

LANGLEY 2020: LIGHT RAIL, TOMORROW'S TICKET TO RIDE

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Rapid transit is desperately needed in Langley, and the first phase of the route should be 200th Street, from the Golden Ears Bridge to the Willowbrook regional town centre.

THE PROBLEM

The most significant traffic issue in Langley is 200th Street, especially north of Highway 10. The 200th Street freeway interchange is loathed by many Langley drivers, and 200th is regularly congested at the bottom of the Willoughby slope. As Willoughby develops and the Golden Ears Bridge opens, more pressure than ever will be put on 200th.

Adding to the 200th problem is the general lack of suitable transit options in Langley. In January 2007, TransLink presented the first draft of its 25-year South Fraser transit plan. It was not promising for Langley residents. On my website, www.langleypolitics.com, I wrote the following:

As far as frequent bus service (defined as at least every 15 minutes, 15 hours a day, 7 days a week), by 2011, TransLink expects such service from Langley City to Walnut Grove along 200th.

By 2021, Hwy. 1 will have a bus/HOV lane from the Port Mann to 200th.

By 2031, we see bus rapid transit up and down north 200th and 15-minute service along Hwy. 1 from 200th to Abbotsford.

The Interurban revival is not in TransLink's 25-year plan, and they seem very unconvinced of its merits.

I asked about a possible pilot project to put transit into an area as people move in. For example, we have some higher density neighbourhoods in Willoughby. My suggestion was to put, at the very least, community shuttle service in before people buy a home. That way, you might be able to attract some transit users into those subdivisions, or perhaps convince people that they don't need two-plus cars per family to live in Langley. Under TransLink's plan, two more working generations of people will grow up in Langley without transit being a viable option to get to work. The system will continue to force people to drive.

Rapid bus in 2031 is far too little, far too late for 200th Street. By then, two working generations in Langley will have grown up tied to the car, and 200th itself will be congested for long periods of the day. We need rapid transit sooner than the 2031 date given to us by TransLink. And we need a light rail line, not rapid buses.

THE SOLUTION

We need to get 200th Street moving again. As Willoughby develops, more and more strain will be put on this major road. While we must continue to work to connect other Willoughby roads to Hwy. 10, we must also look for ways to get cars off 200th.

To do that, we need rapid transit on the 200th Street corridor. 200th is Langley's spine, the centre of virtually all our commercial and residential growth. This rapid transit needs to be:

- Safe. This is the #1 complaint I hear about bus and SkyTrain transit. We need to push TransLink to address these issues through better policing, cameras, and other initiatives.

- Clean. We need a solution that is clean both environmentally and 'on the ground.'
- Reliable. We need a solution that will be on time, every time. For transit to work, it has to keep its promises to riders about ease of use and timeliness.

I propose supporting the northeast sector's push for the light rail Evergreen Line. Under the present plan, Evergreen stops at Coquitlam Centre. This line should be extended down Lougheed Highway through the urban areas of Port Coquitlam, Pitt Meadows, and Maple Ridge to the Golden Ears Bridge.

Under my plan, light rail would run across the Golden Ears Bridge into Langley, and down 200th or a parallel street all the way to the Willowbrook Town Centre (with stations in the Northwest Langley Industrial area/96th Ave., Colossus/Hwy. 1, the Willoughby Events and Recreation Centre/80th Ave., and Willowbrook Drive.

It would then bear west along Fraser Highway, connecting several Surrey communities before terminating at the King George SkyTrain station. A second option would be to rejoin the Interurban line through Surrey, if that makes better sense for that community.

BENEFIT

A 200th Street alignment recognizes where the major growth in Langley is happening.

My plan would give 20,000 Walnut Grove residents, the future 45,000 Willoughby residents, and 22,000 Langley City residents quick and easy access to rapid transit. It would also help thousands of Clayton and Cloverdale residents in Surrey. Future service to Brookwood along 200th, and to Murrayville/Aldergrove down Fraser Highway would be a possibility.

The Golden Ears Bridge is being built with space for a light rail line, and 200th holds Langley's largest road allowance. Supplementary bus service throughout Walnut Grove/Fort Langley, Willoughby, Murrayville/Aldergrove and Brookwood would bring those neighbourhoods to the new line. The Golden Ears Line would act as a spine for local transit.

My proposal has an added benefit: it could attract regional support. Port Coquitlam, Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge already want the Evergreen. Coquitlam wants the line funded. Surrey is looking for more connections; my plan would allow them to focus on light rail down Fraser and perhaps SkyTrain down King George. This line would bring the region together. We would not need to spend time haggling with rail companies, as a new track would be laid down.

This light rail loop would:

- put Langley residents within minutes of Surrey and Coquitlam
- reduce traffic on 200th by connecting north Langley to Willowbrook
- serve three of the fastest growing municipalities in Canada
- link to the SkyTrain in two ways—the Expo line at King George, and the Millennium Line at Lougheed
- link our residents to the West Coast Express in Maple Ridge
- serve key points like the NW Langley Industrial area, Colossus, the new Willoughby Events and Recreation Centre, and the Willowbrook commercial area
- be accessible to thousands of Langley residents through buses, community shuttles, and park and ride

Eventually, future rapid lines could run down Highway 1 from Coquitlam to Gloucester/Abbotsford, connecting with this line at 200th, and into Brookwood on 200th, and Aldergrove/Abbotsford via Fraser Hwy.

Light rail is more cost-effective than SkyTrain. It is quiet, with no emissions, and can integrate naturally onto street level. The stations are smaller and safer. It is also significantly cheaper than SkyTrain. We can use the West Coast Express as a model for a 'higher-end' type of transit.

With the Canada Line opening in 2009, and Evergreen's first phase set for 2013 (pending funding), it seems to me that an opening date of 2018 for the Langley/Surrey line is both possible and practical. While still ten years away, this would be TransLink's present rapid transit goal (buses) for Langley by more than a decade.

There has been much discussion about reviving the Interurban line. I believe we must look forward, not back. While the Interurban right-of-way is attractive for its heritage value (and should be used as a tourist attraction), it simply would not serve enough residents to be viable.

We must look at where people are, not where they were. The vast majority of Langley residents live between 196th and 216th. The Interurban route may have made sense decades ago, but a revival today should be considered a tourist attraction. We need rapid transit in Langley along 200th.

Regional and provincial authorities rightly point out that there simply are not enough people living between Trinity Western University and Abbotsford to make the Interurban sustainable. Using the Interurban line for commuter rail would ratchet up pressure to remove precious agricultural land all along its winding, rural route east of TWU. Historically, transit lines foster residential and commercial development, which would endanger Milner's agricultural land northeast of Crush Crescent, and add pressure to take farmland out of the ALR in Coghlan and other rural areas. It would also miss nearly every urban center in the Township, and it has fewer connections to other transit options than a Golden Ears/200th Light Rail Line does.

WHY LIGHT RAIL AND NOT SKYTRAIN?

Light rail is the preferred option for several reasons, including:

- Cost. Light rail is far cheaper and would work with Golden Ears and 200th road alignments.
- Unobtrusiveness. Light rail is quiet compared to SkyTrain, and does not negatively impact a neighbourhood with overhead cement routes.
- Safety. A new light rail system would include drivers on every train, and allow us to use cameras, undercover transit officers, police, and other safety measures to ensure safety for users. The top complaint about transit remains crime issues; a new light rail system allows us to put safety procedures in place from day one. To be successful, it must be clean, safe, accessible and easy-to-use. If it is perceived to be used by an unsavory element for criminal purposes, it will never be accepted by drivers.

ACTION THUS FAR

Township Council motion, April 2, 2007

Moved by Councillor Bateman,

Seconded by Councillor Vickberg

CARRIED unanimously,

Whereas transportation is the number one concern among Township of Langley residents, according to the Langley Tomorrow survey; and

Whereas the Township of Langley concurs with community groups like VALTAC that a long-term regional master transportation plan is necessary to bring better transportation and transit solutions to Lower Mainland families and businesses; and

Whereas there is an urgent need to prepare a new regional transportation plan in connection with the GVRD update of the regional growth strategy; and

Whereas the TransLink governance structure is presently undergoing a major reconfiguration; therefore

Be it resolved that the Provincial Ministry of Transportation be requested to take the lead with the other key transportation interests to expedite and facilitate the preparation of a regional transportation plan that:

1. is comprehensive with a planning horizon beyond 2031,
2. fully integrates the multi-jurisdictional interests,
3. covers the entire Lower Mainland, including Abbotsford, Chilliwack and Mission,
4. protects potential corridors and right-of-ways for transportation future use, and
5. includes an implementation and funding strategy.

And further be it resolved that the Mayor of the Township of Langley send a letter on behalf of Council supporting VALTAC for its efforts in asking government to develop "a long-range (50 year) Master Transportation Plan for the Lower Mainland."

The Township is currently reworking its Master Transportation Plan, while TransLink is being reorganized from the top down. VALTAC and other transportation groups continue their work bringing attention to various issues. A recent UBC Sustainability by Design report on 200th Street, which proposed light rail, has also been helpful, and will be the subject of a Council workshop this fall.

MY COMMITMENT

The top priority is to hear what Langley residents think. Is 200th the logical place for light rail? Does the community even want it?

I plan to continue the conversation about light rail both within Langley and with our neighbours in Surrey, Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows and Coquitlam. I will also speak with TransLink, provincial and federal representatives on these topics. I will also work to ensure that our long term transportation plan include rail right-of-ways along 200th and other logical alignments.

FOR MORE

This document should be considered a starting point for discussion. I am not a traffic or transit engineer, but it seems to me that 200th Street is where rapid transit should be focused in Langley, and that is what I am working toward. I would be grateful for your opinion.

Interested in talking with me about this issue? Here's how to contact me...

- Visit my website, www.jordanbateman.com
- E-mail me at jbateman@tol.bc.ca
- Call me at 604-340-9385