



## Standby tow trucks keep traffic moving

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That dinner you managed to eat with your entire family? Thank the tow trucks.

That early meeting you made it to on Monday morning, saving you from a irritated boss and a bad start to the week? Again, thank the tow trucks.

And for those who doubted the difference a small fleet of standby tow trucks might make when it comes to clearing rush-hour arteries of stalled cars and minor crashes, consider this.

In the first five days of operation, Calgary's new tow truck fleet cleared 55 traffic-blocking vehicles off trails like Deerfoot, Crowchild and Glenmore.

Don't think of that number as 55 cars, trucks and vans — think of it as 55 traffic jams, because without the standby tow trucks, that's what they would have become.

"I just received a phone call from a woman ... who was helped by the roving tow truck project this morning."

So reads a report from an official at the city's Traffic Management Centre, detailing one of the first rescues conducted by the new fleet, first deployed on Feb. 16.

"She had a flat tire on southbound Deerfoot Trail just before Memorial Drive and waited less than 10 minutes before City Wide came along to help her.

"She said that they were a huge help to her and that she was very thankful because she did not have a cell phone of her own to call for help and she was very nervous being broken down on Deerfoot Trail."

If the motorist was relieved, imagine the drivers who didn't have to crawl along for an extra hour in snail-pace traffic, cursing their luck, their sorry lives and the Deerfoot in general.

Notorious for its design, the Deerfoot is also infamous for transforming from freeway to parking lot at the slightest mishap — the city recorded some 1,400 traffic clogs in three months prior to the new towing service.

The five tow trucks, if nothing else, provide invaluable stress relief to thousands of motorists, who've learned to dread the daily commute above all else.

But to add up the wasted time and fuel is to realize traffic jams are more than a headache — they're a serious economic hindrance in a city with so many commuters.

That loss of vast minutes and money on Calgary's major freeways is the reason Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart resurrected the stand-by tow idea, years after it was successfully tested on Glenmore Tr.

Shelved due to a lack of money back in 2005, Colley-Urquhart finally convinced city council it was worth the \$636,000 price tag to test a tow truck fleet for the next year.

There have been critics of course — anything costing money seems to draw public complaints these days — but the early numbers are showing the tow fleet is having a positive impact.

"Just think of the difference we made for drivers in just one week," said Colley-Urquhart.

"It seems like such a small thing, but it makes a big difference."

It especially made a difference during the afternoon of Thursday Feb. 18, when the stand-by tow team cleared a whopping 16 vehicles over the rush hour.

Indeed, whether it's tired drivers or people driving less carefully on the way home, it the p.m. commute that's the busier time for traffic-clogging mishaps, with an average of 7.4 incidents cleared per rush hour.

The morning, despite a peak of eight tow-truck calls on Feb. 17, is averaging 2.7 incidents.

The trucks, contracted through City Wide Towing, are dispatched through the city's Traffic Management Centre, which monitors major routes through a system of more than 50 live cameras.

While it's early on in the experiment, Calgary's traffic experts are also reporting that the tow trucks seem to be making a difference.

"It been quiet this week, and it's hard to say why — there just hasn't been many problems out there," said Jenny Howe, traffic reporter for CBC Radio's The Homestretch show.

"I can tell you that when people are reporting collisions, the tow trucks are on the scene much quicker than usual."

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