

## Transportation

# Calgary-Edmonton train on the slow road to approval

*Link between Alberta's largest cities supported by latest report that found enough people would use the service, and the faster it is, the more riders it would have*

Katherine O'Neill Globe and Mail Tuesday, Jul. 07, 2009 07:36AM EDT

**Edmonton** — It's one of the most studied capital projects in Alberta history — a bullet train that would zip up and down the province, linking Edmonton and Calgary.

The popular idea was revisited Monday after the Alberta Progressive Conservatives released yet another [government-commissioned study](#) on whether a high-speed passenger train would attract riders and make economic and financial sense. This latest investigation found that enough people would use the service, and the faster the train, the more riders it would have.

Some of the trains on the route could stop in Red Deer.

Proposals for the more than 300-kilometre rail line have been around since the early 1970s, when the Tories first took power.

None have been approved.

However, Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach and his government have been warm to the multibillion-dollar idea, and view it as a potential way to help reduce carbon emissions by getting cars and trucks off the busy stretch of highway that connects the province's two largest cities. The oil-rich province, home to the country's massive oil sands, is constantly

criticized both inside and outside Canada as a major polluter.

According to the high-speed rail study, the projected capital costs range from \$3-billion to \$20-billion, depending on the kind of train used. Four high-speed train options were analyzed, including one that can travel 483 kilometres per hour and connect Edmonton and Calgary in about an hour.

When the Tory government released a similar report in 1985, the projected price tag was \$1-billion, with the travel time clocking in about an hour and 40 minutes.

Alberta Liberal Leader David Swann is hopeful the provincial government finally green-lights the project, which the study predicted could create thousands of jobs and up to \$33-billion in economic benefits. "There has been a lack of vision on this," he said, adding that it's disappointing the Tories didn't proceed with it during the recent boom years, when the province was raking in historic oil and gas revenues.

The latest report, which the government has been quietly reviewing since early last year, says about 10 million people travelled between Calgary and Edmonton in 2006 — of those,

about 91 per cent went in vehicles.

Alberta Transportation Minister Luke Ouellette released the document Monday before a joint federal-provincial Conservative caucus meeting in Calgary and said the province hasn't decided whether to approve it. The report, which cost the province about \$1-million, will also be presented this fall to a federal government standing committee that is gathering information for a study on high-speed rail in Canada.

Mr. Ouellette said the province has no appetite to use public funds to build or operate such a venture, and is looking for private companies to invest. In turn, the province would buy the right of ways for the land needed.

Alberta isn't the only province taking its time probing the pricey transportation option.

The provincial governments in Quebec and Ontario, along with the federal government, are updating a 1995 study on high-speed rail between Quebec City and Windsor. A private consortium of firms is leading the study, in consultation with representatives from the three governments, and is expected to report in early 2010.

*With a report from Karen Howlett in Toronto*