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Deadline for Applications: Friday, 26 February 1982

Contact the Students' Union Executive Offices for application or nomination forms, and/or for more information (259 Students' Union Building, 432-4236).

South LRT argument continues unabated

by Richard Watts

The question of how Light Rail Transit (LRT) will affect the university will not be answered until March.

The city of Edmonton has decided to re-examine the entire issue of LRT on the south side.

This will be done by a panel of three transportation experts from outside the country.

Says Louise Lyle of Edmonton City Transit Systems and Design, "It was felt that the overall perspective of the south LRT should be re-examined. A fresher and more objective perspective could be obtained by going outside the country."

Back in September following public furor over the city's proposed routing of the south LRT, Council decided to appoint a new panel to study all possible alternatives.

The city had planned to extend LRT to the south side using the High Level Bridge, going through Strathcona on existing Canadian Pacific (CP)-owned tracks to 28th Ave. into Millwoods.

But this route by-passed the university and denied the LRT a sizeable ridership.

Public outcry forced the city to plan a branch line to the university.

However, many people felt a branch line would still be inadequate.

Inadequate, that is, because it would mean passengers would have to transfer trains to get onto the branch line. As well, studies have shown that placing a station just two blocks from the destination cuts down on ridership. Passengers might still find the bus a more convenient method of travel.

Says U of A Civil Engineering professor John Bakker: "The proposed system would not have gotten passengers."

The issue of LRT to the U of A was further complicated by the university's insistence that the line run entirely underground through the campus area. The city claimed the costs were prohibitive.

"But we recognize the need for improved transportation to and from the university area. At present the traffic on 114th street is just appalling; LRT looks like it might be the answer," says



photo Ray Giguere

Edmonton Transit's LRT train is still an unfamiliar sight to Edmonton's south side, and may remain so for some time.

Heston.

In addition, opponents of the CP line through Strathcona claimed that routing the LRT along 104th street, a low density population area, would further minimize ridership.

More complications arose when the city attempted to negotiate a deal with CP for the use of the High Level Bridge and the Strathcona right of way.

CP asked for too much money, the city claimed. The city offered \$2.8 million outright for a 99 year lease. CP demanded \$1.8 million per year in an enclosed 5 year lease.

With CP demanding high rates and concerned citizens criticizing the proposed routing, the city began to consider alternate routes.

The most seriously discussed alternative was to put the U of A on a mainline down 114th Avenue to Southgate Shopping Center and the southwest area before going to Millwoods.

This route, it was argued, would serve the largest existing source of potential riders of the south LRT.

Says Bakker: "Such a line

would increase usage of the LRT. When the city spends \$300 million it ought to serve as many people as possible."

While initially pleased with the idea Edmonton's south side residents became concerned when they learned the original reason for routing the LRT on the CP right of way.

With the placing of fast, efficient transportation like LRT comes an enormous increase in the high density apartment development potential in the surrounding area. The middle-of-nowhere area surrounding the CP right of way had been considered ideal for high-rise development.

The concerned residents of the long established bedroom communities of Edmonton's south side feared their areas would be subjected to high density high rise development.

Says Maurice Heston of the McKernan Community League: "We naturally don't want high rise development and we (the south side community residents) will continue to fight it."

"But we recognize the need for improved transportation, and from the university area. At present the traffic on 114th street is just appalling; LRT looks like it might be the answer," says Heston.

With all the complaints from different communities, complicated by CP's high price, Council last September requested an independent review of the south LRT routing.

The panel conducting this review was assembled this month and will be examining all possible alternatives for south LRT.

Although they will discuss a total of five different alternatives, the principal question remains what impact in terms of development LRT will have on the areas it serves.

The panel will have a proposal ready for public hearing by the end of March.

All of this might sound like an attempt to stall LRT expansion by city council, but this is not the case.

Says Louise Lyle: "This panel will look at all possible alternatives and prioritize one. After that some serious constructive effort can begin."

Now all the university and other concerned parties can do is wait until this panel decides what it thinks is best for Edmonton and its citizens.

