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Ring road connections off-track

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Aldermen may have just one chance to make the right southwest connections to the ring road. Right now, it looks as if they're getting ready to blow it.

Despite recommendations from the city's traffic engineers, some aldermen see no need to tie 90th Avenue S.W. or Southland Drive to the ring road.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart says the two road connectors are a waste of money that won't make a bit of difference. Ald. Barry Erskine, on the other hand, fears the roads will be flooded with traffic to a proposed business park on the Tsuu T'ina reserve.

Colley-Urquhart says these connections will be useless, Erskine says they'll be disastrously popular, but both agree they shouldn't be built.

City traffic planners (oh, them) say the connections are needed precisely because they will carry more traffic -- traffic that would otherwise push alternative routes beyond capacity.

Colley-Urquhart says city officials are merely "obsessed" with the 90th Avenue S.W. and Southland Drive connections.

Here's a word of advice: when an engineer is obsessed about a matter that lies within his or her competence and responsibility, it's a good idea to pay attention.

Engineers pride themselves on having good reasons for their opinions. They work at getting the right answer, not the convenient answer. If engineers have a fault, it is perfectionism.

All the more reason, then, to listen when they say something's important. They're not indulging in a madcap whim; they're not fantasizing about the ultimate road network. And they are not "obsessed." They are rendering a considered, professional opinion.

Traffic planning, alas, is the place where civil engineering collides with politics, and the wreckage isn't pretty. Fifty irate phone calls to an alderman can trump two years of careful study.

I don't buy the proposition that we'll be fine with ring-road accesses at Anderson Road and Glenmore Trail and nothing between. That's more than six kilometers of ring road with no connection to the city it's meant to serve. The typical interval between connections on Deerfoot Trail is only three kilometers.

Southland and 90th aren't far apart, and in fact they'd be joined into one connector that ties to the ring road on the Tsuu T'ina reserve. (If this new link between Southland and 90th isn't built, then 24th Street S.W. will serve the purpose, for better or for worse.)

I think one of the great benefits of a ring road is that it takes a lot of medium and long

trips off major streets within the city. With reasonably-spaced connectors, drivers don't have to go far to reach an access route to the ring road, where they can put the pedal down and cover distance quickly.

But with no ring road connector between Anderson Road and Glenmore Trail, motorists will have to drive several kilometers north or south -- on 24th Street S.W., 14th Street S.W., Elbow Drive S.W. or Macleod Trail -- to reach a ring road connector. It's a waste of time and fuel, and it puts a further burden on these roads.

Worse yet, eliminating the Southland/90th connection to the ring road would eliminate an alternative to the Glenmore Causeway. Without the Southland/90th connection, people who need an alternative to the Glenmore Causeway will have to drive all the way south to Anderson Road to cross the river via the ring road.

Sooner or later, we will have a monster traffic jam on the causeway, and we'll be grateful for every alternative.

City council has the chance to make a huge mistake on this one.

Let's hope they don't.

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