

IRTMP Technical Stakeholder Engagement Summary – What We Heard

**Integrated Regional Transportation Master
Plan (IRTMP)**

Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board

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**Edmonton Metropolitan
Region Board**

Regional Action. Global Opportunity.

Prepared by:



1 Background

The Integrated Regional Transportation Master Plan (IRTMP) project has been underway since the fall of 2019. The IRTMP takes direction from the 2017 Edmonton Metropolitan Region Growth Plan (Growth Plan). The purpose of the IRTMP is to build on the policy direction of the Growth Plan and identify key elements of and policy directions for the transportation system over the next 25 years to 2045.

Technical stakeholder engagement was identified in the IRTMP Project Charter as a key component of the IRTMP. Stakeholders provide a unique boots-on-the-ground perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing transportation in the Region. Connecting with these stakeholders allows the project team to better understand the current and future transportation needs in the Region.

A list of technical stakeholders was initially developed by EMRB Administration and was added to by members of the Project Team and IRTMP Working Group. These stakeholders included organizations whose interests include passenger transportation and/or goods transport functions, whether by road, rail, air, or active modes (transit, walking and bicycling).

The following 22 stakeholder organizations were contacted by the EMRB and the consultant team in mid-November:

- Alberta Health Services
- Alberta Industrial Heartland Association
- Alberta Motor Transport Association
- Canadian Armed Forces
- Canadian Pacific Railway
- Canadian National Railway
- Canadian Urban Transit Association
- Commercial Real Estate Development Association (NAIOP Edmonton)
- Edmonton Global
- Edmonton International Airport
- Greater Edmonton Region Chambers of Commerce
- Government of Canada – Office of Western Diversification
- Leduc Chamber
- Nisku Business Park
- Northern Alberta Institute of Technology
- Pathways for People
- Regional Transit Services Commission (RTSC)
- River Valley Alliance
- Strathcona Industrial Association
- Treaty 6 (Enoch Nation)
- University of Alberta
- Urban Development Institute – Edmonton

Of the 22 stakeholders contacted, 21 replies were received (a response rate of 91%) and a 23 video conference interviews were carried out in December and early January.

Stakeholders were provided with questions in advance of each interview. In almost every interview, each stakeholder was asked the following set of questions:

- What are your interests (including potential issues and/or concerns) that we should be aware of?
- What challenges are you facing from a transportation perspective in the Region? What are opportunities to improve the transportation system in the Region?
- What changes are coming (or are you planning for) in the next 10-20 years that would change how we think about transportation?
- What is one piece of advice you would give to the Board to improve the efficiency of the transportation system in the Region?

2 What We Heard

The following summarizes some of the key findings consolidated in four main stakeholder groupings: **industry**, **operators**, **institutions**, and **active modes**.

Table 1. Summary of Technical Stakeholders by Grouping

Industry	Operators	Institutions	Active Modes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Industrial Heartland Association • Commercial Real Estate Development Association (NAIOP Edmonton) • Edmonton Global • Greater Edmonton Region Chambers of Commerce • Government of Canada – Office of Western Diversification • Leduc Chamber • Nisku Business Park • Strathcona Industrial Association • Urban Development Institute – Edmonton 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Motor Transport Association (AMTA) • Canadian Pacific Railway • Canadian National Railway • Edmonton International Airport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Health Services • Armed Forces • NAIT • University of Alberta 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pathways for People • Edmonton Metropolitan Region Transit Services Commission (EMRTSC) • River Valley Alliance

2.1 Industry

Industry stakeholders includes industrial associations, chambers of commerce, economic development entities, and the commercial/residential real estate organizations.

Industry's Interests

Common to all industries was the need to attract capital (new business or investment) to the Region.

- Transportation access, efficiency, and cost plays a key role site selection.
 - For commercial or industrial operations, proximity to the high-load corridor is important
- For many businesses it is about regional (internal) connectivity, but also external connectivity between the Region and the rest of Alberta, other provinces, and international markets.
 - Examples:
 - CANAMEX corridor (via Highway 2)
 - Transcontinental rail connections, such as connections to the Port of Prince Rupert
 - Air connections to/from provincial hubs and international markets
- Mode choice is important to many in the industry, particularly when it comes to residential or commercial real estate development.

Transportation Challenges and Opportunities facing Industry

Certainty and timing of infrastructure investment, supporting forecasted growth in the industrial sector, keeping transportation costs low, and connections to markets outside of the Region were cited as challenges as well as opportunities for industry.

- For commercial or residential development, particularly Transit Oriented Development (TOD), the lack of certainty around these projects makes it difficult for developers.
 - *Example:* Uncertainty tied to plans for LRT in St. Albert has impacted investment in today's developments in the area.
- The industrial (particularly manufacturing) and government continue to be key economic sectors in the Region, many stakeholders cited these areas as part of the Region's economic strengths.
- Growth in the Region is largely driven by demand for products in Asia. Modes that serve this connection include rail connections to seaports like the Port of Prince Rupert and air connections out of EIA.
 - Several stakeholders mentioned the growth in moving goods to/from the Port of Prince Rupert. The Port currently moves 1.1 million units, but 2030 that number is anticipated to increase to 7.5 million units.
- There was a desire to work on the Region's strengths by continuing to focus on development related to government administration and industrial sectors. The industrial focus means that vehicle, rail and air access continue to play an important site selection factor. Access to transit for employee access can also be a key factor in site selection.

- Examples:
 - There was a suggestion to focus on employment nodes like the SE industrial area (SE Edmonton to Nisku) because of proximity to airport and rail.
 - The Amazon Distribution Centre was highlighted as locating near the airport but also because Leduc Country was part of RTSC at the time.
 - It was noted that capital is flowing into areas like Acheson because of good transportation access.
- Transportation emissions cited as a major challenge for many industrial sites. Air monitoring stations at many industrial operations pick up particulate (PM 2.5) from outside/external/offsite sources such as motorized vehicles.
 - *Example:* alternatives fuels such as hydrogen may reduce transportation-related emissions.

Industry Look-Ahead

While the current economic situation may seem grim, representatives had positive outlooks for the longer-term. All respondents agree that the longer-term impacts of COVID are yet to be seen.

- It was noted that economic recovery may not happen until 2024.
- Economic diversification may increase over time, creating more unique products which may require trucking instead of rail.
- The development industry is not divesting in suburbs; however suburban form is changing and becoming denser. Different housing markets and housing types will continue to serve different life stages.
- Climate change and environmental sustainability is increasingly a critical factor for industry.

2.2 Operators

Operation-focused stakeholders includes airport authorities, motor transport associations, and major railroads.

Operators Interests

Similar to industry, operators are focused on supporting existing business and attracting new capital. Some operators have both a passenger and goods movement focus, while other operators are more singular.

- The EIA is concerned with the movement of passengers and goods. EIA serves both passenger and goods while Villeneuve serves as more of a connection to Northern Alberta and as a training facility.
- Railroads are concerned with the movement of goods. Rail is constrained and capacity limited, so ensuring the fluidity along the network as well as first and last mile connections are of key importance.

- For trucks, the highway network is critical.

Transportation Challenges and Opportunities Facing Operators

- Participants mentioned that a lack of tourism due to COVID-19 is hurting the Region's ability to maintain air sector. This impact produces issues with economic development and risk of permanently diminishing capacity to connect communities and move cargo. On average, around 50-60% of the cargo on direct flights is cargo.
 - *Example:* EIA might not return to pre-COVID levels until 2024, which results in reductions in staffing levels by 40%.
- Several stakeholders cited concerns around the road-rail interface. Reducing road-rail interactions seen as critical in ensuring fluidity along the rail network. Delays impact investment and competitiveness. Crossing elimination by either closure or grade separation was identified as an interest that might spur investment.
 - Examples:
 - 46 Street at 50 Avenue in Leduc
 - Highway 15 and Highway 830 grade separation
 - Highway 60 requires separation in Acheson
 - Range Road 231 over Yellowhead/Highway 16
 - 149 Street and 170 Street in Edmonton
- Shortage of drivers as well as facilities needed for trucking to decrease delays in movement of goods.
 - *Examples:*
 - Along Highway 2 and 16 there are a lack of truck stops (i.e. rest areas with amenities) that allow heavy truck drivers to stage the "last mile" of their trip into or out of the Edmonton Region.
 - There is one truck stop in Nisku but no infrastructure to support the effective movement of goods with services such as fuel, showers, and food.
- COVID has accelerated the uptake of e-commerce in the Region. Several stakeholders identified opportunities to rethink distribution in the Region:
 - Develop freight and trucking corridors to move product quickly.
 - Rethink distribution throughout the Region, looking to places like Korea and China.
 - Drone delivery for commercial and residential purposes likely a reality in the near future.
- Streamlining intermodal connectivity was mentioned as a priority for many stakeholders, whether it was air to truck intermodal functions, or rail to road.

Operators Look-Ahead

- There was a call for more research and innovation to explore diversification of the future of commercial transport.
 - *Examples:* Potential future technology to decrease emissions and/or increase efficiency includes hydrogen and electricity and using it in trucking, autonomous

freight network, air monitoring stations, and drone delivery. When it comes to alternative fuel sources, what supporting infrastructure is needed?

- Enabling the application of future technologies important. Fiber to support connectivity of vehicles and infrastructure, as well as an array of sensors to support connectivity in a winter environment.

2.3 Institutions

Stakeholders grouped under institutions includes post-secondary schools such as Alberta Health Services, the University of Alberta, NAIT, and the Armed Forces.

Institutional Interests

- Post-secondary institutions are planning for increases in student population in the longer term, helping to make up for capital shortfalls due to budget cuts. Institutions like NAIT cited a consolidation of campuses in the future, centralizing more programs/functions to one campus.
- Armed Forces operations are primarily concerned about the domestic operations on base and the travel between bases for training purposes and programs (i.e., between Edmonton, Sturgeon County, Cold Lake, and Wainwright). On average, anywhere between 6,000-7,000 people are on base on a given day, and of those, only 20% live on base. Department of National Defense operations planners see good flows along the corridors connecting bases such as Highways 2, 14 and 28.
- Alberta Health Service (AHS) are interested in reducing hospitalization rates and durations by understanding social determinants of health, particularly when it comes to vulnerable populations like seniors. AHS is also interested in planning for future facilities, access to facilities for staff (including paramedic services), patients, visitors, and suppliers.

Transportation Challenges and Opportunities Facing Institutions

- NAIT and University of Alberta are primarily commuter campuses. At the U of A, only 15% of the student population lives on campus, while 85% lives off campus. For NAIT, many of the programs are short-term (i.e. 6 to 8 week programs), so many students do not live on campus.
- Suggestions that transit and LRT connections to campuses will need to become more efficient, reliable, and increase in frequency as increased enrollment in students will occur in the future. Airport connections to campuses should be enhanced as well for international students.
 - *Examples:*
 - Inter-regional transit provides increase opportunities for students to access U of A and NAIT campuses without having to drive.
 - Both NAIT and U of A have plans to increase student enrollment, without adding significant on-site student housing.

- NAIT's campus expansion plans do not include expansions to on-site parking.
- While flows between Armed Forces Bases are good, transportation to/from armouries relies on multi-modal access. Transit access to/from armouries important now and in the future.
- Post-secondaries are major nodes in the Region. The form, density, and activity in these nodes are akin to the activities of small, walkable villages with a variety of uses. Stakeholders raised the concept of the "15-minute city", where most basic needs can be met within a 15-minute walk or bike ride.
- The Armed Forces cite transportation options or choice as a major challenge and also opportunity. Interviewees noted that moving away from a hub-and-spoke transit system may help in getting people to/from base. They cited that in addition to Edmonton, the base draws on the labour force in Morinville and St. Albert. Villeneuve Airport was also mentioned as a longer-term opportunity that could be used for deployment.
- When it comes to reducing hospitalization rates and stays, AHS cited social and environmental support systems as a major factor. Environmental factors include transportation elements such as proper snow clearing for pedestrians, longer walk signal timing, and the ability of vulnerable populations to get to multiple medical facilities (i.e. a lab may be in one community while the doctor's office is in another). For the capital planning group, AHS cited fast, frequent, and reliable transit services as a key in improving the accessibility of their facilities. They noted a goal of having all major health centres on one or more rapid transit line in the future.

Institutional Look Ahead

- All institutions cited increasing multi-modal access and increasing transportation choice as part of their future.

2.4 Active Modes

Stakeholders that fall under this category include transit, trail, and complete streets groups, including: the Edmonton Metro Transit Services Commission (EMTSC), Paths for People and the River Valley Alliance. These stakeholders emphasize a seamless experience for transit or bicycles across the Region as well as supporting greater equity, mobility of labour, and mode choice.

Active Mode Interests

These stakeholders generally emphasized the interconnections of modes, the development of regional transit and bicycle networks, and supporting greater equity when it comes to mode choice and supporting the mobility of labour through affordable modes.

Transportation Challenges and Opportunities Facing Active Modes

- Opportunities to develop a regional transit network, focusing on links in/through Edmonton and lifeline services into the greater Region.
- Opportunities to integrate transit systems under a common fee and operations structure – better service with less cost.
- There were multiple suggestions that employees in spaces outside of the City Centre need more transit support and connections to access their workplace. Park and rides, regional fixed route and on-demand transit, were suggested as possible solutions.
 - *Examples:*
 - The U of A emphasized connections to the EIA for visiting students, guests, and staff.
 - The EIA and industrial organizations cited that many prospective businesses and major events consider alternative modes of transport to/from the airport in their site selection process.
- Supporting the mobility of senior population and persons with disabilities outside Edmonton was cited by several stakeholders as a regional need. References made to the 2015 *Transportation Needs Assessment*, noting that the Regional population is aging and that the percentage of individuals with a disability is increasing.
- Regional bicycle connections cited as priorities.
 - *Examples:*
 - Comments that separated bicycle infrastructure (such as separated bicycle lanes in Downtown Edmonton and multi-use trails in and around the Region) should continue to be created and maintained.
 - Southwest Edmonton is the major gap in the River Valley trail system. It contains recently annexed land that is a high priority from an active transportation infrastructure perspective.
- COVID created an opportunity to show how reconfiguring certain roads to accommodate wider sidewalks and bicycle lanes can be an affordable option that can promote change in behaviors.

Active Mode Look-Ahead

- Trends in e-bikes and e-scooters and shared systems were stated as something to continue to consider. Electrification of micromobility and the rise of shared systems proving that ownership, hills, distances, and physical exertion may be less of a barrier.
- Trends in on-demand and micro-transit are opportunities for providing services in lower demand areas.

2.5 Advice for the Board

The project team ended most interviews with the question, “What is one piece of advice you have for the Board?”. Not all stakeholders were ready to answer this question, but for those that did, this is what we heard:

- **Support the connectivity to export markets.** Several stakeholders cited that industrial growth in the Region requires consideration of efficient linkages to export points such as the Port of Prince Rupert.
- **Continue the conversations with end users.** This allows the EMRB to have a better understanding of regional transportation needs.
- **Work closely with the Province and Federal governments.** This will allow the EMRB to leverage sources of funding.
- **Continue regional collaboration.** Several stakeholders emphasized that they see value in regional dialogues, information sharing, and partnerships.
- **Emphasis on sustainability, resiliency and equity.** These are becoming greater concerns for industry, operators, institutions, and active modes. References made to climate change, smart cities/new technologies, the mobility of labour, aging in place, and reducing emissions.
- **Continue to invest in transportation infrastructure and ‘alternative’ modes.** Improving transportation options and choices in the region was cited by several stakeholders as a major contributor to attracting business and increasing the quality of life, especially for vulnerable populations like seniors.

3 Summary

A high response rate from stakeholders indicates an interest in regional information sharing and a strong interest in maintaining and enhancing the regional transportation system. Stakeholders emphasized that transportation is critical in supporting economic development and enhancing the quality of life in the Region.

Several key themes emerged from stakeholder feedback:

- **Efficient, cost-effective, and multi-modal transportation is key in supporting the future growth and quality of life in the Region.** Stakeholders emphasized intermodal aspects of both passenger and goods movement.
- **Industrial activity, particularly manufacturing, will likely continue to drive the Region’s economy.** Connections within the Region but also outside of the Region (to other destinations in the Province and to international markets) are priorities for industrial stakeholders.
- **The success of modes like transit and bicycling requires regional integration and a high level of service, whether in frequency and quality of the infrastructure.** Transit connections support residents but also plays a part in attracting investment to the Region.

- **Future proofing requires the consideration of new technologies.** This includes understanding the potential for alternative fuels such as hydrogen; electric vehicles; drone delivery; to vehicle autonomy/connectivity in the Region.

4 Next Steps

The project team is reviewing the stakeholder feedback against the draft long list of transportation projects and draft policy directions. The project team has followed up with several stakeholders to gather additional information and feedback, such as projects related to greater separation of the road-rail interface and plans for future intermunicipal trails. Continued technical stakeholder engagement may also be identified as part of the implementation section of the IRTMP.