

Date: August 25, 2025

To: **Mayor and Council**

Name and title: Blake McIntosh, Director of Civic Operations

Subject: Little Prince Train

Attachment(s): Little Prince Train Shelter – Schematic  
Little Prince Train – License of Use and Operating Agreement

## Recommendation(s):

That Council CONSIDERS the options presented in the report dated August 25, 2025 from the Director of Civic Operations titled “Little Prince Train” in regard to a long-term operating agreement of the Little Prince and construction of a train storage shelter.

## Purpose:

This report is before Council to provide information on the continued operation of the Little Prince Train.

## Strategic Priorities:

The operation of the Little Prince Train and subsequent improvement of a train shelter supports Clear Identity and Pride, Cultural Richness and Sustainable Infrastructure under the myPG framework.

## Background:

Council approved the following Committee of the Whole recommendation on July 14, 2025:

That the Committee of the Whole RECOMMENDS Council DIRECT Administration to meet with the Exploration Place administration (Fraser-Fort George Museum Society) regarding a long-term operating agreement for the Little Prince and to report back to Council by the end of 2025.

The City of Prince George has owned the Little Prince heritage steam locomotive since CN Rail donated it in 1971. The Little Prince, built in 1912, is the only 24” narrow gauge steam engine in operation in North America and is Canada’s shortest railway. The City constructed the small railway in Lheidli T’enneh Memorial Park in 1975 that was operated for many years by the Fort George Railway Society before major repair and society trouble in 2007 caused the train to cease to operate. In 2011 Exploration Place took on operation of the train through a service agreement with the City of Prince George from the Fort George Railway Society. The service agreement has been renewed on an annual basis since that time.

## Discussion:

The current agreement defines parameters such as operating season, operating schedule, ticket pricing and maintenance responsibilities. Maintenance of the train and ensuring that the train is in safe, working condition while meeting required permitting is the responsibility of the operator. As a result, this necessitates on-going, specialized work to keep the train functioning. To perform these works, a suitable space for storage and repairs is required.

In January 2020, Council approved a capital project to replace the Little Prince Train Shelter. The current storage space leaks and is undersized, which makes storage and maintenance a challenge. The project was deferred shortly after due to impacts from the pandemic. In the interim, the annual operating agreement has continued to be renewed for train operation each year.

The train shelter building capital project was requested to be further discussed as part of City Committee of the Whole meeting at the end of June. Administration suggested discussing the long-term operation of the Little Prince with Exploration Place to confirm the relationship will continue in future years before capital funds are dedicated to constructing a replacement storage shelter.

Exploration Place has indicated that they will only commit to a long-term agreement to continue the operation and maintenance of the Little Prince Train should the City commit to the construction of a new structure that will allow for improved conditions for required maintenance and dry storage. Likewise, Administration does not want to commit to the costs of construction unless there is a long-term agreement in place to operate the train. Administration is requesting that Council consider the following three options in regard to the Little Prince:

1. Approve the inclusion of the new structure in the 2026 capital plan as a FUNDED project. Administration would fund this project first with available resources. This may result in other infrastructure priorities being recommended as unfunded or requesting debt funding if they are deemed to still be critical;
2. Approve the inclusion of the new structure in the 2026 capital plan as an UNFUNDED project. Council may then weigh this project against the other projects of the capital plan before making a decision;
3. Do not approve the inclusion of the new structure in the 2026 capital plan. This would likely result in the inability to find an operator for the train. Administration would bring a subsequent report with options regarding the future of the Little Prince without an operator.

## Financial Considerations:

The most recent operating agreement for the Little Prince Train includes a \$50,000 annual contribution by the City to Exploration Place. Discussions with Exploration Place indicate this amount currently meets funding requirements but this could change in future years. The \$50,000 covers costs for items such as train conductors, maintenance staff, training, annual regulatory permitting, supplies for train maintenance, marketing, promotion and insurance. The City contribution does not fund maintenance on the railway itself. As per the operating agreement, track repairs are the responsibility of the operator. Some train and track repairs are imminent and include injectors and water tanks which are costly and custom for a unique train of this vintage. It is possible Exploration Place may need a one-time additional budget beyond the \$50,000 to address these repairs in order to operate the train without temporary or permanent interruption of service.

A new storage shelter based on the designs approved by Council in 2020 is estimated to require a capital investment in the range of \$1.25 million dollars. This estimate needs to be further refined based on costs related to archeological and environmental assessments, civil and structural designs

and Transport Canada Requirements. The intent would be to have the shelter as a 2026 capital project but the complexities and regulatory requirements may necessitate a 2027 submission.

#### Summary and conclusion:

The construction of a new train storage shelter and subsequent capital investment is contingent upon the long-term operation of the Little Prince Train. The current operating agreement for train operation is renewed annually with Exploration Place. The construction of a replacement shelter is a significant capital expenditure and complex project. Informal discussions have taken place with administrative staff of Exploration Place. They see the Little Prince Train and associated operating requirements as a worthy endeavor and are interested in a long-term agreement for future operations. The agreement would be contingent on a replacement shelter to eliminate the poor conditions currently experienced by train maintenance staff. The shelter would also protect the Little Prince from environmental degradation. The capital project ideally would be included in the 2026 Capital Expenditure Plan and work would begin in 2026 but complexities and regulatory requirements may delay the completion of the project until 2027. Administration is requesting that Council approve the inclusion of the new structure in the 2026 capital plan as a priority funded project; or as an unfunded project for Council to weigh against the other projects of the capital plan before making a final decision.

#### Respectfully submitted:

Blake McIntosh, Director of Civic Operations

#### Approved:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting date: 2025/09/17