

# Connecting Communities Initiative

A unique opportunity to tackle  
*Alberta's Housing Crisis*



THIS REPORT WAS DEVELOPED FOR



FUNDED & FACILITATED BY



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## GOAL

This report set out to explore how regional passenger rail development, specifically the Connecting Communities Initiative, can help to alleviate Alberta's Housing Crisis. The Connecting Communities Initiative aims to bring numerous benefits to communities in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor, focusing on enhanced connectivity, transportation justice, economic growth, improved quality of life, community development and reduced emissions.

In order to assess the initiative's impact on resolving Alberta's housing crisis, research and analysis was conducted in the following areas:

- + **Community Impact Assessment**
- + **Housing Affordability Analysis**
- + **Economic Stimulation Study**
- + **Engagement Action Plan**
- + **Policy Development and Recommendations**

## KEY FINDINGS

- ❑ Passenger rail development in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor will bring positive social impacts to the region as it acts as catalysts for innovative ideas to emerge in the region.
- ❑ Passenger rail development will improve the quality of life of those who live in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor as it increases job opportunities, accessibility, and livability in the region.
- ❑ Passenger rail development heightens the economic growth of a region which will result in increased access and development in housing, local community infrastructure, and urbanization.
- ❑ Passenger rail development will provide regional connectivity within the corridor which will improve tourism, sense of community, and regional inclusion.
- ❑ Current housing cost and supply are unsustainable, and by 2026 many communities within the Calgary-Edmonton corridor will not have access to adequate housing options. It is imperative to act with urgency and invest in innovative solutions.
- ❑ Policy barriers and challenges need to be addressed in order to cultivate a productive environment for the Connecting Communities Initiative to flourish.

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# ALBERTA'S HOUSING CRISIS

INTRO | COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT | HOUSING & ECONOMIC ANALYSIS | ACTION PLAN | POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The province of Alberta has seen a rapid population growth over the years with a 22% increase from 2011 to 2021<sup>1</sup>. With this population increase, the demand for housing has become an ever pressing issue. The housing crisis is a complex problem as it involves development, affordability, and the rental market. In respect to development, the building of new homes in Alberta is behind the amount needed to accommodate the growing population. In 2022, a Fraser Institute study found that one new house was built in the province for every six people<sup>2-3</sup>. This is one of the highest population growth to housing development ratios in the country<sup>2-3</sup>. With less housing available for Albertans, the housing and rental market becomes increasingly more competitive and leads to less affordable housing options<sup>3</sup>. Albertans shoulder the burden of higher rental costs with a loss of disposable income as stagnant wages fail to keep up with inflation. A competitive and sparse housing inventory compounds the affordability crisis.

Rent increases across the country have caused Canadians to make the move to Alberta, where rents compared to provinces such as British Columbia and Ontario are significantly lower<sup>2</sup>. This migration into Alberta from other provinces adds to the housing crisis, as more demand for rental units results in higher prices that local Albertans are finding difficult to afford<sup>4</sup>. Unlike British Columbia and Ontario, Alberta does not have rent control or rent mitigation policies in place<sup>5</sup>. This results in existing tenants receiving increases in their rent that reflect the new rental market prices. Rents in 2023 increased an average of 15.6% in the province, with larger urban municipalities, such as Calgary and Edmonton, acquiring the highest rent increases<sup>6</sup>. Housing Needs Assessments (HNA) have been conducted by various municipalities in both urban and rural regions in Alberta. The overwhelming result from these assessments have been that there are not enough housing options available for residents and urgent action is required to alleviate the issue<sup>7-11</sup>. The cost of living in Alberta has accelerated. Residents of rural and Indigenous communities face higher unemployment rates compared to urban regions, and do not have access to the same employment and housing support<sup>3</sup>. Employment in rural communities is more limited and industry dependent, and in being so, more susceptible to business cycles<sup>7</sup>.

Vulnerable populations within rural regions are said to be the most impacted by the housing crisis as they face a multitude of barriers such as lack of accessibility and continued marginalization due to sex, race, gender identity, and sexual orientation<sup>7</sup>. Homelessness in the province has increased in both rural and urban regions, with municipalities in all regions reporting a greater need for more shelter and supporting services<sup>7-11</sup>. As housing becomes less accessible with cofactors such as increasing unemployment rate, it is projected that the number of individuals experiencing homelessness will also increase in the province. The Government of Alberta has responded to the housing crisis by introducing a 10-year affordable housing strategy called Stronger Foundations<sup>1</sup>. The Stronger Foundations strategy emerged from the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Review Panel<sup>12</sup>. The strategy sets out to increase the housing supply by reducing rigidity in housing governance, by partnering with public and private institutions to increase development, and by investing in innovative and emerging ideas<sup>1</sup>.

In order to improve the housing crisis, a transformative idea that will act as catalyst for innovative solutions in the region is required. This is where the Connecting Communities Initiative comes in as an innovative idea to connect communities and bring positive social benefits to the region that will help to alleviate Alberta's housing crisis. The Connecting Communities Initiative sets to connect communities within the Calgary-Edmonton corridor through passenger rail development. This report will explore how the social benefits of this project will help tackle Alberta's Housing Crisis.

# CONNECTING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

INTRO | COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT | HOUSING & ECONOMIC ANALYSIS | ACTION PLAN | POLICY DEVELOPMENT

## TACKLING ALBERTA'S HOUSING CRISIS

The "Connecting Communities" initiative by Alberta Regional Rail (ARR) and Integrated Travel & Rail Development (ITRD) presents a unique opportunity to tackle Alberta's housing crisis. This project aims to assess and enhance the socio-economic impact of rail network expansion, focusing on community revitalization, housing affordability, and sustainable development along the Calgary-Edmonton corridor. The initiative will take a "Rail for All" approach, where safety, sustainability, practicality, accessibility, and equality, are always imbedded throughout the project stages. The goal of this project is to explore how the expansion of passenger rail development can contribute to resolving Alberta's housing crisis, particularly in underserved areas, and how it can foster balanced regional development.

This report will focus and research the following areas:

### COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- + Evaluate the expected social benefits of passenger rail expansion, including improved accessibility, community connectivity and community development.

### HOUSING AFFORDABILITY ANALYSIS

- + Examine how enhanced rail connectivity influences housing development and affordability in communities along the corridor.

### ECONOMIC STIMULATION STUDY

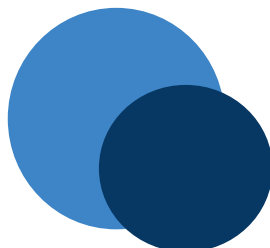
- + Analyze the economic implication of rail expansion, including ROI, job creation, and local economic growth.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

- + Plan pathways to engage with community, government, and industry stakeholders, to Ensure that stakeholder voices are heard and implemented throughout the project phases.

### POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND RECOMMENDATION

- + Formulate policy recommendations to support equitable rail service expansion and focus on housing and community development.



# 1.0 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A community impact assessment explores the possible impacts that a project may have on a community throughout the different project stages. The community impact assessment in this report will focus on the introductory stage of the project. The assessment will delve into the social benefits that the Connecting Communities Initiative will have on communities within the Calgary-Edmonton corridor. The social benefits explored will connect to the overarching goal of improving Alberta's housing crisis.

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## *Elements of the Community Impact Assessment*

- 1.1 Community Profile Analysis
- 1.2 Community Transportation Analysis
- 1.3 Social Benefit Impact Assessment

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## **1.1 COMMUNITY PROFILE ANALYSIS**

Community Profile Analysis provides an overview of each community along the Calgary-Edmonton corridor, in respect to geographical size, population, income, unemployment rate, and age of population. This analysis will be used to understand the unique position of each community and to estimate the degree of impact each social benefit will have on each community in the *Social Benefit Impact Assessment*.

The level of social benefit on each region is dependent on the region's specific attributes. Attributes of each community determine its vulnerability factor. The community vulnerability factor is impacted by subdivision, geographical size, population, income, unemployment rate, and age of population. Other elements such as marginalization and community/geographical seclusion are also considered. The higher the community vulnerability factor, the higher the impact of a social benefit will be felt in that community. The lower the community vulnerability factor, the lower the impact of a social benefit will be felt in that community. For example, the social benefit of an increase in job opportunities and job creation is greater in regions with higher unemployment (high community vulnerability factor) compared to areas with a low unemployment rate (low community vulnerability factor). Conversely, a social benefit can be mutually beneficial to all areas by creating a sense of belonging and allowing open movement within the Calgary-Edmonton corridor (neutral community vulnerability factor).

The Calgary-Edmonton corridor consists of urban and rural municipalities that have all been impacted by the Alberta housing crisis to varying degrees.

# 1.0 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

INTRO | COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT | HOUSING & ECONOMIC ANALYSIS | ACTION PLAN | POLICY DEVELOPMENT

**TABLE 1**

*Community Profile: Communities within the Calgary to Edmonton Corridor*

Community	Subdivision	Land area in square kilometers	Population Size	Unemployment Rate (%)	Average Individual Income (\$)	Average age of population (year)	65 years old and over out of total population (%)
Airdrie	City	84.3	74,100	11.1	61,150	34.8	9.2
Blackfalds	Town	16.58	10,470	12.8	53,750	31.7	6.2
Bowden	Town	3.48	1280	22.7	43,700	42	18.8
Calgary	City	820.62	1,306,784	12.5	60,450	38.8	13.6
Carstairs	Town	11.77	4,898	10.2	53,550	39.5	18.2
Crossfield	Town	11.89	3,599	10.6	54,700	38.1	13.3
Didsbury	Town	16.12	5,070	10.3	45,120	44.1	24.3
Edmonton	City	765.61	1,010,899	12.7	52,900	38.4	13.7
Innisfail	Town	19.39	7,985	11.2	47,760	44.8	25.4
Lacombe	City	20.59	13,396	12.3	49,840	40.5	18.8
Leduc	City	42.25	34,094	11.7	57,100	37.6	14.1
Maskwacis	Unincorporated place	0.25	64	83.3	-	29.2	7.7
Millet	Town	6.62	1,890	9.9	45,500	42.4	20.4
Morningside	Unincorporated place	0.25	85	25	-	49.2	29.4
Nisku	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Olds	Town	14.92	9,209	9.8	49,000	43.6	23.8
Penhold	Town	11.2	3,484	11.4	52,700	34.1	8.3
Ponoka	Town	17.22	7,331	9.5	46,040	42.2	21.1
Red Deer	City	104.34	100,844	12.3	49,080	39.4	15.1
Wetaskiwin	City	19	12,594	12	43,520	42.4	21.5
Calgary Edmonton Corridor		1986.15	2,608,076	16.38	45,571	39.6	16.9

*Note.* The data used in this analysis was collected from Statistics Canada 2021 Census<sup>13-31</sup>.



# 1.0 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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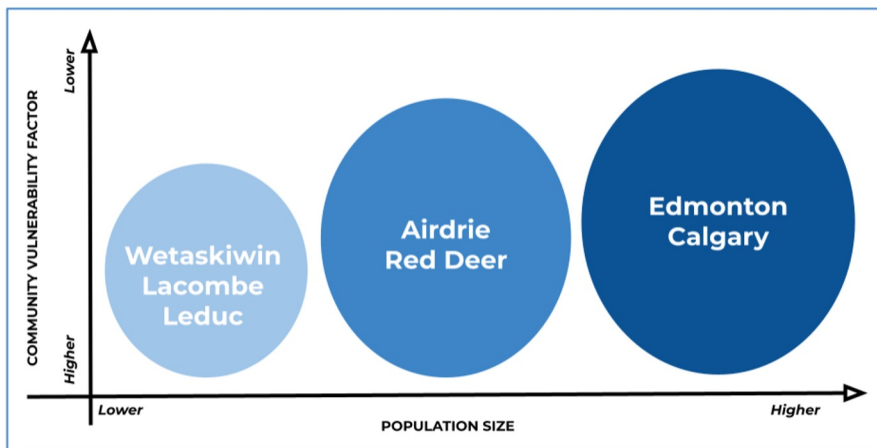
*In order to determine the scope of each community, the same census data was collected to compare and contrast the various attributes. The communities are divided into census subdivisions which are city, town and unincorporated places.*

## RESULTS

A Community Profile Analysis considers that cities usually hold an unemployment rate close to the provincial average and have relatively younger populations compared to smaller towns and counties. Towns have less uniformity in the data when compared to cities. Unincorporated places are the most vulnerable areas with the highest unemployment rate, with Maskwacis being home to the youngest population while Morningside is home to the oldest population in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor.

### *Cities*

In the Calgary-Edmonton corridor there are seven distinct cities that have a total population of 2,552,711 residents. Cities generally have a lower community vulnerability factor compared to towns and unincorporated areas due to their higher population size, lower unemployment rate, higher incomes, and younger populations. As the population size of a city increases it inversely affects its community vulnerability factor. This is due to high population cities having a larger economy, job market, and geographical connectivity.



*Note.* This figure shows the relationship between the population size of a city and the community vulnerability factor.

### *Towns*

In the Calgary-Edmonton corridor there are ten distinct towns that have a total population of 55,216 residents. Towns vary in the community vulnerability factor as they have varying statistical attributes. Their varying attributes may be due to their specific local economy, job opportunities, and proximity to larger cities. The smaller the population of an area, the more independent a population has to due limited access and availability of services. A small population size in a town generally equates to a higher vulnerability factor as they have a smaller local economy, smaller pool of job opportunities, and smaller budget for municipal led support resources.

# 1.0 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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Community Profile Analyses are impacted by a modifying attribute which is in respect to the town's proximity to larger cities. The closer a town is to a city lowers its community vulnerability factor and the further it is from a major city the higher its community vulnerability factor will be. For example, a town that is close in proximity to a metropolitan is more likely to benefit from the metropolitan's economy and services. Residents of a town can commute to cities for job opportunities and access services that may be unavailable in their community.

## *Unincorporated places*

In the Calgary-Edmonton corridor there are two distinct unincorporated places that have a total population of 149 residents. Unincorporated places have the highest community vulnerability factor due to attributes such as high unemployment, small populations, large age variability, and geographical seclusion. They follow similar trends as towns, as their proximity to towns and cities can impact their community vulnerability factor.

## 1.2 COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION ANALYSIS

Community Transportation Analysis delves into each community's transportation profile to determine level of connectivity and accessibility. It highlights the community's passenger vehicle use, availability of shared modes of transportation, and degree of reliance on passenger vehicles. Registered passenger vehicle numbers over the total population size are used as a parameter to determine access; however, it is important to note that multiple vehicles could be registered to one person or various people could be operating one vehicle. For the purpose of this analysis, it gives an estimated value of single-occupant (personal-use) reliance compared to shared mode transportation use. This analysis provides the current state of transportation in each community and projections on how it can be improved with rail development and integrated travel pathways will be provided in the *Social Benefit Impact Assessment*.

### Figure 2

*Transportation accessibility: Levels of availability of modes of shared transportation in the Calgary to Edmonton Corridor*



Note. This figure shows four different accessibility levels of the collective shared transportation profile in a community, from poor to very good. Poor rating is given to a community that has zero modes of shared transportation available. Fair rating is given to a community that has one mode of shared transportation available. Good is given to a community that has a two modes of shared transportation available. Lastly, very good rating is given to a community that has three or more modes of share transportation available.

# 1.0 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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TABLE 2

*Community Transportation Profile: Communities within the Calgary to Edmonton Corridor*

Community	Subdivision	Population Size	Number of registered passenger vehicles in 2020	Registered passenger vehicles over the total population (%)	Modes of Shared Transportation	Number of Modes of Shared Transportation	Accessibility	Access to Personal Vehicle Required
Airdrie	City	74,100	60,347	81	Local buses Intercity bus	2	Good	Yes
Blackfalds	Town	10,470	5,796	55	Local bus (On-demand)	1	Fair	Yes
Bowden	Town	1280	1,218	95	Intertown bus (On-demand)	1	Fair	Yes
Calgary	City	1,306,784	586,439	45	Local buses Light Rail Transit Intercity bus Local bus (On-demand)	4	Very Good	No
Carstairs	Town	4,898	4,404	90	-	0	Poor	Yes
Crossfield	Town	3,599	3,991	111	-	0	Poor	Yes
Didsbury	Town	5,070	5,516	109	Local bus (On-demand)	1	Fair	Yes
Edmonton	City	1,010,899	422,623	42	Local buses Light Rail Transit Local bus (On-demand)	3	Very Good	No
Innisfail	Town	7,985	4,848	61	Intertown bus (On-demand)	1	Fair	Yes
Lacombe	City	13,396	11,381	85	Intercity bus (on-demand)	1	Fair	Yes
Leduc	City	34,094	18,877	55	Local buses Local bus (On-demand)	2	Good	Yes
Maskwacis	Unincorporated place	64	-	-	-	0	Poor	Yes
Millet	Town	1,890	3,475	184	-	0	Poor	Yes
Morningside	Unincorporated place	85	-	-	-	0	Poor	Yes
Nisku	-	-	-	-	-	0	Poor	Yes
Olds	Town	9,209	7,992	87	Local bus	1	Fair	Yes
Penhold	Town	3,484	2,187	63	Intertown bus (on-demand)	1	Fair	Yes
Ponoka	Town	7,331	8,349	114	-	0	Poor	Yes
Red Deer	City	100,844	51,039	51	Local buses Local bus (On-demand)	2	Good	Yes
Wetaskiwin	City	12,594	9,353	74	-	0	Poor	Yes

*Note.* The data used in this analysis was collected from Statistics Canada 2021 Census<sup>13-31</sup>, and the Government of Alberta 2020 passenger vehicle registrations (cars, trucks, and vans) for each respective municipality<sup>32-50</sup>. Shared transportation data was gathered from municipal government websites<sup>51-64</sup>.

# 1.0 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## 1.2a POOR

Poor accessibility is given to communities with zero modes of shared transportation available, and a heavy reliance on personal passenger vehicle transportation.

Communities that fall into this category are Carstairs, Crossfield, Maskwacis, Millet, Morningside, Nisku, Ponoka, and Wetaskiwin. Majority of these communities have a high percentage in registered passenger vehicles over the total population size. These ratios range from 63% to 184%, which means at the lowest only 63% have access to personal vehicles and at the highest there is a surplus of vehicles to the population size. Having access to a personal passenger vehicle is imperative in communities that have zero modes of shared transportation.

This means that the majority of the population are required to have access to a personal passenger vehicle in order to travel in their community. A poor transportation profile presents an extra challenge for communities that have over 20% of their population over the age of 65 years old. As it presents a major barrier for seniors and individuals with mobility needs. These communities include Millet, Morningside, Ponoka, and Wetaskiwin.

## 1.2b FAIR

Fair accessibility is given to communities with one mode of shared transportation available, and still maintains a heavy reliance on personal passenger vehicle transportation.

Communities that fall into this category are Blackfields, Bowden, Didsbury, Innisfail, Penhold, and Olds. Like the poor rating, the majority of these communities have a high percentage in registered passenger vehicles over the total population size. Ranging from 55% to 109%, which means at the lowest only 55% have access to personal vehicles and at the highest there is a surplus of vehicles to the population size. Having only one mode of shared transportation available allows for some reliance to reduce on personal passenger vehicles; however, the majority of the population is still required to have access to a personal passenger vehicle in order to travel in their community.

The most common mode of shared transportation available is an on-demand intertown bus, with only Olds being the only community in this rating to have a scheduled local bus. On-demand bus service can be quite beneficial for seniors and those who have mobility needs. The issue with on-demand bus services is that they operate at a small capacity and are not able to accommodate transportation within the community effectively. Due to this, it maintains the reliance on personal passenger vehicles both in travel and ownership.

# 1.0 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## 1.2c GOOD

Good accessibility is given to communities with two modes of shared transportation available, and maintains a medium to heavy reliance on personal passenger vehicle transportation.

Communities that fall into this category are Airdrie, Leduc, and Red Deer. Communities with a good accessibility rating have a lower percentage in registered passenger vehicles over the total population size compared to poor and fair accessibility ratings. The ratio in the good accessibility rating ranges from 51% to 81%, which means at the lowest only 51% have access to personal passenger vehicles and at the highest only 81% have access to personal passenger vehicles. In both poor and fair accessibility ratings, there was a surplus of vehicles to population ratio, while communities that fall in the good accessibility rating have no surplus.

The types of shared transportation available in these communities are local buses, on-demand local buses, and intercity buses. Personal passenger vehicle use is still strong in these communities; however, this analysis showcases that the reliance on personal vehicles decreases as the availability of shared transportation increases.

## 1.2d VERY GOOD

Very good accessibility is given to communities with three or more modes of shared transportation available, and maintains a small to medium reliance on personal passenger vehicle transportation.

Communities that fall into this category are Calgary and Edmonton. Communities with a very good accessibility rating have a lower percentage in registered passenger vehicles over the total population size compared to good, fair, and poor accessibility ratings. The ratio in the very good accessibility rating ranges from 41% to 45%, which means at the lowest only 41% have access to personal passenger vehicles and at the highest only 45% have access to personal passenger vehicles.

In poor, fair, good accessibility ratings, there was over 50% of vehicles to population ratio, while communities that fall in the very good accessibility rating have under 50%. This means that access to a personal passenger vehicle is not required in order to travel in the community. The types of shared transportation available in these communities are local buses, on-demand local buses, intercity buses, and Light Rail Trains. Similarly to the good accessibility rating, this analysis effectively highlights that the reliance on personal vehicles decreases as the availability of shared transportation increases.

# 1.0 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## 1.3 SOCIAL BENEFIT IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Social Impact Assessments are conducted to assess how a project will impact the lives of those in the community<sup>65-66</sup>. The Social Impact Assessment is modified for this report to be specific to attributes of the Calgary to Edmonton corridor rail development that relate and may alleviate Alberta's housing crisis. Due to this modification, in this report it will be called the *Social Benefit Impact Assessment*.

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### *Elements of the Social Benefit Impact Assessment*

1.31 Job Opportunities

1.32 Transportation Accessibility

1.33 Livability

1.34 Community Development & Regional Connectivity

1.35 West Coast Express

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### 1.31 JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Job opportunities will increase in the region due to direct and indirect impacts from the development of passenger rail. Increased mobility options in the region allow for Albertans to move within the corridor and access new job markets. This may help to improve their incomes and reduce the unemployment rate. Communities with a high community vulnerability factor due to high unemployment will be impacted at a higher degree by this social benefit than those with a lower community vulnerability factor. Job creation will also occur due to the direct development of the rail project but also indirectly. Indirect job creation can occur due to increased interest in the region, higher economic potential, and access to new markets. Studies conducted on new train stations found that once a new train station was added in a community that business development in the area increased<sup>67-69</sup>. New business may be attracted to the region as there is more earning potential due to increased movement within the corridor.

**Social benefit 1.31a Increased job opportunities**

**Social benefit 1.31b Job creation through direct and indirect pathways**

**Social benefit 1.31c Decreasing unemployment rate**

**Social benefit 1.31d Increased personal income**

# 1.0 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## 1.32 TRANSPORTATION ACCESSIBILITY

Studies conducted on rail projects have shown that it may improve the availability of other modes of shared transportation in the region <sup>67</sup>. This is due to an increase in need for more transportation options, such as buses, in order to meet the demand of residents who require access to the train stations.

As explored in the Community Transportation Analysis, the majority of communities in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor do not have access to viable shared transportation options. This causes a heavy reliance on personal passenger vehicles use rather than shared mode transportation use. Residents who do not have access to a personal vehicle, such as seniors and those with mobility needs, are the most impacted by this reliance on personal passenger vehicles.

Passenger rail development in the corridor will allow for transportations pathways to become more integrated. The project does this by working on a collective transportation framework rather than an independent one. For transportation networks to work seamlessly with the rail project, communities that have zero shared mode transportation options will be encouraged to add options in order to improve connectivity. For example, buses that take residents to their closest train stations. This may also encourage communities to adopt various transportation options such as local and intercity buses. This showcases how passenger rail development will ignite inclusive and integrated transportation solutions in the region.

**Social benefit 1.32e Act as an innovation catalyst in the region**

**Social benefit 1.32f Improves transportation profile of each community in the region**

**Social benefit 1.32g Improves accessibility for seniors and those with mobility needs**

**Social benefit 1.32h Reduces reliance on personal passenger vehicles**

**Social benefit 1.32i Increase reliance on different modes of shared transportation**

## 1.33 LIVABILITY

Livability will improve in the region due a possible decrease in traffic, accidents, and emissions. Passenger rail development will encourage a shift from personal passenger vehicle use to shared transportation use. As shown in the Community Transportation Analysis, it is evident that as more shared transportation options become available in a community it results in less personal passenger vehicle use. Less personal passenger vehicle use will result in less traffic and associated road accidents. As personal passenger vehicle use decreases so will its carbon output into the atmosphere <sup>70</sup>. This will result in reduced emissions and may also improve air quality in the region.

**Social benefit 1.33j Reduces traffic associated with passenger vehicle use**

**Social benefit 1.33k Improves safety and reduces accidents associated with passenger vehicles**

**Social benefit 1.33l Reduces emissions due to reduced passenger vehicle use**

# 1.0 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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## 1.34 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Community Development will improve in the region as it may encourage investment in the region resulting in increased housing supply and local community infrastructure. Studies conducted on passenger rail development have found that they act as a hotspot for investment as the economic potential of a region is increased<sup>67-70</sup>. This means that it will attract investors to build more infrastructure such as housing, business, and facilities. A higher economic potential also improves the local economies of communities, especially those with a high community vulnerability factor, and will allow for local improvements to be made to existing infrastructure.

Due to improved regional connectivity, Albertans in the region will also have access to a wider set of housing and services options. For example, Albertans will have more options of where they live without compromising connection to larger municipalities where they may hold job positions. This may also help to lessen the burden of housing in large municipalities such as Calgary and Edmonton. With improved regional connectivity, Albertans are also able to access more services in the area such as health and wellness facilities. It may also increase investment in these facilities, as more Albertans will frequent them due to better accessibility. For example, in 2018 Calgary failed to win the Amazon bid, and one of the reasons was due to inadequate connectivity and transit accessibility<sup>71</sup>. This cost Calgary to lose on business investment, infrastructure development, and job opportunities. This example highlights how regional connectivity and vibrant transport pathways are imperative for business investment to be actualized in communities.

As movement in the corridor increases, it will boost local economies due to increased tourism, business development, and community connections. As it will provide a pathway for locals and tourists to discover Alberta in a convenient and connected manner.

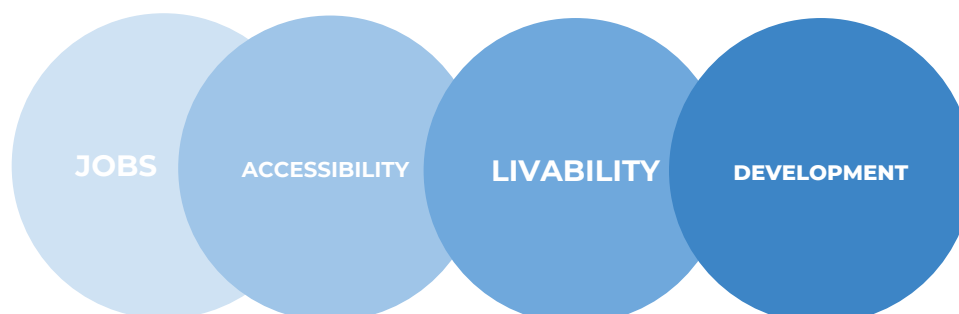
**Social benefit 1.34m Community investment and development**

**Social benefit 1.34n Housing developments, increased supply, larger market scope availability**

**Social benefit 1.34o Increased access to health and wellness facilities within the region**

**Social benefit 1.34p Increased movement within the corridor and regional connectedness**

**Social benefit 1.34q Increase in tourism, access to regional parks, and community relationship development**





# 1.0 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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## 1.35 WEST COAST EXPRESS CASE STUDY

The West Coast Express is operated by the British Columbia Rapid Transit company (BCRTC) and Translink in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia<sup>72-74</sup>. It began service in 1995 and has eight stations, from City of Mission to the City of Vancouver<sup>72-74</sup>. It currently sits as the only passenger rail development that is actively running in Canada today<sup>72-74</sup>.

The West Coast Express has allowed for integrated movement in the Lower Mainland that has improved job opportunities, accessibility, shared transportation use, community development and housing availability. This has been made possible due the West Coast Express directly and indirectly improving the community profiles of the communities it connects. These communities have benefited as the West Coast Express has specifically become a community asset<sup>72-74</sup>. For example, the train stations alone encouraged investment in business development around the area to service the increased traffic of commuters<sup>73-74</sup>. This also includes housing infrastructure developments in close proximity to the West Coast Express train stations<sup>73-74</sup>.

British Columbia is no stranger to a housing crisis of its own; however, regional connectivity achieved from integrated travel pathways allows for British Columbians to expand their options in respect to where they live. This also helps to lessen the housing burden on major cities such as the City of Vancouver and reduce densification. The West Coast Express is an example of a successful passenger rail development project that has effectively connected the Lower Mainland and improved quality of life for residents.

FRASER  
VALLEY  
TO  
METRO  
VANCOUVER

8  
STATIONS

2.6m  
BOARDINGS  
A YEAR

# 2.0 HOUSING ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC STUDY

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## 2.1 HOUSING AFFORDABILITY ANALYSIS

The Housing Affordability Study will focus on the economic impact of the rail network expansion, emphasizing on community revitalization, housing affordability, and sustainable development along the Calgary-Edmonton corridor. The Calgary-Edmonton corridor is a mostly urbanized area and one of the most populated urban regions in Canada. This corridor contains three Census Metropolitan Areas of the province, which are Calgary, Edmonton, and Red Deer. The corridor also contains two census agglomerations: Lacombe and Sylvan Lake. The communities included within this corridor are: City of Edmonton, Strathcona, Edmonton, South Edmonton, Nisku Hamlet, Leduc City, Millet Town, Wetaskiwin City, Maskwacis City, Ponoka Town, Morningside Hamlet, Lacombe City, Blackfalds Town, Red Deer City and Penhold Town.

**Figure 3**

*Map of Calgary-Edmonton Corridor*



*Note.* This map illustrates the approximate location of the trains stations in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor.

### CASE STUDY: EDMONTON

Edmonton has one of the fastest-growing populations in Alberta, it is attractive to newcomers and tourists. However, it is going through one of its biggest housing crises. Many Albertans are experiencing homelessness, while those who are housed are finding it difficult to find affordable and livable options<sup>78</sup>. For consecutive months, Edmonton and Calgary have experienced some of the highest rent increases in the country<sup>78</sup>. This case study will explore the an average and low income family expenses, and highlight potential benefits that passenger rail development can bring,

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### Housing Affordability in Edmonton

For the Edmonton Metropolitan area, 73% of the households are composed of 2 or more people, if the average family has only one vehicle, this means that more than half of the population in this area relies on a private vehicle to commute. The median price of a home in Edmonton is approximately \$400,000. Properties in the central core of the Edmonton metropolitan area are significantly lower, close to \$270,000.

#### *Monthly Expense Estimate for a family of 3*

We estimate the basic household expenses to live in Edmonton to be \$3,256. Household gross income averages \$7,200 per month. A household's after tax income decreases to \$3,944. This leaves only \$688 discretionary monthly income (under \$23 per day) for a family of 2 after accounting for the following expenses:

- + Average monthly cost of fuel to commute to work via automobile is \$183. The cost of fuel is calculated using the price of \$1.22 per litre, and 5 weekly trips to work.
- + Transit pass for two
- + Utilities, groceries, internet, and cell plan
- + Access to exercise and recreation facilities

A family that saves \$1500 per month for a 20% down payment on a residence in Edmonton would require between \$54,000 and \$80,000 in 2024<sup>79-81</sup>. This does not account for housing market inflation which was 0.34 % from 2022 to 2023<sup>82</sup>. It takes, in 2022 dollars, between 4 and 5 years to save a down payment for a modest home in greater Edmonton. A down payment for an apartment condo in Central Edmonton will take more than 3 years under this scenario. If a family had a reliable transportation method to commute to work or study, instead of buying a house in Edmonton, they could buy more affordable housing in a nearby town, like Leduc or Millet where a similar home would cost \$70,000 less than in Edmonton, decreasing the time to enter the housing market by a year. In either community, low-income households will struggle to react to unexpected expenses and save for a down payment for their initial home. When families have access to a reliable rail transportation system, both would be ahead financially, and towns outside of the normal commute would be more attractive.

When families have access to a reliable rail transportation system, economic advantages include:

- + **Commute time and expense to work or study**
- + **A family will contribute to the reduction of GHG emitted into the atmosphere compared to a gas or diesel-powered automobile**
- + **A family will have more time to rest or spend time together**
- + **A family has the choice to buy a house further away from the metropolitan area**
- + **A family will benefit from a safe transit option, reducing the risk of personal injury caused by an automobile collision**

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### Housing Affordability in Edmonton Data

Over the past decades, Alberta and Edmonton have experienced significant population growth, principally due to Alberta oil sands. Despite the impact that a downturn in oil prices has had on Edmonton's economy, it is expected that the city will continue to be one of Canada's engines of growth.

Back in 2021, the purpose-built rental apartment vacancy rate in Edmonton was 7.3% overall, like 2020. Vacancy rates were 7.6% for one-bedroom units, 7.0% for two-bedroom units, and 6.8% for three-bedroom units. Average rents were \$1,038 for a one-bedroom unit; \$1,270 for a two-bedroom unit, and \$1,408 for a three-bedroom unit<sup>83</sup>. The vacancy rate for 2023, sits at 2.4% as reported by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation<sup>4</sup>.

The number of people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton has doubled since 2019, from 1,350 in December 2019 to 2,669 in July 2022<sup>83</sup>. The number of people who must sleep outside, in temporary shelters or encampments, has also grown significantly in recent years. In 2021, there were over 6,200 encampment-related requests for service to 311, which represents a substantial increase from the 790 encampment-related inquiries in 2016<sup>83</sup>. Currently, more than 700 people are estimated to be unsheltered on any given night in Edmonton<sup>10</sup>. The winter conditions that are harsh in Edmonton, make these facts even more concerning.

The following table shows the maximum amount that families could afford for rent in Edmonton in 2022. The categories of household income were obtained by calculating percentages from the area median income.

**Table 3**

*Maximum Housing Costs for Income Categories*

Median Household Gross Income			\$ 87,225
% Threshold	Income Category	Household Income	Maximum Rent or Housing Cost
<20%	Very Low	Less than \$15,000	\$375
20 - 50%	Low	\$15,000 to \$44,999	\$1,125
50 - 80%	Moderate	\$45,000 to \$69,999	\$1,750
80 - 120%	Average	\$70,000 to \$104,999	\$2,625
>120%	High	\$105,000 and over	-

*Note.* From Edmonton Affordable Housing Needs Assessment August 2022<sup>83</sup>.

As highlighted in the Table 3, the very low-income category was not able to afford the average one-bedroom apartment and had to rely on shelters or move away from the city to smaller towns with the most affordable options.

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The number of households in Edmonton(city) in 2021 was 396,400. With a 0.2% growth, the number of households in 2026 will be 397,193.

**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 97,312 households in Edmonton will not have access to affordable housing.**

To ensure long-term community sustainability, local and regional economic development and growth plans must consider the role of affordable housing in the growing economy.

### Housing Affordability in Strathcona, Edmonton

A report of The Canadian Rental Housing Index, and a dozen organizations from across the country, found that Edmonton Strathcona, among other federal ridings, are facing a “crisis” of rental housing affordability. In Strathcona, around 20% of residents are spending at least half of their income on rent and utilities.

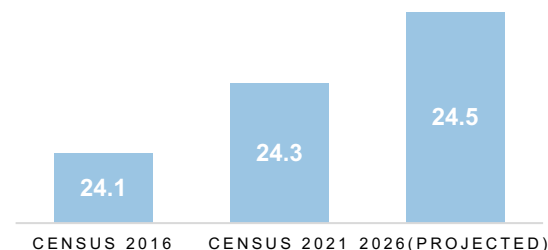
Certain groups of people are facing housing affordability challenges more often than others; seniors, single mothers, those under the age of 30, immigrants, and Indigenous populations are disproportionately affected by costly housing, according to the report<sup>85</sup>. 58% of senior-led households in this area are spending 30% or more on their basic housing needs. For single moms, it is 60%. 40% of young people in and around this area spend at or above the 30% threshold on their housing, compared to 35% of immigrants and 47% of Indigenous people<sup>85</sup>.

### Housing Affordability in South Edmonton

South Edmonton is compounded by a few neighborhoods, like South Edmonton Common or Bearspaw. Homeownership in South Edmonton is high, with a split of 83% owners to 17% renters among those living in the area. The South Edmonton Common household kinds are varied, but families are the largest group. Families with children in the area tend to have 1 child at home, with a large percentage of young children<sup>86</sup>.

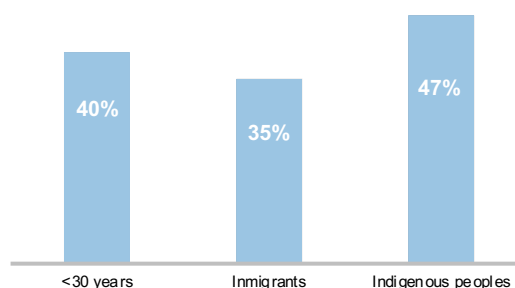
Most people commuting by car from South Edmonton spend less than one hour in transit, and the case is similar for people commuting by transit. This number provides us with an insight of how long workers are willing to spend commuting every day (<60 min).

**Figure 4.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Edmonton (2016-2021)



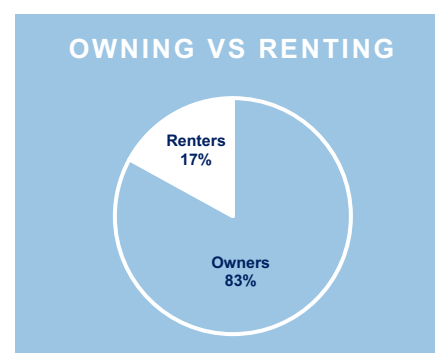
Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>84</sup>.

**Figure 5.** Percentage of People Spending More Than 30% of Salary on Housing in Strathcona



Note. Data from Edmonton Journal<sup>85</sup>.

**Figure 6.** Ownership vs Renting in South Edmonton



Note. Data from Next Home<sup>86</sup>.

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## Housing Affordability in Nisku

The asking price of homes for sale in Nisku has increased 109.26%, which makes it more difficult for Albertans to move there. Since February last year, the number of homes for sale has increased by 50%. The average price for a 3-room house is higher than \$500,000<sup>87</sup>.

## Housing Affordability in Leduc

90.9% of homes in Leduc County were single-family houses in 2021. The percentage of single-family homes in Leduc County increased 2.04% in the last five years<sup>88</sup>. The Leduc Regional Housing Foundation, safe and affordable apartments to individuals and families at rental rates set below market rates. There are various options, from bachelor apartments to four-bedroom units<sup>89</sup>. The 2024 affordable housing rental range from \$730 for one-bedroom to \$1260 for a four-bedroom.

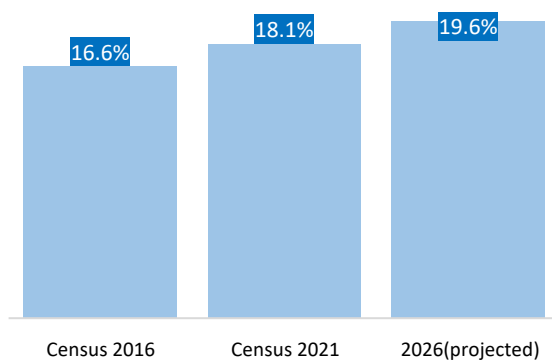
## Housing Affordability in Millet

In 2021, there were 800 households in Millet (Town) with a homeownership rate of 82.5%. This rate changed by -1 percentage points from 2016. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth of 1.5%, by 2026 19.6% of the households in Millet will spend 30% or more of their income on housing. The number of households in Millet in 2016 was 1,527,675. By 2021 the number had increased to 1,550,590<sup>90</sup>. With a 1.5% growth, the number of households in 2026 will be 1,573,848. **Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 308,000 households in Millet will not have access to affordable housing.**

## Housing Affordability in Wetaskiwin

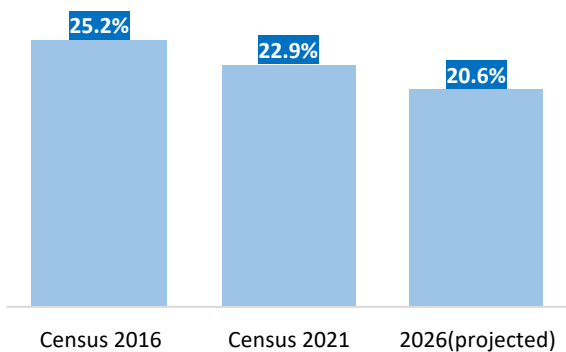
The cost of living in Wetaskiwin is 17% lower than the national average, Wetaskiwin housing is 67% lower than the national average, with family homes starting pricing range starting at \$250,000<sup>91-92</sup>. In 2021, there were 5,185 households in Wetaskiwin City with a homeownership rate of 63.4%<sup>93</sup>. This rate changed by 0.4 percentage points from 2016. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 20.6% of the households in Wetaskiwin will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Wetaskiwin in 2021 was 5185. With a decrease of 20.3%, the number of households in 2026 will be 4148. **Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 236 households in Wetaskiwin will not have access to affordable housing.**

**Figure 7.** Percentage of People Spending More Than 30% of Salary on Housing in Millet



Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>90</sup>.

**Figure 8.** Percentage of People Spending More Than 30% of Salary on Housing in Wetaskiwin



Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>93</sup>.



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### Housing Affordability in Maskwacis

Maskwacis serves five reserves of four Cree First Nations: Ermineskin Cree Nation, Samson Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, and Montana First Nation. According to the Ermineskin band councillor Jason Makinaw, they were about 500 houses short in 2019. Many Elders live with their children and grandchildren, increasing the number of people per household. In 2019, High school students from Maskwacis Construction programs-built homes for elders in their community, as part of an apprenticeship. While initiatives like this one help to alleviate the housing crisis, also tell us about the high need for affordable housing in Maskwacis<sup>94</sup>.

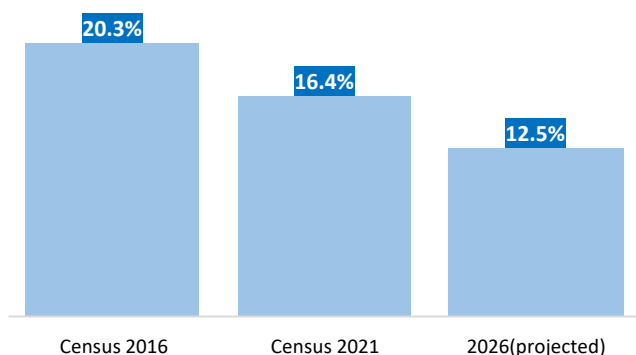
### Housing Affordability in Ponoka

In 2021, there were 3,085 households in Ponoka (Town) with a homeownership rate of 72.9%. This rate changed by 1.1 percentage points from 2016<sup>95</sup>. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 12.5% of the households in Ponoka will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Ponoka in 2021 was 3085. With a 1.5% growth, the number of households in 2026 will be 3548.

**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 461 households in Ponoka will not have access to affordable housing.**

**Figure 9**

*Households spending more than 30% of Income in Ponoka (2016-2021)*



*Note.* Data from Statistics Canada<sup>95</sup>.

### Housing Affordability in Morningside

Morningside is located in Lacombe County, the 2022 Lacombe County municipal development plan and land use bylaw, reported minor uptake of residential development in Hamlet areas (like Morningside), from 2017-2022, most likely due to the already existing amount of housing available in our Hamlets, but also because the current dwelling size. For this reason, it is recommended to reduce the minimum dwelling size to explore the community's desire for smaller dwelling footprints and more affordable housing<sup>96</sup>.

## 2.0 HOUSING ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC STUDY

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### CASE STUDY: CALGARY

Calgary is home to more than 1.6 million people. According to the 2023 World Atlas, Calgary is the cleanest city in the world. However, the city is known for its traffic congestion, in 2014 Calgarians could expect 71 hours of traffic delays over a period of one year<sup>97</sup>.

#### Housing Affordability in Calgary

In the Calgary Metropolitan area, more than 70% of the households are composed of 2 or more people. If a family has only one vehicle, more than half of the population in this area relies on a private vehicle to commute. The median price of a home in Calgary for a single detached home is \$640,000 compared to \$407,000 for a townhouse<sup>98</sup>.

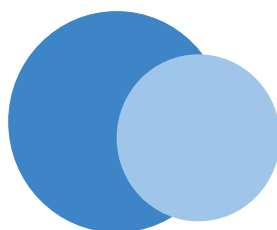
#### *Monthly Expense Estimate for a family of 3*

The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Calgary: is \$2,200 as of February, 2023<sup>99</sup>. The estimated fuel cost for an automobile in Calgary is \$205.50 (based on fuel \$1.37 per liter, and to commute 5 times a week). The vehicle fuel cost coupled with the average cost of utilities, groceries, internet, entertainment, cell phone plan, transit pass and access to exercise options for two household residents, is estimated to be \$3,623.

Assuming in Calgary that the household income of \$8,850 per month and after tax income to be \$5,227, the family may be able to save \$2000 every month, for a 20% down payment for a property (\$128,000 down payment for a detached house and \$81,400 for a townhouse)<sup>100-101</sup>. Without taking into account the housing market inflation, and unforeseen expenses, it would take between 5 years and 6 years to save for a down payment for the detached home and between 3 years to 4 years for a townhouse.

If a reliable transportation service is available to commute to work or study, instead of buying a house in Calgary, they could buy more affordable housing in a nearby town. Crossfield or Carstairs housing up to \$108,000 lower than Calgary. This lowers the amount of down payment by as much as \$21,600, lowering the time necessary to save a 20% down payment by just under 1 year<sup>102</sup>. The availability of frequent intercity passenger rail or busing may negate the need for a second vehicle and related savings for residents of these communities.

A low-income family with a threshold of \$39,382 or \$3281.83 per month and similar costs of living from the previous case, there would be no disposable income left to save for a down payment. Unexpected expenses make it practically impossible for a low-income family to buy a house or condo in Alberta. When families have access to a frequent and reliable passenger rail or busing service, the opportunity to live outside Calgary is more viable.





## 2.0 HOUSING ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC STUDY

### Housing Affordability in Calgary Data

Calgary is facing a great housing crisis, just like Edmonton. Data from the Housing Needs Assessment shows that in 2021, the households in need were 84,600 by 2018. What this means, is that 1 in every 5 homes in Calgary could not afford their housing<sup>103</sup>. The number of households in Calgary in 2021 was 502,305. With a 0.7% growth, the number of households in 2026 will be 505,821.

**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 113,302 households in Calgary will not have access to affordable housing.**

### Housing Affordability in Lacombe

In 2021, there were 5,190 households in Lacombe (City) with a homeownership rate of 71.9%<sup>105</sup>. This rate changed by -5 percentage points from 2016. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 20.4% of the households in Lacombe will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Lacombe in 2021 was 5195. With a 1% growth, the number of households by 2026 will be 5715.

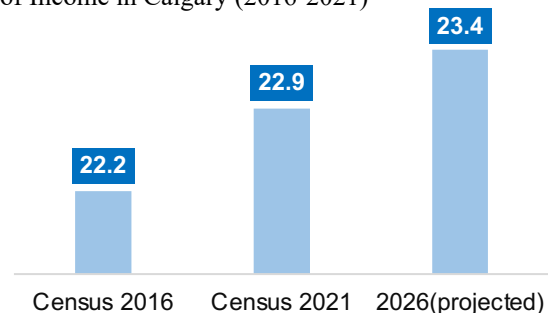
**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 1143 households in Lacombe will not have access to affordable housing.**

### Housing Affordability in Blackfalds

In 2021, there were 3,780 households in Blackfalds (Town) with a homeownership rate of 77.8%. This rate changed by -5.3 percentage points from 2016<sup>106</sup>. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 20.4% of the households in Blackfalds will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Blackfalds in 2021 was 3055. With a 1.1% growth, the number of households by 2026 will be 3391.

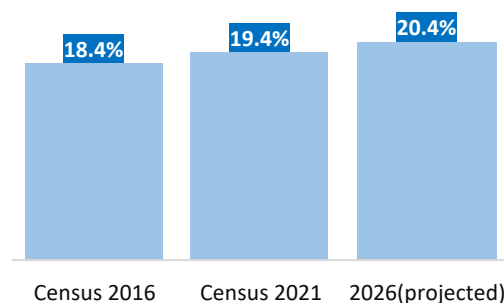
**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 692 households in Blackfalds will not have access to affordable housing.**

**Figure 10.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Calgary (2016-2021)



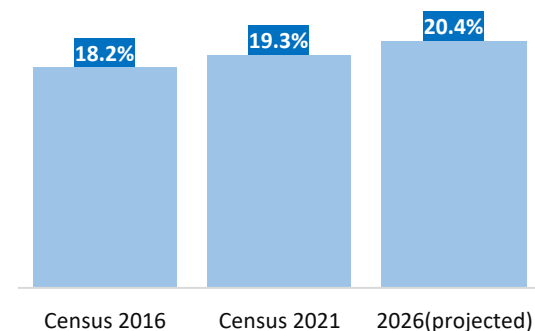
Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>104</sup>.

**Figure 11.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Lacombe City (2016-2021)



Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>105</sup>.

**Figure 12.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Blackfalds Town (2016-2021)



Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>106</sup>.

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## Housing Affordability in Red Deer

In 2021, there were 40,510 households in Red Deer (City) with a homeownership rate of 64.8%. This rate changed by 0.9 percentage points from 2016<sup>107</sup>. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 20.6% of the households in Red Deer will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Red Deer in 2016 was 39,705, by 2021 it decreased to 31,645. With a 0.7% decrease, the number of households by 2026 will be 31,423.

**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 6473 households in Blackfalds will not have access to affordable housing.**

## Housing Affordability in Penhold

In 2021, there were 1,325 households in Penhold (Town) with a homeownership rate of 80.0%. This rate changed by -5.2 percentage points from 2016<sup>108</sup>. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 18.9% of the households in Penhold will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Penhold in 2021 was 1325. With a 1.2% growth, the number of households by 2026 will be 1484.

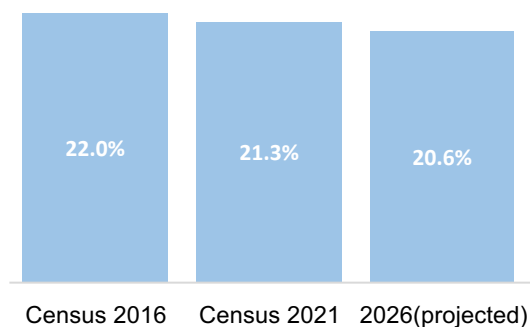
**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 280 households in Penhold will not have access to affordable housing.**

## Housing affordability in Innisfail

In 2021, there were 3,355 households in Innisfail (Town) with a homeownership rate of 70.3%. This rate changed by -4.6 percentage points from 2016<sup>109</sup>. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 18.8% of the households in Innisfail will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Innisfail in 2021 was 3355. With a 0.6% growth, the number of households by 2026 will be 3375.

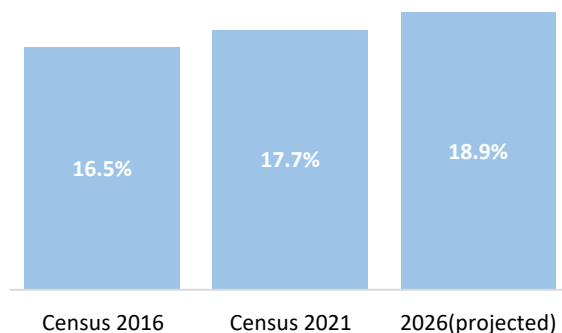
**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 642 households in Innisfail will not have access to affordable housing.**

**Figure 13.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Red Deer City (2016-2021)



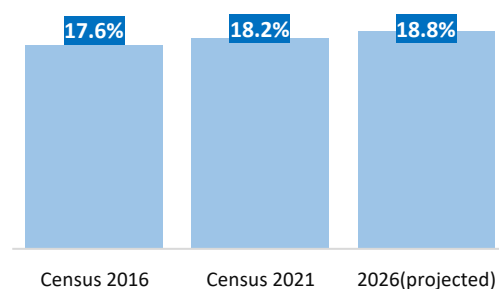
Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>107</sup>.

**Figure 14.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Penhold Town (2016-2021)



Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>108</sup>.

**Figure 15.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Innisfail Town (2016-2021)



Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>109</sup>.

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## Housing Affordability in Bowden

In 2021, there were 585 households in Bowden (Town) with a homeownership rate of 74.4%. This rate changed by -8.5 percentage points from 2016<sup>110</sup>. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 20.8% of the households in Bowden will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Bowden in 2021 was 580. With a 0.3% growth, the number of households by 2026 will be 582.

**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 122 households in Bowden will not have access to affordable housing.**

## Housing Affordability in Olds

In 2021, there were 3,810 households in Olds (Town) with a homeownership rate of 72.4%. This rate changed by -1.1 percentage points from 2016<sup>111</sup>. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 16.2% of the households in Olds will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Olds in 2021 was 3810. With a 2.7% decrease, the number of households by 2026 will be 3707.

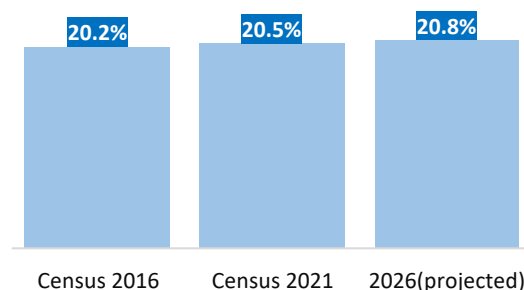
**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 601 households in Olds will not have access to affordable housing.**

## Housing Affordability in Didsbury

In 2021, there were 2,050 households in Didsbury (Town) with a homeownership rate of 78.8%. This rate changed by -1.7 percentage points from 2016<sup>112</sup>. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 17.9% of the households in Didsbury will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Didsbury in 2021 was 2025. With a 0.7% decrease, the number of households by 2026 will be 2011.

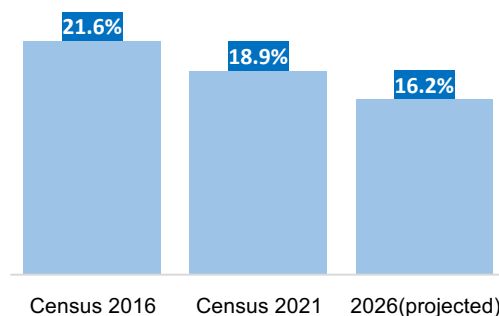
**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 360 households in Olds will not have access to affordable housing.**

**Figure 16.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Bowen Town (2016-2021)



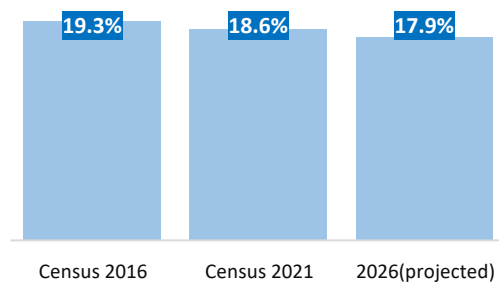
Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>110</sup>.

**Figure 17.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Olds Town (2016-2021)



Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>111</sup>.

**Figure 18.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Didsbury Town (2016-2021)



Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>112</sup>.

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## Housing Affordability in Carstairs

In 2021, there were 1,840 households in Carstairs (Town) with a homeownership rate of 86.4%. This rate changed by -4.4 percentage points from 2016<sup>113</sup>. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 12.7% of the households in Carstairs will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Carstairs in 2021 was 1365. With a 4.6% decrease, the number of households by 2026 will be 1302.

**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 170 households in Carstairs will not have access to affordable housing.**

## Housing Affordability in Crossfield

In 2021, there were 1,325 households in Crossfield (Town) with a homeownership rate of 83.4%. This rate changed by -1.1 percentage points from 2016<sup>114</sup>. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 15.6% of the households in Crossfield will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Crossfield in 2021 was 1,330. With a 0.5% growth, the number of households by 2026 will be 1337.

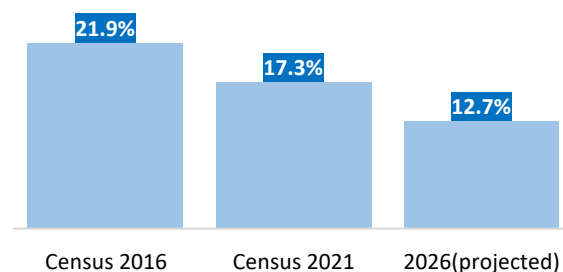
**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 209 households in Crossfield will not have access to affordable housing.**

## Housing Affordability in Airdrie

In 2021, there were 26,295 households in Airdrie (City) with a homeownership rate of 79.3%. This rate changed by -3.2 percentage points from 2016<sup>115</sup>. Based on data from the last two census, and assuming a constant population growth, by 2026 22.1% of the households in Airdrie will spend 30% or more of their income in housing. The number of households in Airdrie in 2026 was 21,490. By 2021 was 21,920 With a 2% growth, the number of households by 2026 will be 22,358.

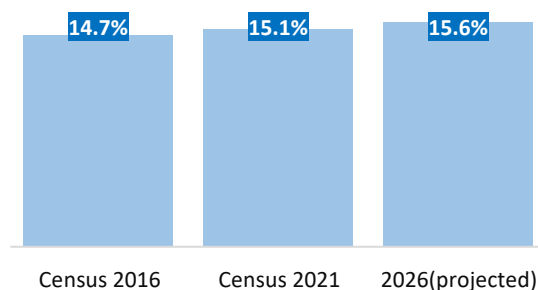
**Under current housing affordability conditions, by 2026, approximately 4,718 households in Airdrie will not have access to affordable housing.**

**Figure 19.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Carstairs Town (2016-2021)



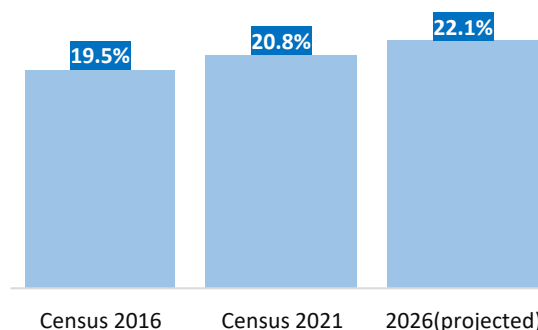
Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>113</sup>.

**Figure 20.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Crossfield Town (2016-2021)



Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>114</sup>.

**Figure 21.** Households Spending More Than 30% of Income in Airdrie City (2016-2021)



Note. Data from Statistics Canada<sup>115</sup>.

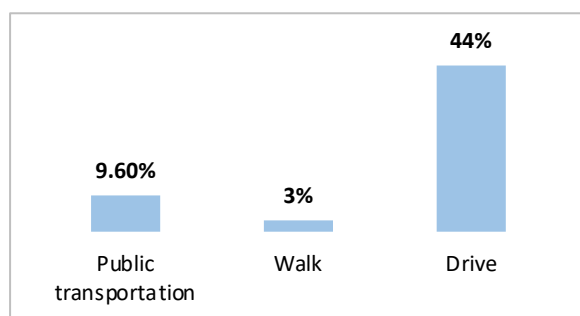
## 2.0 HOUSING ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC STUDY

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### Housing Affordability in Country Hills Boulevard

The highest priced Country Hills real estate listing is \$749,900.00 lowest priced property is \$416900 for an average price \$563,933<sup>116</sup>. The cost of living in Country Hills is 4% lower than the Calgary average, of all the people that commute, 9.6% take public transportation in Country Hills, 3% walk to work and 44% drive to work. This area would be greatly benefited with the project<sup>117</sup>.

**Figure 22.** *Communing Options*



Note. Data from Area Vibes<sup>117</sup>.

### THE CHALLENGE OF HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Housing is considered ‘affordable’ when a household spends no more than 30% of its gross income on shelter. Currently, more than 110,000 Albertans live in government-subsidized housing, with an additional 19,000 households on a waiting list for subsidized housing. Housing problems and homelessness are wide challenges that have cut across all the corners of the province, affecting the most vulnerable and the middle class. The provincial and federal governments have taken different steps to solve these challenges<sup>118</sup>. Areas with job growth are a great opportunity because jobs attract more families that come and stay in the area, adults stay in the area and migrants arrive. The demand for housing increasing also stimulates housing production. Tackling house affordability with more employment is directly linked, because when non-profit organizations start to construct, for every single house constructed, two and a half jobs are generated. These are local jobs, and the investment stays local too. According to the Canadian Home Builders’ Association (CHBA) study, the residential construction industry created:

- + 46, 935 on-site and off-site jobs in new home construction, renovation, and repair
- + \$3.2 billion in wages
- + \$7.2 billion in investment value

Adding to the effects that housing investment has on job creation, access to an affordable home will bring many other great effects; this means that people will be healthier and more productive, and all this has a direct impact on the economy because, with a better quality of life, Albertans will most likely spend money in their local economies. There is strong evidence that quality affordable housing also generates improved social outcomes for low- and moderate-income households, this is because good quality affordable housing yields positive health and education outcomes by lowering household stress, enabling the purchase of nutritious food, and supporting family stability<sup>118</sup>.

## 2.0 HOUSING ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC STUDY

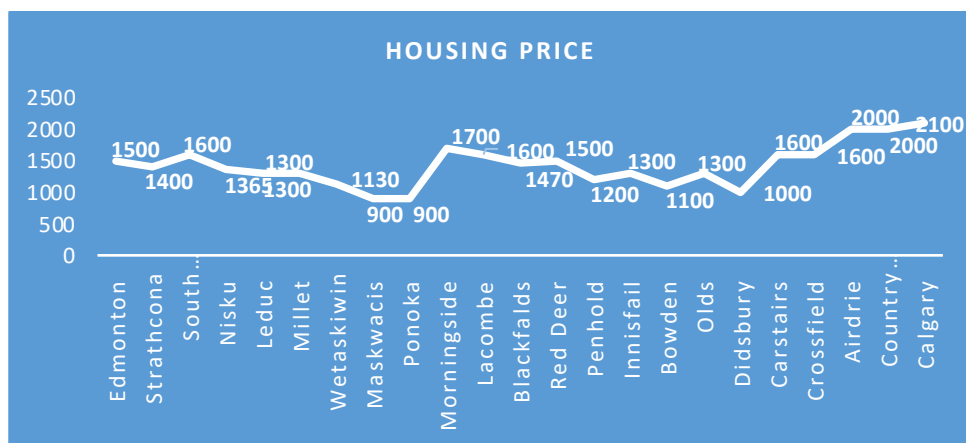
Healthy educated workforces attract increased investment for employment in the area, and children that grow in adequate housing are more likely to complete post-secondary education. This is reflected in higher salaries for graduates after and a better quality of life for their families. When families move from non-affordable to affordable housing, they tend to spend more money on food and other goods that were limited before due to the high prices of housing, when this happens, the whole economy of the area improves when low-income households spend more of their income primarily within their community, they can help stimulate the local economy and spur job creation<sup>118</sup>. The investment in a rail transportation system for those families in need of affordable housing permits that the investment of construction companies in smaller towns speeds up, also permitting commuting with better work opportunities and post-secondary opportunities. The demand will increase in restaurants, entertainment, malls, and wellness centers. With time, this will increase the jobs in those areas and continue growing the economy.

### HOUSING PRICING COMPARISON BETWEEN EDMONTON AND BENEFITED TOWNS

The following graph, shows the rent comparison for a 2-room apartment in all the communities that will benefit from this project in January 2024.

**Figure 23**

*Two-bedroom Apartment Rent in Calgary-Edmonton Corridor*



*Note.* Data collected from rentals.ca, rentcafe.ca and rentfaster.ca.

This Housing Affordability Analysis found that the Connecting Communities Initiative will bring the following benefits to the Calgary-Edmonton corridor:

- + Increase the offer of housing in commuting towns and cities, as a result housing increases affordability.
- + Lead to the connectivity of markets, which results in more rapid economic growth and housing development.
- + Economic growth which will increase the job offers for all the commuting cities and towns.
- + Lead to urbanization growth will connect communities like Maskwacis and Wetaskiwin to health and community services.



## 2.0 HOUSING ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC STUDY

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### 2.2 ECONOMIC STIMULATION STUDY

The study will explain the economic implications of the rail expansion for the Calgary-Edmonton corridor, as well as an overview of what the return on investment of this project represents, information on job creation, and local economic growth.

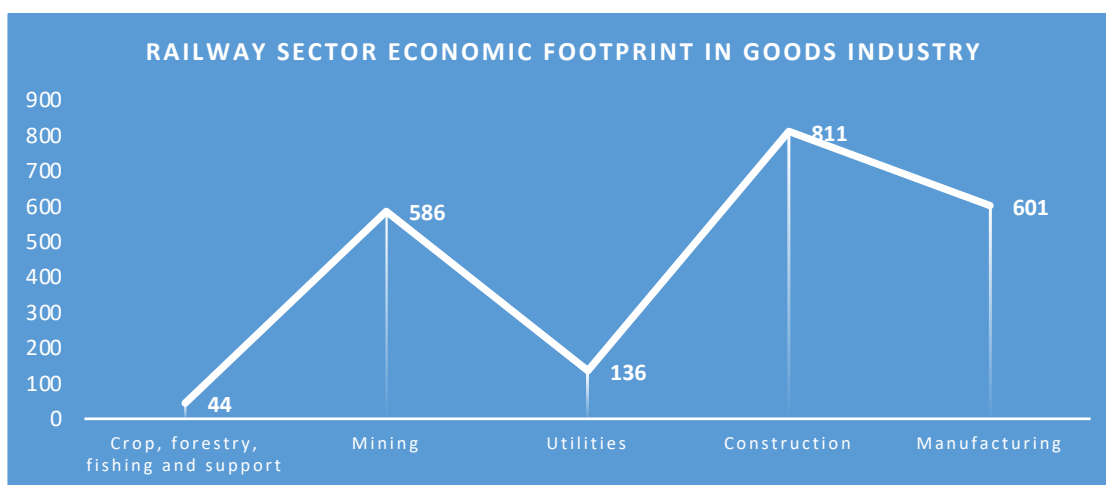
#### ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

The economic implications of this project should be examined from the point of view of the economic footprint that it will generate as well as the spinoff effect that the railway investment will have in the economy. The GDP generated in 2018 directly linked to operations in the railway industry was valued at \$8.5 billion. But the economic implications of railway projects go further than that, due to the generation of jobs, taxes, and sales of the sector. The Calgary-Edmonton corridor will have a direct implication in the bigger supply chain, through the demand for services and products, like transportation fuels and finance, insurance, and real estate services, as was previously explained in the housing affordability analysis<sup>69</sup>. Another way in which the railway expansion contributes to the economy is called "induced effects", which refers to employers of the railways or any other companies linked to this sector, spending their money on goods and services in the area, generating more jobs and expanding other economic sectors<sup>69</sup>.

The economic footprint of the railway expansion is given by the direct, indirect, and induced effects of the project. This means that if we wanted to quantify the economic footprint, it would be given by the sum of the impact of the rail sector operational and investment activities. According to The Conference Board of Canada, the industries on which the railway expansion projects have an impact are, the goods industry (crop, forestry, fishing, and support, mining, utilities, construction, manufacturing), the business services (wholesale and retail trade, transportation and warehousing, rail transportation itself, information and cultural services, finance, insurance and real estate, professional, scientific and technical and other businesses), and public administration; as shown below.

**Figure 24**

*Railway Sector Economic Footprint in Goods Industry (2018)*



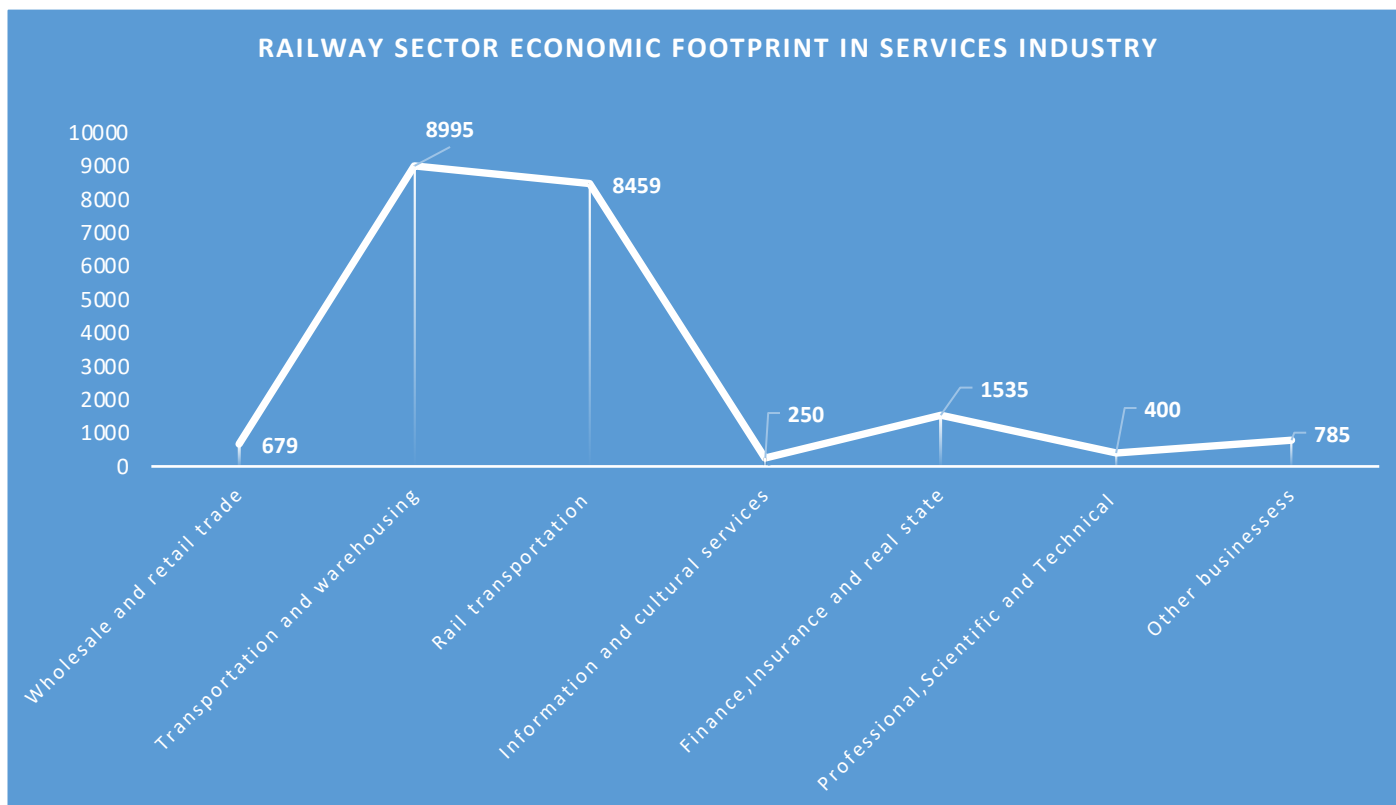
Note. Data from The Conference Board of Canada (in 2012 dollars)<sup>69</sup>.

## 2.0 HOUSING ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC STUDY

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**Figure 25**

*Railway Sector Economic Footprint in Services Industry (2018)*



*Note.* Data from The Conference Board of Canada (in 2012 dollars)<sup>69</sup>.

The Conference Board of Canada's *Railway Sector Economic Footprint in Services Industry* graph outlines the railroad sector's impact to the Canadian Economy. In Alberta, mining, oil and gas extraction remain the largest contributing sectors to the economy, accounting for 16% of GDP<sup>119</sup>.

### JOB CREATION

Housing affordability is a factor that greatly influences the job market; when the cost of housing increases, people may be unable to afford living in their community and be forced to move to another municipality. This phenomenon often limits working in markets with higher wages. Businesses may find it more difficult to hire workers and this affects business sectors in rural areas, preventing employers from growing. Investing in affordable housing promotes equality, because different economic sectors grow in each of the benefited communities. Markets that are currently growing and in high demand will offer economic space for other sectors to grow.

The following table illustrates the results of comparing the current sectors that generate the most income in Canada due to rail expansion, with the current growing sectors that will highly benefit in each community, generating more jobs in those markets (the darkest squares show the sectors that will benefit the most).



# 2.0 HOUSING ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC STUDY

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**Table 4***Growing Economic Sectors in the Calgary-Edmonton Corridor*

Edmonton, South Edmonton and Strathcona	Nisku and Leduc	Wetaskiwin and Maskwacis	Ponoka	Morningside and Lacombe	Blackfalds
Construction	Manufacturing	Finance	Wholesale and retail trade	Real Estate	Construction
Professional scientific and technical services	Transportation	Insurance and Real estate	Construction	Construction	Real estate
Public administration	Warehousing	Utilities	Other services (Tourism and food services)	Retail trade	Professional services
Manufacturing		Manufacturing		Transportation	Other services
Real estate		Information			Transportation
		Cultural services			

Red Deer	Penhold	Innisfail	Bowden	Olds	Didsbury
Real estate	Professional services	Real estate	Real estate	Real estate	Construction
Professional services	Real estate	Construction	Other services	Construction	Real estate
Construction	Construction	Professional services	Construction	Professional services	Professional services
Other services	Other services	Other services	Transportation	Retail	Other services
Retail	Administrative services	Retail	Professional services	Finance	Transportation
Administrative	Transportation	Transportation			

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Carstairs	Crossfield	Airdrie	Country Hills Boulevard and Calgary
Retail	Real estate	Professional services	Professional services
Construction	Construction	Construction	Real estate
Real Estate	Professional services	Real estate	Construction
Professional Services	Transportation	Other services	Finance
Transportation	Retail	Transportation	Other services
Administrative services	Manufacturing	Retail	Retail

*Note.* Based on Statistics Canada, Edmonton Homes, Leduc County, West Central Planning Agency and Economic Development in Wetaskiwin website data<sup>120-137</sup>.

## RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Investing in affordable housing will contribute to diversification of the economy for communities benefiting from passenger railway service expansion. The average cost to build a house in Calgary and Edmonton ranges from \$150 to \$240 per square foot. If we were to build a 1200 sq ft single family home, using the upper limit range as the building cost (\$240), the house will cost \$288,000 to build<sup>138</sup>.

The key elements from the ROI projections in Alberta, assuming the average building cost is \$288,000 (February 2024) include:

- + The return on investment will be 39% of the initial investment for each single-family home built in Edmonton.
- + Building 1000 single family homes in Edmonton will generate a ROI of \$112,000,000.
- + The return on investment will be 71.9% of the initial investment for each single-family home built in Calgary.
- + Building 1000 single-family homes in Calgary will generate a ROI of \$207,000,000.
- + The community that will generate the higher ROI is Calgary (Central Calgary and Country Hills Boulevard area)(197.6%), with a value of 207,000,000 for each 1000 new homes in Central Calgary and 362,000,000 for each 1000 homes in the Country Hills Boulevard area.

# 2.0 HOUSING ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC STUDY

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**Table 5***Return on Investment for Single-family Homes*

Community	Single-family house Price (CAD)	ROI for 1 home (CAD)	ROI for 1000 homes (CAD)	ROI for 1 home (%)
City of Edmonton	400,000	112000.00	112000000	38.9
Strathcona	520,000	232000.00	232000000	80.6
South Edmonton	759,000	471000.00	471000000	163.5
Nisku	539,000	251000.00	251000000	87.2
Leduc and Millet	342,000	54000.00	54000000	18.8
Wetaskiwin and Maskwacis	180,000	-108000.00	-108000000	-37.5
Ponoka	189,000	-99000.00	-99000000	-34.4
Morningside	227,000	-61000.00	-61000000	-21.2
Lacombe	234,000	-54000.00	-54000000	-18.8
Blackfalds	419,000	131000.00	131000000	45.5
Red Deer	300,000	12000.00	12000000	4.2
Penhold	345,000	57000.00	57000000	19.8
Innisfail	340,000	52000.00	52000000	18.1
Bowden	290,000	2000.00	2000000	0.7
Olds	290,000	2000.00	2000000	0.7
Didsbury	300,000	12000.00	12000000	4.2
Carstairs	470,000	182000.00	182000000	63.2
Crossfield	570,000	282000.00	282000000	97.9
Airdrie	500,000	212000.00	212000000	73.6
Country Hills Boulevard	650,000	362000.00	362000000	125.7
Calgary	495,000	207000.00	207000000	71.9

*Note.* Based on Realtor, RE/MAX and Point2Homes website data.

## 2.0 HOUSING ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC STUDY

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- + The communities that will generate the lowest ROI are Wetaskiwin and Maskwacis (-37.5%), due to the current housing prices. However, these calculations do not account for the economic benefits that other sectors such as finance, insurance, utilities, and manufacturing will have in these areas, which are more likely to have a positive effect on the real estate market.

### VULNERABILITY TO HOUSING CRISIS

Construction companies tend to invest in highly profitable areas, for this reason the access to affordable housing is directly linked to the profit margin of constructing in each area. After evaluating the profitability of building new homes in each of the studied communities, it is possible to assign vulnerability levels to each of the studied communities.

**Table 5**

*Vulnerability to Affordable Housing Crisis Levels*

Vulnerability to Affordable Housing Crisis (based on ROI)		
from -37.5% to 12.5%	no profit to low profit	high vulnerability
from 12.6% to 62.5%	low profit to medium profit	medium-low vulnerability
from 62.6% to 112.5%	medium profit to high profit	medium vulnerability
from 112.6% to 163.5%	high profit to very high profit	low vulnerability

*Note.* Based on Realtor.ca, RE/MAX and Point2Homes data.

- + The communities with the highest vulnerability to the affordable housing crisis, based on the ROI of single-family homes are Wetaskiwin, Maskwacis, Ponoka, Morningside, Lacombe, Red Deer, Bowden, Olds, and Didsbury.
- + The communities with a medium-low vulnerability to the affordable housing crisis, based on the ROI of single-family homes are Edmonton, Leduc, Millet, Blackfalds, Penhold, and Innisfail.
- + The communities with a medium vulnerability to the affordable housing crisis, based on the ROI of single-family homes are Strathcona, Nisku, Carstairs, Crossfield, Airdrie, and Calgary.
- + The communities with the lowest vulnerability to the affordable housing crisis, based on the ROI of single-family homes are South Edmonton and Country Hills Boulevard.

# 2.0 HOUSING ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC STUDY

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**Table 6***Vulnerability to Affordable Housing Crisis*

Community	ROI for 1 home (%)	Vulnerability to Affordable Housing Crisis
City of Edmonton	38.9	Medium-low vulnerability
Strathcona	80.6	Medium vulnerability
South Edmonton	163.5	Low vulnerability
Nisku	87.2	Medium vulnerability
Leduc and Millet	18.8	Medium-low vulnerability
Wetaskiwin and Maskwacis	-37.5	High vulnerability
Ponoka	-34.4	High vulnerability
Morningside	-21.2	High vulnerability
Lacombe	-18.8	High vulnerability
Blackfalds	45.5	Medium-low vulnerability
Red Deer	4.2	High vulnerability
Penhold	19.8	Medium-low vulnerability
Innisfail	18.1	Medium-low vulnerability
Bowden	0.7	High vulnerability
Olds	0.7	High vulnerability
Didsbury	4.2	High vulnerability
Carstairs	63.2	Medium vulnerability
Crossfield	97.9	Medium vulnerability
Airdrie	73.6	Medium vulnerability
Country Hills Boulevard	125.7	Low vulnerability
Calgary	71.9	Medium vulnerability

*Note.* Based on Realtor.ca, RE/MAX and Point2Homes data.

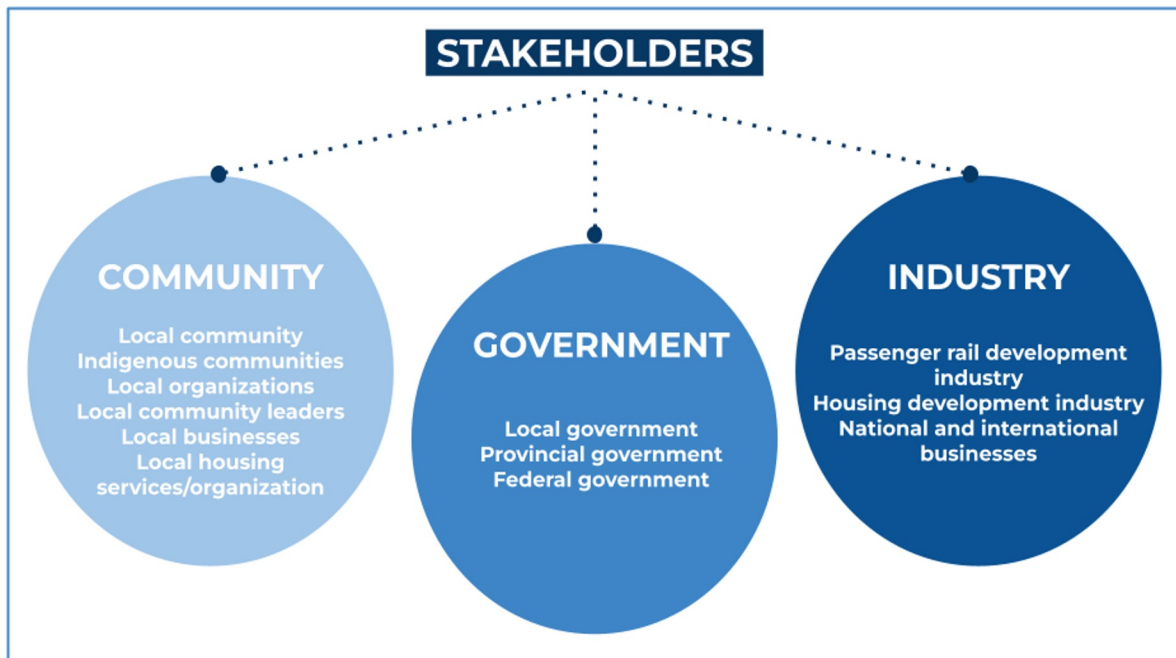
# 3.0 ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

## 3.0 Engagement Action Plans

Stakeholder and community engagement is an important aspect in the success of the Connecting Communities Initiative. In order to showcase how passenger rail development can alleviate Alberta's housing crisis it is imperative to engage with stakeholders and community members for their insights and needs. In this section of the report, two detailed action plans are provided in order to effectively engage with all stakeholders.

**Figure 26**

*Stakeholders to consider for Connecting Communities Initiative*



*Note.* In this figure stakeholders are segmented into three categories, which are community, government, and industry. All of the above stakeholders will be consulted throughout the project phases.

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### *Elements of the Engagement Action Plan*

#### 3.1 Community Engagement Action Plan

#### 3.2 Government and Industry Stakeholders Engagement Action Plan

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# 3.0 ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

## 3.1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

### STAKEHOLDER: COMMUNITY

#### FOCUS

+ The purpose of this action plan is to engage with local communities to gather input and build awareness/support for the Connecting Communities Initiative.

#### Goals

- Goal 3.1a - To connect with communities and understand where their interest, awareness, and support lies in respect to this project
- Goal 3.1b - To educate community members in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor on the social benefits that this project will bring to their respective community
- Goal 3.1c - To gather community members' respective perspectives, concerns, and insights about the project
- Goal 3.1d - To create a database of survey results for continued use throughout the project phases

#### ASSESSMENT

+ Determine the amount of awareness/support there currently is for passenger rail development in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor and the Connecting Communities Initiative.

- Action item 3.1a - Conduct Community Awareness Perception Analysis  
Purpose: Provides a baseline of the level of awareness, support, and perception before direct community engagement.

#### PLANNING

+ Determine engagement targets in each community in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor

- Action item 3.1b - Set out how many people this engagement plan is meant to reach
- Action item 3.1c - Determine how many community contacts are required for each community
- Action item 3.1d - Determine how many completed surveys for each community would be considered a adequate on a respective timeline

+ Creating surveys to gather and understand community members' project awareness, support, perception, and insights.

- Action item 3.1e - Create two surveys that gauge awareness, support, perception, and provide section to collect input  
Purpose: The initial survey will be circulated before community engagement is initiated, and future surveys will address the feedback from the participants.

# 3.0 ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

## PLANNING

- + Indigenous communities and vulnerable populations special consideration
  - Action item 3.1f - Reach out to community leaders and members of Indigenous communities within the Calgary-Edmonton corridor.  
Purpose: To provide a respectful and inclusive community engagement experience with Indigenous communities and vulnerable populations.
- + Hold community meetings both in-person and virtually
  - Action item 3.1g - Find point of contact in each community (community organizations or local government) to arrange and schedule meetings  
Purpose: To engage in-person with community members, educate them about the initiative, and gather input through open dialogue and surveys.
  - Action item 3.1h - Schedule virtual community meetings with community leaders and residents  
Purpose: To engage virtually with community members, educate them about the initiative, and gather input through open dialogue and surveys.

## EVALUATING AND MEASURING

- + Attendance and survey completion
  - Action item 3.1i - Collect data on how many individuals attend community meetings both virtually and in-person
  - Action item 3.1j - Collect data on how many surveys were completed for each community
- + Support
  - Action item 3.1k - Assess the overall response to the survey and categorize responses as positive, neutral, and negative
  - Action item 3.1l - Compare how awareness and support changed from the preliminary survey to the concluding survey
- + Targets
  - Action item 3.1m - Determine if engagement and survey targets were met

## MONITORING

- + Review action plan
  - Action item 3.1n - Determine where gaps in action plan exist and if targets need to be amended
  - Action item 3.1o - Revise and implement action plan until desired targets are met
  - Action item 3.1p - Once action plan has completed desired targets, begin planning next stage of project



# 3.0 ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

## 3.2 GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

### STAKEHOLDER: GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY

#### FOCUS

+ The purpose of this action plan is to engage with respective government and industry stakeholders to gather input, gain support, and build partnerships for the Connecting Communities Initiative.

#### Goals

- Goal 3.2a - To connect with respective government and industry stakeholders and understand where their interest, awareness, and support lies in respect to this project
- Goal 3.2b - To provide project details to respective government and industry stakeholders in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor on the social and economic benefits that this project will bring to the region.
- Goal 3.2c - To gather respective government and industry stakeholders respective perspectives, concerns, and insights about the project
- Goal 3.2d - To create partnerships with respective government and industry stakeholders

#### ASSESSMENT

+ Establishing connections

- Action item 3.2a - Determine the specific government and industry stakeholders to reach out to for this project and identify key contacts

#### PLANNING

+ Determine engagement targets for each respective government and industry stakeholders

- Action item 3.2b - Set out how many organizations this engagement plan is meant to reach
- Action item 3.2c - Determine how many respective government and industry stakeholders contacts are required
- Action item 3.2d - Determine what level of communication would be considered adequate with each contact
- Action item 3.2e - Determine timeline and follow-up schedule with each contact

+ Gather input

- Action item 3.2e - Create a database to collect respective government and industry stakeholders project awareness, support, perspectives, and insights.

# 3.0 ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

## PLANNING

### + Indigenous communities governing bodies/organizations

- Action item 3.2f - Reach out to community leaders and members of Indigenous communities within the Calgary-Edmonton corridor.

Purpose: To provide a respectful and inclusive community engagement experience with Indigenous communities governing bodies.

### + Holding community meetings both in-person and virtually

- Action item 3.2g - Find point of contact in each respective government and industry stakeholders and arrange in-person and virtual meetings
- Action item 3.2h - Attend government and industry events to engage with respective government and industry stakeholders

## EVALUATING AND MEASURING

### + Meetings

- Action item 3.2i - Collect data on how many meetings were successfully facilitated with respective government and industry stakeholders contacts.
- Action item 3.2j - Collect data on how many surveys were completed for each community

### + Support

- Action item 3.2k - Assess the overall response to the project from meetings and categorize responses as positive, neutral, and negative

### + Targets

- Action item 3.2l - Determine if engagement targets were met

## MONITORING

### +Review action plan

- Action item 3.2m - Determine where gaps in action plan exist and if targets need to be amended
- Action item 3.2n - Revise and implement action plan again until desired targets are met

### + Move into next project stage

- Action item 3.2o - Once action plan has completed desired targets, begin planning next stage of project

# 4.0 POLICY DEVELOPMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

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## 4.1 POLICY DEVELOPMENT

In the context of tackling the Alberta Housing crisis, developing a policy framework and recommendations for this project is crucial for the success of ARR and ITRD's Connecting Communities Initiative. Without addressing the current barriers and challenges, progress on the project will be hindered. Access to equitable transportation, housing, and community development will be delayed, limiting the main goal of this project, to connect communities via affordable, frequent and transportation options.

An effective and comprehensive policy framework is essential to ensure that the societal benefits of the project are fully realized. In addition to that, understanding policies will aid project teams to anticipate challenges throughout the project lifecycle. Furthermore, alignment with local and regional stakeholders is important to the success and sustainability of the initiative. Incorporating these considerations into the project planning process is imperative to achieve meaningful and lasting impacts on housing affordability and accessibility in Alberta.

*Policy barriers that impact the Connecting Communities Initiative include:*

- + Regulatory complexities
- + Environmental regulations
- + Indigenous rights and consultation
- + Labor regulations
- + Land use policies
- + Taxation and fiscal policies
- + Health and safety regulations

Acknowledging policy impacts to phases of construction and operation will ensure the successful implementation of this project. The Governor in Council has the authority to establish regulations concerning engineering standards for railway construction or modification, which may cover both physical specifications and performance criteria.

When directed by the relevant governing ministry, a railway company must develop or update engineering standards for specific matters, as outlined in the Minister's order. These standards must be submitted to the ministry for approval within a specified timeframe. Additionally, any engineering standards proposed or revised by a railway company independently must also be submitted to the ministry for approval.

The procedures outlined in subsections 19(4) to (11) of the Act apply to the standards, with necessary modifications and disregarding references to relevant associations or organizations. The Railway Safety Act of 1985 also includes parts for a proposed railway work<sup>139</sup>. The notice of proposed railway work is of a prescribed kind. The individual or entity proposing the work must not commence activities without Federal approval. Relevant authorities must be notified according to the Act. The individual or entity may commence if all notified parties provide a response of no objection to the work.

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In the case of objections, the act states the procedure for filing of objections, withdrawal of objections, and vain objections. Furthermore, the act states the proof for undertaking of proposed railway works where all works must abide by Canadian engineering standards. The work must be done in accordance with sound engineering principles and all work must be approved by a professional engineer. Part 2 & 3 of the Canada Transportation Act outlines the regulations for Canadian Railroad operations<sup>140</sup>. Part 2 of the act focuses on the operation and maintenance of Railway works and equipment.

*This section outlines the requirement for:*

- + Certification
- + Crossing maintenance
- + Compliance with regulations
- + Operating rules
- + Compliance with engineering and other relevant standards

### CURRENT POLICY LANDSCAPE

On a provincial level, Alberta has the “Railway (Alberta) Act” (2000)<sup>141</sup>. This act is like the Federal Railway Act, however, the building and operation of all provincial railroads, or railroads that run exclusively in Alberta, are governed by this Act. It distinguishes between several types of railroads and defines what constitutes a railway. The Act establishes the post of Railway Administrator and gives the Minister the authority to choose a candidate for it. Railway operators are presented with respect to various rights, constraints, and obligations, in addition to penalties and appeal procedures. The Act gives the provincial transportation minister the authority to establish regulations on a variety of topics pertaining to the building and management of railroads.

For operation, Canadian Railway rules and standards include the following most important and highlighted rules/regulations:

- + Canadian Railway Medical Rules Handbook
- + Canadian Rail Operating Rules
- + Duty and Rest Period Rules for Railway Operating Employees
- + Railway Extreme Heat and Fire Risk Mitigation Rules
- + Railway Equipment Reflectorizing Rules
- + Rules for the Installation, Inspection, and testing of Air Reservoirs
- + Railway Freight and Passenger Train Brake Inspection and Safety Rules
- + Railway Locomotive Inspection and Safety Rules
- + Transport Canada Railway Medical Rules for Positions Critical to Safe Railway Operations
- + Railways Passenger Car Inspection and Safety Rules

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- + Railways Passenger Handling Safety Rules
- + Railway Signal & Traffic Control System Standards
- + Rules Respecting Key Trains and Key Routes
- + Standards Respecting Pipeline Crossings Under Railways
- + Standards Respecting Railway Clearances
- + Transport Canada Standard for LED Signal Modules at Highway/Railway Grade Crossings
- + Work/Rest Rules for Railway Operating Employees (2011)

It is important to acknowledge Indigenous rights in Canada. It is therefore necessary to refer to the First Nations Property Assessment and Taxation (Railway Rights-of-Way) Regulations (2007). These regulations were created to offer First Nations an alternative method for the purposes of imposing property taxes on railway rights-of-way located within reserve lands. This was done to ensure taxation levels are like off-reserve land in surrounding communities. For the implementation and approval of the project to progress smoothly, it is important that laws, acts, and regulations are taken into consideration.

### FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POLICY BARRIERS OR BLOCKERS

Regional passenger rail will run within the provincial boundaries of Alberta. The service will operate under the rules, laws, and regulations of the province of Alberta and Transport Canada that regulates both class one railways CPKC and CN with whom the regional rail service will operate.

One of the important regulatory complexities to consider is the Alberta Railway Audit Protocols. This audit must be completed by all provincial railways to ensure safety protocols are considered. A self-audit by the regional rail operator is possible and may be conducted to categorize compliance with the Alberta Railway Legislation<sup>142-143</sup>.

*Three categories are considered for this audit:*

**Category 1** covers railway cars that can be self-switched using a rail car mover or locomotive. The railroads are heritage, public, and industrial. Applying for operational approval renewal along with an external audit in the third-year mandates yearly self-audit.

**Category 2** is applicable when no self-switching cars by a locomotive or rail car mover are necessary. This category transload one hundred or more cars per year. Regardless of the number of cars, it also includes any location that transloads hazardous materials. A yearly self-audit then mandates an external audit in the third year to be submitted alongside the operation approval renewal application.

**Category 3** does not include self-switch cars with an engine. The number of cars transported must be 99 cars or less per year and each car may not carry dangerous goods. The self-audits shall be done on a yearly basis and the third-year self-audit shall be accompanied with operating approval renewal application.

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Federal and provincial regulations overlap and affect railways operating in Alberta. Generally, provincial governments hold the largest land ownership in Canada and wield authority over land use as stipulated by the Constitution. Municipal governments, while influential in land use planning, lack constitutional recognition as an official level of government; rather, they derive their powers from the provinces.

Specifically, Section 92(13) of the Constitution Act, 1867, grants provinces the exclusive authority to legislate on matters pertaining to property and civil rights within their jurisdiction. Consequently, the assignment of regulatory power over land use planning and development to provincial legislatures, and indirectly to municipalities, stems from this provincial authority over property and civil rights, rather than from the Federal Parliament.

To avoid impact on the population, it is necessary to identify stakeholders, their interests, and any conflicts that may arise. This should be done by first identifying the stakeholders, identifying their interests and what their objectives are. In case of any conflict, a conflict resolution mechanism or grievance redress mechanism shall be developed to acknowledge any concerns surrounding the project.

It is important to keep the community engaged during all steps of the project to ensure its success and avoid conflict. The impacts on the community must be properly assessed to highlight the positive impacts and mitigate the negative impacts and eliminate them when possible.

### CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Policy framework challenges that may arise for this project include:

- + Regulatory approval process
- + Land acquisition and Rights-of-Way.
- + Environmental Regulations
- + Transportation Policy and Planning
- + Safety and Security Regulations
- + Intermodal Connectivity
- + Community Engagement and Public Consultation
- + Indigenous Consultation and Consent
- + Financial and Economic Considerations
- + Government Funding and Subsidies

It is important to note that challenges attributed to stakeholder concerns are being acknowledged in the early stages of the planning to avoid conflicts. The policies and regulations have been studied and observed to identify possible hurdles. Indigenous consultations have been conducted for the preliminary studies. The planning for this project has been conducted and economic studies have been leveraged to assess the importance of this project.

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*Other challenges may require further methods such as:*

- + Policy flexibility and alignment analysis
- + Finding regulatory streamlining opportunities
- + Finding opportunities for the policy integration in municipal, provincial, and federal governments
- + Forming Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) by collaborating with governmental entities and industry stakeholders.
- + Capacity building to develop stakeholders' understanding of policies.
- + The engagement of the public in the project to gain public support.
- + Continuous monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation
- + Conducting a risk management assessment to mitigate legal, environmental, and social risks associated with this project.
- + Ensure that all policies are sustainable and adaptable.

By following this methodology, stakeholders have the potential to leverage supportive policy environments, acknowledge and overcome regulatory barriers, and commence the development of the project.

## 4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING POLICY BARRIERS OR BLOCKERS

It is critical to identify considerations to limit arising issues. To overcome policy barriers and blockers, it is important to align stakeholder priorities. Collaboration between policy makers, regulatory bodies, and entities responsible for the planning and construction of the project is tantamount to complete the *Connecting Communities Initiative*.

After we recognize and establish partnerships with policymakers and regulatory bodies, we need to keep these partnerships strong and informed through frequent meetings, briefings, working groups, and consultation sessions. It is important to highlight the benefits of the *Connecting Communities Initiative* through collaboration and to emphasize the positive impact of the project to Alberta.

Aside from policy makers, stakeholder partnerships are key to the success of this project. Partnerships will assist many communities once frequent inter-city transportation services are operating. The benefits to Alberta are numerous.

*The introduction of frequent inter-city busing, and passenger rail will benefit the following provincial government ministries:*

- + **Advanced Education** - To provide post-secondary opportunities to low-income Albertans living in rural and Indigenous communities.

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- + **Affordability and Utilities** - To alleviate pressures on housing, food cost and insurance expenses by making it easier for Albertans to identify lower cost housing, allow those without a vehicle to be able to travel to an adjacent community for groceries and services, and offer rural residents an opportunity to remove the need for a second vehicle and its costs of insurance, fuel and maintenance.
- + **Arts, Culture and Status of Women** - To make it easier for Albertans and visitors to attend cultural events and institutions and to support the participation of women in Alberta's economy.
- + **Children and Family Services** - Improve access to young people struggling with mental illness to the 4 new wellness centers and provide greater access to affordable daycare for parents working outside their local municipality.
- + **Education** - Offer greater choice to specialty education in Alberta. Offer greater educational support for children with complex needs. Provide greater access to young Albertans seeking apprenticeship experience within skilled trades.
- + **Energy and Minerals** - Offer large emitters an opportunity to invest in Alberta and obtain Carbon Offsets towards their road to net-zero.
- + **Environment and Protected Areas**
  - o Work with all levels of government, First Nations and industry to reduce passenger vehicle impacts on the environment.
  - o Offer Albertans an opportunity to develop and improve a new land-use plan for municipalities and counties by decreasing the need of private automobiles which induce road building, sprawl and loss of habitat.
  - o Alleviate the environmental costs associated with "The High Cost of Free Parking"<sup>144</sup>, where each additional car per household that is parked 95% of the time, requires a considerable amount of space for storage.
  - o Reduce the percentage of parking necessary in municipal downtown areas and reclaim the land for new greenspaces.
  - o Reduce "Roadkill" by private automobiles.
  - o Recognize that a train can move the equivalent of hundreds of cars from the roadways.
  - o Improve the walkability of all communities serviced by frequent passenger rail and inter-city busing services.
- + **Forestry and Parks** - Improved access to Provincial and Regional Parks. Enable expansion of bike and walking paths to transportation hubs.
- + **Health**
  - o Improved access to lab and diagnostic services.
  - o Improved access to Urgent and Emergency Care by balancing the patient loads at Alberta hospitals.
  - o Offer better care to seniors which may allow a senior to stay within his or her local community



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- + **Health**
  - Address the affordability of healthcare services to rural and Indigenous communities.
  - Improve health workforce planning
  - Offering better access to healthcare practitioners, who may be scheduled within a larger regional area
  - Improve access to Mental Health and additional services.
- + **Immigration and Multiculturalism**
  - Improve access to settlement services including English language training.
  - Provide immigrants increased access to tourism and hospitality jobs.
- + **Infrastructure**
  - Increase utilization of schools and hospitals in Alberta by offering students and patients an option to attend or visit a regional service provider.
  - Decrease the wear and maintenance on public roadways by switching private vehicle trips to passenger rail.
- + **Jobs, Economy and Trade** - Increase the attractiveness of Alberta and all communities, by removing barriers to growth caused by the lack of frequent inter-city mobility services.
- + **Justice** - Improve access to court services. Improve access to support services to help those released from incarceration.
- + **Mental Health and Addiction** - Improved access to recovery community centers. Decrease transportation costs to and from mental health appointments. Offer same day, no wait list, emergent care.
- + **Municipal Affairs** - Improved Equity between Urban and Rural communities to government services and employment opportunities.
- + **Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency services** - Offer safe transportation of mental health and addiction patients to appropriate health services.
- + **Seniors, Community and Social Services**
  - To attract Transit Oriented Design and increase affordable housing options in Alberta.
  - Provide disabled residents equitable access to public services including physiotherapy, etc.
  - Offer the province flexibility while implementing the affordable housing strategy. Provide lower cost transportation to low-income Albertans.
- + **Technology and Innovation** - Improve attractiveness to large corporations seeking a net-zero workplace by decreasing the reliance on passenger vehicles while decreasing the carbon footprint.
- + **Tourism and Sport** - Provide greater access to world class community recreation centers. Improve access to Alberta Tourism locations for both residents and visitors to the province.

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### + **Transportation and Economic Corridors**

- Offer an inter-city transportation alternative to 10% of Albertans without access to a private vehicle and/or without a driver's license.
- Increase employment opportunities within Rural Alberta and to offer Rural Albertans improved access to jobs outside their local communities.
- Offer a cost-sharing arrangement with the municipalities served by improved busing and the re-introduction of a frequent and affordable regional passenger "heavy" rail network.
- Funnel Regional rail passengers into public transit,
- Connect regional communities between Calgary and Edmonton,
- Offer tourism trains into Alberta and to Banff and Jasper National Parks and decrease environmental impacts of passenger vehicles to the parks.

Projects that respond to a crisis, will be impacted less by policy blockers and barriers. To establish a good partnership with stakeholders, it is necessary to keep everyone informed. Clear objectives will improve the likelihood of mutual understanding and focus for stakeholders. The identification of common ground is necessary for the goals to be accomplished. Concerns can be solved, and Alberta needs to seek a win-win solution to ensure the success of the project and satisfaction of stakeholders involved in the design and creation of the project. For this to occur and to ensure fairness, a decision-making process must be established to include processes and procedures for transparency, accountability, and fairness. Most importantly, transparency is key for a successful project.

Conflicts and impacts may be studied through various means. The most important section is impact assessment to assess the magnitude, significance, and likelihood of the impacts on the community and the environment. This can be done through data analysis, field surveys, impact modeling, and expert consultation. All impacts observed shall have the necessary mitigation measures to limit their impact. Policy consultation and engagement processes must prioritize the needs of vulnerable and Indigenous communities. This ensures that the voices, perspectives, and concerns of these communities are heard and incorporated into the decision-making process.

*Additionally, a policy framework must include targeted provisions aimed at addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by vulnerable populations, such as:*

- + Affordable housing initiatives
- + Access to essential services
- + Job creation programs

Indigenous communities, Indigenous rights, sovereignty, and self-determination are the centerpiece to an equitable solution. Policy recommendations are guided by principles of reconciliation and respect for traditional knowledge and land stewardship practices.

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Furthermore, mechanisms for ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and capacity-building with Indigenous communities must be established to ensure that the policies are culturally sensitive, responsive, and beneficial to all Albertans. Transportation and housing policies need to be integrated to ensure equitable housing developments are available. Promoting shared transportation choices, growing public transit networks, and including equitable considerations into planning procedures should be the main focuses of Alberta's transportation policy.

An equitable housing policy should promote mixed-income housing complexes, establish anti-displacement measures and encourage more affordable housing units to be built. Transit Oriented Design must include the development of walkable, transit accessible neighborhoods with a variety of housing options. Coordination of Alberta's housing and transportation policies will foster affordability, accessibility, and inclusion for all citizens.

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