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**Tow trucks on standby****Alderman unveils proposal to clear crashes on city road more quickly**

By MICHAEL PLATT - CALGARY SUN

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**Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart proposes to have the city fund a plan to put tow trucks on major roads to cut down the time it takes to clear wrecks.**

Five tow trucks to cure the five biggest commuting headaches in Calgary.

That's the plan and if the rubber-stamp of common sense is taken up by aldermen this month, standby tow trucks will be providing rush-hour relief to motorists as early as February.

It's a simple solution: Tow trucks wait at the roadside, and if a crash occurs, they reach the wreckage in moments, clearing the lane and the clot of traffic behind.

A report headed to the city's Transportation Committee on Jan. 20 has city officials recommending that five commonly clogged roads be patrolled with their own exclusive tow-truck sentinel, ready to respond within seconds of a fender bender.

Obtained by the Sun yesterday, the report suggests \$636,000 be spent on a year-long trial, targeting the five stretches of road deemed most prone to serious clogs as a result of minor crashes.

The hotspots identified by the transportation department are Crowchild Tr. as it crosses the Bow River; Memorial Dr. between Deerfoot and Edmonton Tr.; Macleod Tr. between 162 Ave. and Anderson; and Glenmore Tr. between Crowchild and 14 St. S.W.

Deerfoot Tr., the road which spurred this latest push for expedited towing, also gains a wrecker's truck under the recommended plan.

If approved, the trucks, costing \$84.80 an hour, would be on duty for three hours in the morning and again during the evening

commute.

"It's obvious this would improve the flow of traffic in this city," said Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart.

Colley-Urquhart has been saying pretty much the same thing for the past five years, after her first attempt to have a tow fleet stationed on city freeways stalled due to a lack of cash.

It was way back in 2005 when a test project on Glenmore Tr. showed standby towing saved up to 30 minutes in response time per crash, worth thousands of dollars in lost time to motorists.

It was a great success in keeping traffic flowing, but the tow truck test was scrapped.

Colley-Urquhart didn't give up though and a rash of Deerfoot traffic delays last fall resulted in the alderman bringing a new motion forward, suggesting the tow truck fleet be tried again.

Aldermen will have to find the \$636,000 to pay for the new trial, possibly gleaned from the city's rainy-day fund.

But, Colley-Urquhart said it's a small amount of cash, given the cost of Calgarians stuck in traffic jams.

In the big scheme of things it's not a lot of money, compared to adding interchanges and widening roads and that kind of thing," said Colley-Urquhart.

"We really need to get on with it, and that money is an investment towards making everyone's lives a little easier."

That it's taken five years and a full safety audit of Deerfoot Tr. to return to this already-proven point is indicative of the study-first, act later attitude too often adopted down at city hall.

That Deerfoot safety audit, finished a year-and-a-half ago, has yet to result in a single change on Calgary's busiest freeway, despite 1,900 collisions every year.

Wider shoulders, pull-in areas and extra lanes were all suggested in the \$7-million audit, which remains in a limbo of analysis and follow-up studies.

But the same study also named tow trucks as an easy solution to the traffic jams which regularly haunt motorists, and that spurred Colley-Urquhart to draft the motion asking they be implemented immediately.

Of course, "immediate" at city hall generally means months, and despite being approved by city officials, the tow truck plan still requires an aldermanic committee and then city council to allow it — that means mid-February at best.

A second section of the motion, which will change Calgary's traffic bylaw to require immediate removal of wrecked vehicles following police investigation, will be debated by aldermen in June.

Colley-Urquhart just hopes this latest standby towing attempt escapes the ditch of bureaucratic delay.

"We've studied this thing to death now for about five years," she said.

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