

British Columbia Chamber of Commerce’s Perspective on Transport 2040

November 2007

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1. Preface

The British Columbia Chamber of Commerce is the largest and most broadly- based business organization in the province. Representing 130 chambers of commerce and boards of trade, the BC Chamber represents over 32,000 businesses of every size, sector and region of the province. The BC Chamber is “The Voice of BC Business.”

The perspectives presented in this paper represent the policy recommendations developed and approved through the most democratic, grassroots policy development process in British Columbia. This policy process has been highly successful at generating innovative policy solutions through local evidence-based analysis as well as the values of influential stakeholders and community members.

The chambers of commerce of the Lower Mainland have established the Lower Mainland Chambers Transportation Panel. This key stakeholder group represents the business community in each of the communities of the new authority’s boundaries. All comments and perspectives provided in this document were presented and discussed with representatives from each of these community chambers of commerce.

2. Introduction

The region stands at a sustainability crossroads. The region is dependent on the efficiency of its transportation system for its continued economic and social development. The nature of our transportation choices will also play an increasingly critical role in the future environmental health of the region.

As we embark on a long-term vision for the region focused on developing a comprehensive and integrated transportation and transit network, we must be prepared to embrace new ways of thinking about transportation from a multi-level, integrated economic, social and environmental perspective. New ways of thinking are essential given that the pattern of demographic, population and economic growth in the region are undergoing fundamental change. The traditional economic and commercial centres are shifting to the extent that the transportation network and infrastructure will no longer be able to serve the needs of the region. The ability to move goods and services efficiently and smoothly between multiple origins and destinations will have to become the cornerstone of our long-term transportation strategies. This new reality will continue to shape the region and underpins the comments made in this section.

3. A vision of success

The purpose of the new South Coast British Columbia Transportation Authority Act, as defined in Bill 43 - Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Amendment Act (2007) is to provide a regional transportation system that:

- a) moves people and goods, and
- b) supports

- (i) the regional growth strategy,
- (ii) provincial and regional environmental objectives, including air quality and greenhouse gas emission reduction objectives, and
- (iii) the economic development of the transportation service region.

The business community believes a vision of success for the 2040 will be a transportation system that achieves the stated purpose of the Act. This will require an ability for individuals who want to travel to have a viable alternative to the personal automobile; it will require an ability for businesses to plan without concern for gridlock and transportation delays for its people and its goods; it will require a transportation network that assists in conserving energy resources. Most importantly, it will require a vibrant economy that supports community development that is focused on compact communities that connect people to jobs and goods to markets.

A prerequisite for these goals is a coordinated, integrated approach to regional planning and transportation. It is the view of the BC Chamber that the failing of the Livable Region Strategic Plan (LRSP) lies in its inability to enforce smart growth practices and decisions. While much positive focus is placed on the need for smart growth, the fact remains that there are numerous examples of decisions taken at the local level that not only do not conform to the LRSP principles, but actually encourage poor transportation decisions by individuals.

Underpinning our success in 2040 will be a comprehensive, integrated approach to regional transportation planning, central to which will be a comprehensive transit and transportation network that connects workers to jobs, goods to market and services to customers. The network must also embrace the fact that the patterns of economic and population growth for the region will necessitate the ability to ensure the efficient movement of goods and services across and within the regions, from north to south and from east to west.

4. Meeting the transportation needs of the business community to 2040

The business community will remain focused on the need for an efficient, integrated transportation network that facilitates the smooth and efficient movement of goods, services and people.

The challenge over the next 30 years will be the extent to which factors such as population growth and land use decisions impact the ability of business to move goods, services and people in an efficient way across and within the region.

5. Key challenges and opportunities facing the Lower Mainland transportation system

Population growth

Census 2006 showed that the population for Greater Vancouver was 2.1 million, an increase of 6.5 per cent over Census 2001. The population of the region will continue to attract new migrants both internationally and also from within Canada and other parts of the province. This immigration will see the population for Greater Vancouver rising to three million people by 2031.

Fractured responsibility for transportation infrastructure

As with other metropolitan areas, responsibility for the transportation network is fractured between many authorities with varying levels of responsibility. From municipal government, to the provincial and federal government through to TransLink and private operators such as the railways, airport and port authorities, the fractured nature of responsibility for the transportation infrastructure of the region is an impediment to developing a comprehensive long-term plan for the region, an essential element of the long-term sustainability of the province.

The region requires a leadership capacity that does not currently exist. Without someone taking a strong leadership role on behalf of the Lower Mainland, we will continue to have a fractured region to the detriment of the region and the province.

Lack of available land

With a need for additional infrastructure to accommodate population and economic growth, the lack of land protected for designated uses will be a significant hindrance to the sustainable growth of the region that balances a diverse economic base with strong communities.

Industrial land and transportation corridors are significantly challenged by strong residential growth. Given that much of this growth is actively encouraged by municipal government, there is a requirement for a structure to be established that will provide a level of protection for appropriate land, not dissimilar to the Agricultural Land Reserve.

The core of the issue – automobile dependency

Automobile use obviously produces a variety of advantages such as performance, comfort, status, speed and convenience. These advantages jointly illustrate why automobile ownership continues to grow worldwide. Several factors influence the growth of the total number of registered vehicles, such as sustained economic growth (increase in income and quality of life), complex individual urban movement patterns (many households have more than one automobile), more leisure time, and suburbanization. The

significant growth in vehicles also gives rise to congestion at peak traffic hours on major thoroughfares, in business districts and often throughout urban areas.

Over time, a state of automobile dependency has emerged which results in a diminution in the role of other modes, thereby limiting still further alternatives to urban mobility.

Two major factors contributing to automobile dependency are:

- **Lack of demand management techniques**
Road infrastructure in BC, as in many other jurisdictions, is considered a public good and therefore is heavily financed by the taxpayer. In the absence of effective price signals such as tolls, as well as other mechanisms to influence behaviour such as High Occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, and appropriate and available transit options, there is inevitably an increase in single-passenger vehicles and use, which then leads to congestion and bottlenecks.
- **Planning and investment practices**
Efforts to plan and allocate public funds towards improving road and parking facilities, in an ongoing attempt to avoid congestion, tend to make insufficient use of other transportation alternatives. In many cases, zoning regulations impose minimum standards of road and parking services, and impose de facto regulated automobile dependency.

The Gateway Strategy

The continued growth in Asia Pacific trade will see a tidal wave of containers over the next 15 years. Indeed, it is estimated that BC will see an increase of 300 percent in Twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEU) traffic by 2020, according to the British Columbia Ports Strategy. While the success of the Gateway Strategy is essential to our long-term prosperity, BC's ability to become the gateway between North America and Asian markets represents both a significant opportunity and also a significant challenge. Our ability to balance the new business opportunities presented by the strategy with the need for sustainable economic development will hinge on our ability to address the significant pressure this increase in trade will place on the transportation infrastructure of the Lower Mainland.

6. Recommendations to TransLink

As the region continues to grow, the ability of the transportation network to move goods and services will require a range of strategies and measures. These range from new infrastructure and services through to the need for a comprehensive and integrated demand management strategy utilizing a range of tools.

Given the scope of these challenges, TransLink strategies cannot, and must not, be separated from the other agencies involved in transportation and goods movement in the

region. Without a coordinated and comprehensive approach from all agencies, there cannot be a strategy that will serve the interests of the region.

All agencies must embrace the concept that there is limited room in the region for additional infrastructure; therefore, the focus must be on addressing choice of travel in terms of both mode and time. The business community believes that central to this is ensuring that transportation choices are focused on the principle of user pay.

Further to the concept of user pay, the business community believes that a key element to ensuring the efficient movement of goods and services must be the separation of the modes that move goods and services from personal transportation.

An essential element of the development of a truly comprehensive approach must be an understanding of the relationship between the provincial and regional economies and our dependency on the resource sector, and the transportation challenges faced by these industries as they relate to the Greater Vancouver region.

The Chamber recommends that TransLink:

1. Make it a prerequisite of these visions that there is a need for investment in public transit to provide viable alternatives to single passenger vehicle travel.
2. Commit to funding transportation infrastructure investment through mechanisms that are equitable, efficient and reflect basic traffic demand management principles.
3. Create, in conjunction with business, a tolling policy on transportation infrastructure, and examine the use of tolls and other innovative funding programs as a sustainable funding mechanism and a key traffic demand management tool.

7. Recommendations to other agencies that influence transportation use

All transportation authorities, including all governments with a role and/or responsibility for transportation, need to coordinate their planning and consult with each other and the stakeholders of the Lower Mainland on current and future transportation needs.

We believe that the provincial government must take the lead in the coordination of transportation planning, which must include review and coordination of land use planning. We see a role for a panel, under the auspices of the Ministry of Transportation, with the sole objective of ensuring a regional transportation and land use policy that is binding on appropriate municipal, provincial and federal government agencies and other appropriate bodies.

Essential to the success of such a structure must be the ability to ensure that a decision-making structure exists that guarantees that all levels of government harmonize decisions on land use and transportation. If this cannot be done in a collaborative way, then the Chamber believes that there will need to be limitations placed on the ability of local and regional governments to make decisions over land use by imposing a regional plan.

The Chamber believes that the provincial government's current "tolling policy" must be reviewed. Under the current policy, the province will only introduce tolls to pay for new construction when a viable, free alternative is available. The Chamber believes this policy is not in the provincial economic, social or environmental interest and puts at serious risk the success of the Asia Pacific strategy.

The benefits of investments in transportation depend on good traffic speed and, in the long-term, there is widespread agreement that the only way to preserve this is to ration the road using tolls. The Chamber believes that the global trend is towards an acceptance of the necessity of tolls as both a provider of long-term sustainable funding for transportation and transit investment, within the concept of ensuring that the user pays, as well as the most efficient traffic demand management system that is available.

The Chamber understands there is likely to be significant public resistance to comprehensive tolling. However, we also believe that public acceptance of tolls would be possible if quality transit options are made available from the start. Initial tolls can fund the inevitable start-up costs and can be adjusted to keep traffic at targeted performance for the benefit of the public and business.

The federal and provincial gas taxes collected are currently largely allocated to general revenue and the federal government only allocates 39 percent of that revenue to transportation infrastructure. The shifting of gas tax revenue to tolls that would be allocated to transportation at a local level would provide a much more relevant and immediate display of transportation costs to users.

8. Making choices, setting priorities

The business community does not believe that making choices and trade-offs is in the interests of the region. With a need for a comprehensive approach that incorporates all stakeholders, particularly senior levels of government, there should be adequate resources dedicated to the transportation network for the region in the interests of the region, the province and the country.

However, should such choices be required, the basic premise of all decisions must derive from a basic understanding that the ability to address the challenge of ensuring a sustainable future for the region must always be a vibrant economy. Only through a strong economy will individuals and governments be provided the ability to make the choices necessary to guarantee our long-term sustainable future.

One of the greatest challenges for the Lower Mainland is the management of sustainable growth so that the region's quality of life, economic opportunity and environmental values can be at least maintained, if not improved. A key part of this is the reality that the Lower Mainland is an international transportation hub that is critical to Canada's economic wealth and its economic future – this adds a fourth leg to the sustainability

stool. Regional and municipal planning need to reflect and take into account the comprehensive, integrated transportation planning so that developments are not at a cost to current and future transportation systems.

A key to our long-term success will be strategic and long-term investment in high-quality public transit. The Chamber recognizes that transit investments by themselves will not reduce roadway congestion. However, they become more effective at reducing congestion as a critical component of a comprehensive strategy that includes complementary road pricing, mobility management strategies and smart growth land use policies.

The need for full integration of transportation systems, planning and strategies is a critical need if the Lower Mainland is to have any semblance of an efficient transportation system in 2040. There can be no more transportation development silos in that eventually, transportation systems will become even more inefficient, and the economic sustainability of the region will deteriorate, causing social deterioration as well.

9. Conclusion

The economics of transportation will be a key element in determining the magnitude of future economic expansion and our competitiveness in both the domestic and export markets. Recognition must be given to this important role. Both the federal and provincial governments must recognize the absolute necessity of integrated long-term planning as opposed to a system that functions on the basis of short-term plans based on political expediency.

The Chamber movement across British Columbia eagerly awaits the outcome of this process given the essential role that transportation in the region plays in the prosperity of communities across the province. The establishment of a long-term integrated regional transportation strategy is essential to our economic, environmental and social development. The strategy developed through Transport 2040 must recognize the inter-relationships and inter-dependencies which exist between all modes of transportation and their attendant infrastructures.

Further to this, there must be an unprecedented level of coordination on the way forward and the mechanisms that must be followed at all levels of government to ensure our long-term success.