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## Transit service possible within five years

Darryl Mills  
Wednesday March 22, 2006

**Cochrane Times** — Calgary Transit's general manager, John Hubbell, dropped a bit of a bombshell last week at a meeting looking into the future of Light Rapid Transit in Calgary and area.

He speculated that while C-Train service to outlying communities such as Cochrane, Airdrie and Okotoks may still be 25 years away, transit buses could start making their way down Highway 1A and into Cochrane in as little as five years.

"I think you're seeing tremendous growth in the Calgary region, and if I were to speculate, you're going to see at least bus-based service develop in the five-year time frame," Hubbell told reporters.

The expectation that public transportation between Cochrane and Calgary would certainly one day become reality has existed for years, but Hubbell' suggested time frame was a surprise to many, including Cochrane's Mayor Ken Bech.

"I hadn't heard any rumblings," Bech said early this week. "We were waiting for the next bit of news."

Bech is involved with the Calgary Regional Partnership's regional transportation committee which has been looking into the future possibilities for some form of regional transit service being available.

Bech said increased transportation options is a subject he has raised with Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier whenever he gets the opportunity.

"In the discussions I have had with him, I have said we have to start looking at options for alternative transportation, or just keep building overpasses."

Bech said the prediction from Hubbell is more evidence that more and more, Calgary is seeing the benefits of looking at issues from a regional perspective, and such a move will help the whole region with things like meeting Kyoto greenhouse emission targets.

Bech said a funding model would still have to be established, but he suggested most of the costs involved with such a service would be covered by federal and provincial funding.

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Curtis Cook, Cochrane's economic development officer also was excited by the news.

"I think it would be huge," Cook said.

"It would allow youth here reasonable access to post-secondary education, and to come back afterwards," he said.

He also noted such a move would prove beneficial to the workforce, giving them more options, a key factor when currently, more than 50 per cent of Cochrane residents in the workforce travel to Calgary to do their job.

Currently, Southland Transportation does offer a commuter bus service to and from Cochrane with the for-profit Cochrane Commuter. Both Bech and Cook praised Southland for the service they do offer, but they also noted limitations they are forced to abide by, such as not being allowed to stop at LRT stations.

Jenny Chenier, manager of rural operations for Southland did express concern over the proposed move, saying they were under the understanding it would be transit service within those communities, not between them.

"If they were to do that, it would be quite a concern for the Commuters," she said.

In recent weeks, Southland has stated publicly they may have to cancel one of the Cochrane buses, due to low ridership.

Since that point, Chenier said ridership has increased, and they are hoping with upcoming promotional efforts, they hope to be able to maintain their current three trips each weekday into Calgary. -- with files from Sun Media

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