

Bell: Smith UCP says no more dough for 'Nenshi nightmare' Green Line

'This is Nenshi's nightmare Calgarians are faced with,' says provincial Transportation Minister Devin Dreeshen of the Green Line LRT

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Published Jul 04, 2024 • Last updated 15 hours ago • 3 minute read

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Devin Dreeshen, Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors, answers questions from media in a press conference announcing a master plan for passenger rail in Alberta at Heritage Park in Calgary on Monday, April 29, 2024. Brent Calvert/Postmedia

The Nenshi nightmare.

That's what Devin Dreeshen, the dude Premier Danielle Smith picked to ride herd on transportation, calls Calgary's Green Line LRT.

The Green Line LRT, cooked up by former Calgary mayor and current Alberta NDP Leader Naheed Nenshi.

Once again, the Smith government is not writing a cheque to cover some of the cost overruns.

“This is Nenshi’s nightmare Calgarians are faced with. This was a project designed a long time ago with unrealistic expectations of the real cost of it and it’s just been a dog ever since.

“I do feel sorry for the city of Calgary that it’s trying to make sense of this Nenshi nightmare. It’s just been a poorly designed project from the beginning.”

The Green Line LRT where the money problems go back to before big-time inflation.

Calgary city hall never really had a clue of what the bottom line would be for this train.

Let's hear from Andre Chabot, the city councillor, who asked a most important question back in the day.

“Why are we doing this ahead of having at least a remote idea of what it is actually going to cost?”

You see, Nenshi and the council majority at the time scooped up a yearly tax break from the province intended for city taxpayers.

They then put it towards a Green Line and, to get city council support, stretched the LRT route from the far north to the deep southeast of the city and conjured up an absurdly low price tag.

Even when the province and the feds kicked in cash it was an unbelievable arithmetic.

Now city hall faces what any person who has a calculator and can read a map could have told them.

There is a big cost overrun just to do a fraction of the Green Line that's not even serving areas where most of the people live.

The smart money figures the cost overrun for just this first phase of the Green Line will have the word billion and not millions in the nasty number.

And we're not talking about the many billions to finish the whole line.

The Nenshi nightmare.

In May, the Smith government and Dreeshen made absolutely clear there would be no more cash for the Green Line LRT.

They wrote Mayor Jyoti Gondek and broke the news to her.

Been there, done that. The city has the \$1.5-billion cheque from the provincial government.

The Smith people suggested the city could change their Green Line plan or find more dough elsewhere.

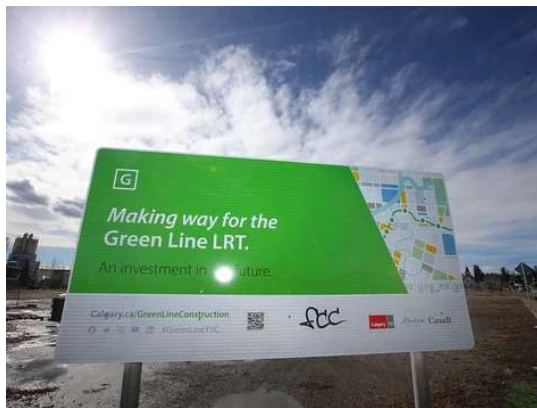
Now, Dreeshen says the province wouldn't rule out looking at helping bankroll future phases of the Green Line — with a big condition.

“They can't be designed the way Nenshi designed the Green Line because it's just been a disaster.

“They didn’t do the proper planning and design work and that’s why they’re painted into a corner.”

Dreeshen adds the province is working on rail lines in the Calgary and Edmonton areas, including the possibility of commuter trains.

“We have bigger dreams here for the province when it comes to rail.”



Demolition and construction continues for the Green Line LRT at the site of the former Lilydale Chicken plant in the Ramsay neighbourhood in southeast Calgary on Tuesday, March 12, 2024. Jim Wells/Postmedia

On Thursday the city’s Green Line braintrust, such as it is, chinwags over the ballooning costs.

Of course, all the juicy bits of the conversation take place in their safe space, behind closed doors, away from the glare of accountability.

They told us we’d get the straight goods in June. Now it could be almost another month of waiting.

They don’t seem to be in a hurry to deliver the bad news.

They do admit Calgarians have lots of questions. Unfortunately they don’t have lots of answers.

The smart money says the city will try to convince the province to show them some money.

The smart money says the city hall beggar bowl will be out early next week.

Can just imagine.

City of Calgary to Dreeshen: “Please sir, we want some more.”

Dreeshen to City of Calgary: “No.”

The city will try to polish this road apple of a project before having to come before a public who are already not in a good mood when it comes to city hall.

Maybe they can squeeze some coin out of Trudeau.

“We’ve been perfectly clear with Calgary, with the mayor’s office and council. Voters don’t want to throw more money at the Green Line and that’s our bottom line,” says Dreeshen.

“If the city or the federal government find it’s worthy to put more money into the Green Line project they can fill their boots.”

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