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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17, 2009

Medevac patients not at risk

Report downplays key objection to closing downtown airport

A report being released to council later this week downplays the risk to medevac patients of closing the City Centre Airport.

It may do the same to the political risks faced by Mayor Stephen Mandel and his councillors.

Sources say the consultant's report takes a sober look at the highly charged issue of medevac flights and concludes that patient safety will not be jeopardized if hospital transfers are done through the international airport instead of the Muni.

Critical or time-sensitive patients make up less than 10 per cent of fixed-wing medical transfers. The majority of those end up at the south-side University Hospital.

The report will be released Thursday as council prepares for next week's three-day public hearing on the future of the City Centre Airport. Council is under immense lobbying pressure to keep the airport open. Muni advocates have focused on the medevacs as a hearts-and-minds issue. Coun. Linda Sloan, for one, is leaning toward maintaining the airport to ensure patient safety.

Other councillors quietly express concerns about appearing mercenary if they vote to close the airport, damn the medevacs. Mandel has said it's unfair to put the sole responsibility for prompt medical transfers on Edmonton's shoulders.

The source said the consultant's report backs Mandel's view. It will

Scott McKeen



show that the final leg of a medical air transfer—from Edmonton airport to Edmonton hospital—only makes up a small part of the timeline.

No surprise, really. It's long been known that the initial admission and assessment at a rural hospital—and consultation with Edmonton specialists—eats up a majority of the time. Then add in the ambulance ride from the rural hospital to the nearest airstrip.

The report, I'm told, concedes the trip to and from the International will take longer than from the downtown airport. But it also reveals the travel time is about the same as from Calgary International to its receiving hospitals. It recommends greater use of helicopters in medevacs to eliminate the time lag.

Apparently, health officials and doctors were already calling for improvements to the medevac system. Part of that might include a medical transfer facility at the international airport.

See MCKEEN / A2



Three days of public hearings will be held next week on the fate of City Centre Airport. More than 300 speakers are expected.

Finishing with a splash



Rachel Allan, 8, enjoys a swim at Borden Park pool on Tuesday during a year-end party for students in Grades 3 and 4 at Anne Fitzgerald elementary school.

JOHN LUCAS, THE JOURNAL

Profit on text messages pegged at 4,900%

Canadian expert testifies at U.S. Senate anti-trust hearing

SARAH SCHMIDT
Canwest News Service

The mark-up on some text messages is an estimated 4,900 per cent, according to a leading Canadian computer scientist who testified before U.S. senators on Tuesday.

Srinivasan Keshav, Canada Research Chair in tetherless computing at the University of Waterloo, told lawmakers probing text messaging rates and the state of competition in the wireless telecommunications industry that the maximum cost of a single text message "very unlikely" exceeds 0.3 cents.

In Canada, the large cellphone companies charge pay-per-use texters 15 cents to send a text message and, beginning next month, Rogers will join Bell and Telus with an additional charge of 15 cents to receive a text message.

In the United States, carriers recently increased their per-message rate to 20 cents for those without a text plan.

"I'm not here to judge whether the market is competitive or fair, I'm just



ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN JACKSON, THE JOURNAL

In Canada, the number of text messages jumped to 20.8 billion in 2008 from 174 million in 2002. Worldwide, 3.5 trillion text messages were sent last year, carried on an estimated four million cell towers around the globe.

telling you this is the price and this is the cost. Let people who are experiencing these plans decide whether it's correct or not," Keshav said in an interview before testifying.

Keshav was invited to Washington by the chairman of the U.S. Senate subcommittee on anti-trust, competition policy and consumer rights to testify as an expert witness.

"If that's what the market will bear, I don't have a problem with

that, from any philosophical perspective. The issue is—are consumers aware that there is such a big gap? Maybe they are aware and they don't care."

During his testimony, Keshav also challenged a key talking point of the industry—that the rapid growth of text messaging is driving the need for these charges.

See TEXTING / A2

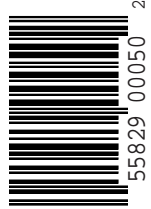
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A transit-friendly place to live

Suburb designed to make personal vehicles obsolete

GORDON KENT
Civic Affairs Writer
EDMONTON

Planning is underway for Edmonton's first major suburban transit-oriented development aimed at mixing homes, offices and shops.

The Heritage Valley Town Centre is expected to include two high schools, a recreation centre, an LRT station and a main street with small shops to serve the 100,000 people who will eventually live southwest of Anthony Henday Drive and Gateway Boulevard, senior city planner Tim Brockelsby said Tuesday.

To reduce the need for private vehicles, the centre will feature an LRT station when the line is extended south of 23rd Avenue, with many residents possibly working in nearby businesses or the post-secondary campuses

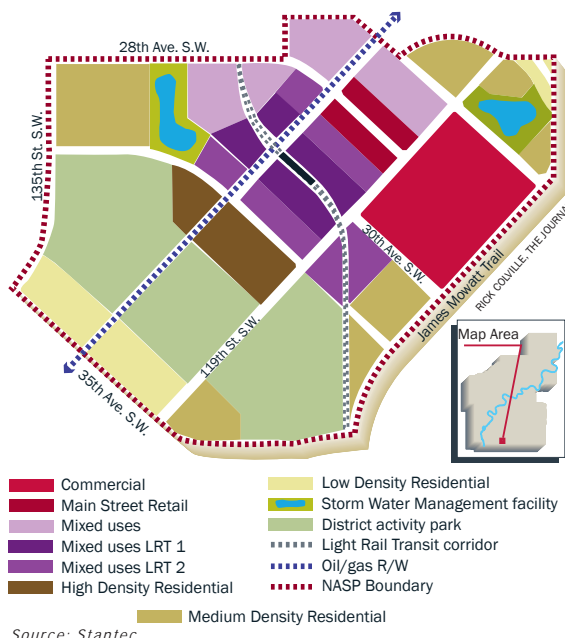
and hospital under discussion for provincial farmland now used by the University of Alberta, Brockelsby said.

"That's not to suggest everyone will work there and live there... but the option is there," he said. "A lot of our suburban development is auto-oriented... There's a shift to making communities more self-sustaining. Part of it relates to having more localized activity, the whole walkable notion."

But this "urban" feel requires higher numbers of people than were traditionally found in suburbia's big lots and single-family homes—the 116-hectare town centre near 127th Street and the future 28th Avenue southwest will have about 10,000 residents, many living in townhouses or apartment buildings.

See SUBURB / A2

HERITAGE VALLEY TOWN CENTRE



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Reader photos



SUPPLIED

To check out reader Eric Epie's picture of lovebirds at the City Hall pool and other shots, including hail in Red Deer, go to edmontonjournal.com/photos.

POLL QUESTIONS

What should be done with the city's deteriorating tennis courts? You have until this afternoon to vote in our online poll.

BLOGS

You Bet: Curtis Stock has high praise for a minor league soccer coach.

Sweatsox: John MacKinnon comments on the end of Jim Balsillie's dream.

Eat My Words: Liane Faulder shares a pancake recipe for Father's Day.

On Tap: Mark Suits highlights Kokanee's can design contest.

Good News: Cam Tait interviews Mary Anne Pope, author of *A Widow's Awakening*.

Cult of Hockey: David Staples thinks coaches are too accommodating to stars who want out.

Button Mash: Ben Gelinis always craves cheezies while playing video games.

Plugged In: Edmonton's Stereos are the proud owners of gold records.

TOMORROW IN YOUR EDMONTON JOURNAL



Create a comfortable living room out of doors
Thursday AT HOME

CORRECTION

City council's public hearing into the proposed municipal development plan, including the city's northeast agricultural lands, resumes at 9:30 a.m. on June 23 and will continue to June 29 if necessary. A story in Sunday Reader contained the wrong date.

Lotteries for June 16

■ **Pick 3:** 659
■ **Extra:** 3945099

Numbers are unofficial. In the event of a discrepancy between this list and the official numbers list, the latter shall prevail.

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Telus plans to spend \$2 billion on capital expenditures this year

TEXTING

Continued from A1

In Canada alone, the number of text messages rose from about 174.4 million in 2002 to about 20.8 billion last year. And in the first quarter of this year, Canadians sent nearly 7.8 billion messages, compared to 4.1 billion in the first quarter of 2008, according to the Canadian Wireline Telecommunications Industry.

Last year, 280 cell towers — out of the four million towers in the world — were needed to carry the estimated 3.5 trillion text messages sent worldwide, Keshav testified, so there is no "congestion cost" associated with spectrum availability and the rapid growth in popularity of text messaging.

Without access to company records, Keshav, a specialist in how such mobile devices as cellphones communicate with centralized server clusters over wireless networks, first analyzed text plans currently offered in North America, assuming carriers are not losing money on their text-messaging service.

He then considered cellular technology to refine his estimates.

Text messaging, known as Short Message Service or SMS, travels two wireless and one wired path. He considered this cost, the cost of storing a text message if the recipient were unavailable, and the costs of updating the billing and location databases to come up with an estimated total cost 0.3 cents per message.

U.S. telecommunications executives, who testified alongside Keshav, dismissed his analysis.

Randal Milch, executive vice-president of Verizon Communications Inc., said the Canadian computer scientist failed to consider the long-term infrastructure investments and costs of spectrum to make it possible for billions of text messages and trillions of voice calls to be sent daily.

In Canada, a spokeswoman for Telus reiterated that the "cost of spectrum has gone up dramatically"



CANWEST NEWS SERVICE, FILE

Text messaging has seen exponential growth in the past few years, proving especially popular with young people.

to fund growth in the system.

"Just looking back over the last year, the industry has invested \$4.3 billion in wireless spectrum. You can't double your traffic volumes every year without significant investments in new technology and greater capacity," said Elizabeth Whiting, adding Telus capital expenditures for 2009 are expected to be about \$2 billion.

"To fund these investments, we need to charge a nominal and fair

price for services, including text messages, that are carried on our network."

Julie Smithers, a spokeswoman for Bell, said the company can't comment on the Keshav's study because it's not based on Bell's network.

Smithers added Bell does not disclose its costs or profit margins. Costs are proprietary, added Rogers spokeswoman Carly Suppa, pointing out "high value SMS pricing" starts at \$5 per month.

Hospital helipad in need of upgrade

MCKEEN

Continued from A1

We've also known for some time that the helipad at the Royal Alexandra Hospital needs upgrading to meet federal standards. City officials have already talked about keeping a helipad on the Muni lands until the work at the Royal Alex is completed.

STARS flies hundreds of critical-care patients directly to Edmonton hospitals each year. If the Muni lands are developed, STARS would likely have to relocate. The report, apparently, doesn't see this as a critical time issue, or at least an insurmountable one.

The report comes to light just as another political lobby jumped into the fray, to back the City Centre Airport. The Building Trades of Alberta held a news conference at City Hall on Tuesday to call for the continued operation of the Muni. Executive director Ron Harry argued the airport is crucial for tradespeople to commute to jobs in the north. How many tradespeople use the airport? Harry wasn't sure.

But he also argued the downtown airport is critical for medical transfers and is an economic driver for the city.

Next week's public hearings promise to be raucous. The airports debate, more than 50 years old, is an emotional one with an almost sectarian feel to it. Some factions call for its immediate closure, while others want it maintained as is. Yet others want to see a return to scheduled service.

Some on the pro-Muni side clearly love the convenience of a downtown location for their private planes. But long-standing aviation businesses also remain a going concern at the Muni.

The airfield is also steeped in local, even international history. Many of those who call for closure see a need for the on-site aviation museum to be kept and enhanced.

Sources also say the province has been kept fully informed of the airport and medevac issues. The city, so far, is being assured that the Stelmach government will not intervene in the public hearings.

The city will also release reports this week on the development prospects for the Muni lands. The last estimate, that the city could fetch \$500-million-plus in land sales alone, will likely be downgraded, given the downturn in the economy.

Muni advocates argue it's folly to throw almost 600 acres of land onto the market. Land values will plummet, they say, and the airport land will stall the progress of priority growth areas such as The Quarters in east downtown.

But that argument assumes a quick closure of the airport and immediate start to development. Neither is likely. Mandel has stated that if the airport closes, he would like to see an international design competition to attract creative ideas for a one-of-a-kind, environmentally progressive urban village, linked to downtown by LRT. Businesses on-site would also be given time to relocate.

Another report, on environmental cleanup costs, will also answer key questions.

The pro-Muni forces argue it's far too expensive to clean up the contaminated lands to pave way for development of a mixed-use urban village.

But others wonder about the logic of that argument. If airport operations are polluting the soil in the area, is it prudent to allow the contamination to continue? Better to close the airport, stop the polluting, then clean up land that is adjacent to neighbourhoods and NAIT.

Council is slated to vote on the issue in early July. Rumours at City Hall on Tuesday were that 300 people will show up to speak at the public hearing.

Expect another time lag.
smckeen@thejournal.canwest.com

City's growth 'reaching a threshold'

SUBURB

Continued from A1

Brockelsby compares the main street, with buildings up to three storeys high and angled parking at the curb, to downtown's burgeoning 104th Street.

"Imagine nurses and doctors living within walking distance of that (hospital) employment area ... if you're a (post-secondary) instructor, you could live within a stop of campus," he said.

"On a Saturday morning, when (residents) are looking for a place to have a coffee and read a newspaper, I don't think they would find that in a big-box environment ... They can buy something at a deli and walk home with it."

Developers hope to have a public hearing on the proposal at city council by the end of August, but Brockelsby cautions that, if approved, work might not start for a couple of years.

Coun. Don Iveson, whose ward includes the southwest, said the town centre could become a

"magnet" for east and west transit service that would feed into the LRT.

While he questioned whether to build LRT in an undeveloped area, or wait until somebody lives there, he likes the increased population density the proposal offers.

"It's the only thing that could possibly justify bringing the LRT into the suburbs. What could happen over time is we have places with parking lots that are park-and-ride at first, that could become transit-oriented development later."

Reaction to the scheme was positive at a public meeting last month, part of a change in attitude among Edmontonians, Brockelsby said.

"Generally speaking, the city of Edmonton is reaching a threshold in terms of its urbanized boom. With this latest economic nature, talk on the streets is about how busy it is, how congested," he said.

"If we're going to live in an urban area, how are we going to do that and make it a full experience beyond just going to work and home?"

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Sandra Sperounes listens. In A&E



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