

The following press release is from the Livable Region Coalition:

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Gateway air quality promises running on empty. Feds call Gateway Program air quality studies inappropriate and misleading: Study of transit solutions required.

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Vancouver- Today the Livable Region Coalition (LRC) revealed documents from federal agencies that identify major claims and studies by the provincial government about the Gateway Program as inappropriate and misleading and others shown to be groundless.

The LRC's submissions to the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) challenged, among other problems, the treatment of alternatives to Port Mann Bridge twinning and the inadequacies of provincial traffic modeling which in turn lead to artificially low estimates of air quality impacts. These deficiencies and more have been echoed by Health Canada and Environment Canada.

Despite the lack of evidence, provincial government officials continue to bait the public with misleading claims:

- Public comments by Premier Gordon Campbell that the Gateway Program will improve air quality are not borne out by any analysis made available to date. All air quality improvements claimed under Gateway would happen even if the mega project did not go ahead due to policies already in place, whereas the project will actually reverse some of these projected air quality improvements. In its critique of a Gateway study on air pollution, Health Canada asserts that "the misdirected focus of this assessment is inappropriate and may be misleading to the general reader."

- Greenhouse gas emissions will rise due to Gateway even with mitigation measures already announced. The province claims the GHG increase will be 0.3% above business-as-usual, Metro Vancouver says 2%, or 176 000 tonnes per year by 2020, based on figures provided. Environment Canada says the increase would likely be higher but deficient traffic modeling to date makes it impossible to know for sure.

-The assertion by the BC Ministry of Highways that the Gateway Program will not impact land-use are contradicted by studies cited by Environment Canada. Furthermore, provincial government traffic models did not include induced or generated traffic and did not account for automobile dependent sprawl induced by freeway expansion. Environment Canada states that: "A review of the sizeable scientific literature suggests that new highway capacity generally encourages more vehicle kilometers traveled, influences land-use planning, enables car-dependent lifestyles and decisions, and induces traffic for vehicle trips that would otherwise not occur. These factors can contribute a significant volume of traffic beyond business-as-usual growth projections."

-Provincial government claims that no other option but Gateway would work for moving people and goods are contradicted by Environment Canada which notes that: "the Proponent has not analyzed the potential for a combination of functionally different methods to meet the needs identified. A combination of alternative measures of approximately equal budget to PMH1 will allow a meaningful comparison"

"When it comes to proving the bold promises that come with doubling the Port Mann Bridge and Highway 1, the provincial government is running on empty," said David Fields, a campaigner with SPEC and LRC Coordinator. "We know it, federal agencies know it and it is about time the province comes clean before they commit the region to what amounts to an \$11 billion illusion." The entire Gateway Program could cost over \$11 billion dollars. Other bridge projects under construction in the province, such as the William R. Bennett Bridge, are up to 70% over budget. The return on this investment could be quite minimal if expert opinion is correct. George Stalk, Senior VP of the Boston Consulting Group and supply chain expert, has said that the provincial Gateway Program will only add 1% or 2% goods movement capacity because it focuses on roads and trucking instead of ports and railways.

"Environment Canada has stated the obvious. A meaningful environmental assessment requires comparing the environmental effects of a \$4 billion package of transit and efficient goods movement solutions to the proposed \$4 billion freeway expansion," said Eric Doherty, SPEC Director. "Kevin Falcon does not want this comparison because it would show what a dumb choice freeway expansion is. The federal documents show that you can't build your way out of congestion with wider freeways and more bridges because freeways cause automobile dependent sprawl and more traffic. And more traffic means accelerating global warming, more smog and more kids with asthma."

SPEC and the LRC have proposed a suite of transit measures that could alleviate traffic congestion in the Port Mann corridor (download at <http://www.spec.bc.ca> See also SPEC's Cooking the Books). The LRC proposal seeks to maximize existing infrastructure to reduce costs and environmental impact. For example, the SkyTrain bridge to Surrey only carries one third the trains it was designed for, bringing it up to carrying capacity would produce the people moving equivalent of 20 lanes of freeway. The LRC proposal costs about one sixth of the cost of doubling the Port Mann and Highway 1. Much more is possible.

"Environment Canada's response is a very effective endorsement of what the Livable Region Coalition has been saying," said Stephen Rees, an independent transport economist. "The BC government now needs to rethink this Gateway proposal, and work towards a truly sustainable regional transportation and land use plan with municipal and regional governments. This requires putting transit first." The Premier promised to make BC a global leader in transit. Current global leaders like Zurich have invested heavily in transit instead of freeways, producing a transit system that is fast, safe, reliable and inexpensive. Zurich's transit priority program has taken 30 years to build and has one of the highest riderships in the world. BC's freeway expansion is scheduled to be completed first and major elements of the recent transit announcement will not start to appear for another six or seven years from now. This release comes with a 5 page backgrounder which contains excerpts from Health Canada and Environment Canada submissions to the EAO. Links to original documents and page references are provided.

The Port Mann/Highway 1 EAO project page can be found here:

http://www.eao.gov.bc.ca/epic/output/html/deploy/epic_project_home_247.html

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