, and to look at what the cost would be to set up the program, including having those towed picking up the charge.

"The crux of the matter is who's paying the tow trucks to be there in morning rush hour and afternoon rush hour, during peak travel?" Colley-Urquhart said.

The Ward 13 alderman points out the city's current towing contract -- which covers a number of city departments and agencies, including the parking authority, Calgary Transit, police and fire -- expires early next year and she wants staff to look at how a standby service could be incorporated.

She would also like city administration to investigate the feasibility of quick clearance legislation, which requires people to try to get off a major road when there's an accident or stall.

Ald. Druh Farrell said tow trucks on standby are a great idea.

"I'd like to know why we're not doing it now," she added.

Ald. Joe Connelly also supports the concept.

"Obviously one break down can back up traffic for hours," he said. "We've got to get traffic moving, it's becoming a problem, it really is."

He said he needs to see what the costs of a standby tow truck program would be, a concern echoed by Ald. Dale Hodges.

"What's the cost-benefit?" asked the veteran alderman. "How effective could it be?"

If council passes the motion, a report on where key tow truck locations could be and budget requirements would come back to the land use, planning and transportation committee, which Colley-Urquhart chairs, by the new year.

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