

Downtown stakeholders want a say over provincial Green Line realignment in Calgary's core



By Adam MacVicar Global News
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As agreements have been reached on a portion of the Green Line LRT project, uncertainty around the downtown alignment has a trio of real estate and business organizations in Calgary's core seeking a seat at the table.

Commercial real estate firms NAIOP and Boma Calgary, as well as the Calgary Downtown Association (CDA) have penned a letter to the Government of Alberta and the city, requesting a "commercial real estate industry advisory committee" be struck to provide input on the future alignment.

"NAIOP, BOMA and CDA members own and operate billions of dollars of real estate investment in Calgary," the letter reads. "We contend that the Green Line should provide connectivity, not impair property values, and be built to sustain the city's future needs."

In an interview with Global News, CDA executive director Mark Garner said the Green Line is vital for transportation to the downtown core with Calgary's booming population.

"If there is considerations and we need to find other potential solutions that are going to be tabled, we need to be at that table to be able to understand what the potential impacts are for downtown," Garner said.

On Thursday, Calgary mayor Jyoti Gondek and Alberta transportation minister Devin Dreeshen jointly announced an agreement that several existing contracts will be maintained, and design work will continue on the line between Victoria Park and



A trio of organizations that represent businesses and real estate companies in Calgary's downtown core have penned a letter to the province and the city seeking a committee on the Green Line's downtown alignment.

Shepard in the city's southeast.

Both sides said they "remain optimistic" that a southeast LRT line can be built, after Calgary city council voted to wind down the \$6.2 billion Green Line project last month.

That was in response to a Sept. 3 letter from Dreeshen announcing the province's intention to pull its \$1.53 billion share of funding due to the project's scope shrinking but its budget ballooning by \$705 million.

The provincial funding has been recommitted and the design agreements also mean 700 jobs can be salvaged.

However, there remains uncertainty around how the Green Line will extend into the downtown core, with original plans of

tunneling becoming a deal breaker for the province.

"The extra added costs and uncertainty of tunneling is something we just knew would have cost overruns," Dreeshen said in an interview Thursday. "We just couldn't, as a province, be funding \$1.53 billion into a project with all that uncertainty."

Engineering firm AECOM has been hired by the province to find an alternative alignment either at grade or elevated through the core, that connects into the Red and Blue lines, the new Event Centre, and southeast Calgary communities.

"I think there's a lot of opinions on the realignment, what it should be and the connection points," Garner said. "That's why NAIOP, BOMA and CDA need to be at the table."

David Wallach with Barclay Street Real Estate agrees input from commercial real estate firms should be considered in a new alignment.

Wallach was among several industry experts that provided recommendations to the City of Calgary on how the Green Line should travel through the core, advising against an elevated route.

"We gave the recommendation that if you do it with a bridge, it will be a disaster for commercial real estate values in that area," Wallach said.

Wallach said concerns for an elevated route include the blocking of natural light for on-street retail, and disruptions from passing trains along the Plus-15 level floors in office towers.

he city also studied an at-grade alignment for the LRT line but determined the stations and trains wouldn't fit on the north-south blocks as they are shorter than the downtown east-west downtown blocks.

"If you're looking at at-grade, you will be repurposing traffic lanes for LRT. That is a given. There's no way around that," said David Cooper with Leading Mobility Consulting.

In a statement to Global News, a spokesperson for the Minister of Transportation said work is ongoing with the City of Calgary "to address stakeholder considerations."

"As we progress, our department will reach out to local groups for opportunities to provide direct feedback, which will help inform AECOM's proposed alignment and our next steps," the statement read.

Dreeshen has told Global News the revised alignment from AECOM will be made public by the end of the year.