

PRESENTATION TO
THE STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

MARCH 13 IN VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

BY

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Good morning, Senators. Thank you for affording me this opportunity.

You have asked me here today to further your study of containerized freight traffic in Canada's ports, specifically, as you state in your letter, "to look into the institutional and physical obstacles to the competitiveness of Canada's intermodal transportation system." I will attempt to do so.

We are here today in Vancouver, talking about the expansion of the Vancouver Port. However that expansion is not taking place here. It is taking place in Delta, and it is in Delta that the major impacts will be felt. I wish therefore that you had come to Delta for this Hearing. However, you haven't. And so I will attempt to bring Delta to you.

Delta is home to 100,000 people.

I know, as you undoubtedly do too, that in China's rise to economic leadership and in the building of its ports and infrastructure to send its goods to the world, China simply told hundreds of thousands of people – you're moving – to make way for that development. There are people involved in the Gateway Project who, it has been reported, have said "we wish we could do that here."

But they can't. Not yet. We still have, in Canada, a semblance of democracy. But only a semblance.

Delta is the doorway to Asian trade. Delta is the doormat.

The Port, to date, has reduced our air quality, endangered the Pacific Flyway, befouled the waters surrounding the Port, and reduced the quality of life for our residents with noise, light and air pollution, traffic disruption and an endless stream of dangerous trucks driving through the heart of our communities.

Now, with the expansion of the Port – first with the Third Berth already approved and under construction, then with the all-new Terminal 2 – all of those negative impacts will increase further, in the name of economic competitiveness.

The Environmental Assessment review of the Third Berth was seriously flawed. To begin with, it was intended to assess the cumulative effects of Terminal 2 and the Third Berth. Then the Terminal 2 was withdrawn from the Assessment, on the grounds that it was just "a twinkle in someone's eye" and not a reality.

Documents released last week prove otherwise.

In a deal between the Vancouver Port Authority and the Tsawwassen First Nation, executed by the parties in November 2004, VPA agreed, among many other things, to pay TFN Two Million Dollars on the Ratification Date of the agreement, followed by a further One Million Dollars to be paid when Environmental approval was given to the Third Berth expansion, and a further One and a Half Million Dollars when Environmental approval is given to Terminal Two. That's a very expensive "twinkle in someone's eye," and it also smacks of bribery.

I expect you're probably unfamiliar with the location of the Tsawwassen First Nation. Their present Reserve – and future Treaty Lands – are located on the shore of the Strait of Georgia between the causeway to Vancouver Port and the causeway to the Ferry Terminal. The Tsawwassen people stand to suffer the most from Port expansion. They will have the Port with its light, noise and air pollution, and the polluted waters between the two causeways at their front doors. And behind them, a huge container storage area and a multi-track train yard. It will ruin their quality of life. But I guess money talks.

And all of this must go forward to ensure the competitiveness of Canada's ports and the competitiveness of Canada's intermodal transportation system.

I think we should look at that more closely.

80% of the economic activity at Vancouver Port is incoming. Only 20% is outgoing. Is that trade deficit sustainable? The United States doesn't think it is. They have the same trade imbalance there, and they are getting understandably, and vocally, worried. And so should we. It is unsustainable.

China itself – the reason for all of this development all up the west coast and across Canada – is falling into disarray. The pollution produced as a side product of all those running shoes, watches and bottles of shampoo, is poisoning the air, the water and the people of China and now, according to scientific studies, it is causing serious weather disturbances to the west coast of BC.

Delta Council has submitted to the Environmental Assessment Office and to various government officials and agencies, its concerns relative to air emissions, road and rail induces traffic delays, commercial truck safety, accidents, emergencies and spill response, noise disturbance, lack of river dredging, container storage, and I will leave you copies of our detailed submissions.

We have also expressed our concerns regarding the many negative impacts on the lives of Delta residents, the disregard and devastation of heritage sites and buildings, the possible alienation of ecological communities both on land and in the waters, and the lack of meaningful consultation with and participation by Delta and Lower Mainland residents and voters in what should be, but is not, a democratic process.

And now I am back to your stated mandate: to look into the institutional and physical obstacles to the competitiveness of Canada's intermodal transportation system.

The Lower Mainland itself poses a major physical obstacle. This is a small area bounded by mountains and the Strait of Georgia. It contains over four million people and millions of significant birds and other species. It also contains the most arable land in all of British Columbia, land that is absolutely necessary to feed the people of British Columbia, and beyond that, the people of Canada.

The Gateway Project's plan for its intermodal transportation system in the Lower Mainland will remove thousands of acres of food-producing agricultural land to make way for roads and railway tracks for the trucks and trains to transport containers to and from the Port. Hundreds of acres will also be removed through the Tsawwassen Treaty to provide room for container storage for the Port. And this is not fallow land. This is land that is actively farmed. We cannot afford to lose another acre of our food-producing lands – or our scarce industrial lands - to 8 or 10 storey high piles of empty containers, which must be stored here because of that unsustainable balance of trade I referred to earlier: 100 containers in – only 20 containers out.

Delta has recently passed a bylaw regulating the storage of containers in our municipality. We have done so to preserve as much of our land as possible for productive industry and agriculture. And to locate the storage facilities where they will be least disruptive to other traffic, and where container traffic movements can be made safely.

It might be considered by some that the people of Delta, the people of the Lower Mainland, the birds, fish and other species, the agricultural lands, the zoning powers of municipalities - it might be considered by some that all of these are obstacles to the competitiveness of Canada's intermodal transportation system.

In my view, the biggest obstacle is the consortium of the Gateway organization, Vancouver Port, the Province of British Columbia and the Government of Canada, of which you are a part.

In pursuit of economic competitiveness, this consortium has ignored the people.

We are all in favour of a strong economy, one which provides jobs and profits and a high quality of life. We can have that. But not when the people, the fish, birds and wildlife, the agricultural lands and the legitimate zoning powers of municipal government are considered obstacles to be ignored or eliminated.

The Corporation of Delta has, for many years now, tried to work with the Port to achieve their ends while protecting the quality of life for our people. But it hasn't worked.

The people are not happy in Delta. They are not happy in the other communities that are experiencing or will be experiencing the impacts of this economic endeavour. And there has been no attempt to provide meaningful mitigation for those impacts.

The Senate of Canada, of which you are members, is the senior level of government, positioned to provide a check and balance against the more politically-driven House of Commons and to protect and enforce the principles of democracy in Canada.

As the Gateway Project has unfolded, leaf by leaf, with no consultation, the people of Delta and of the Greater Vancouver Regional District have come to question the reality of democracy in this country. You are its final bastion. I and they look to you for the conformation that it still exists.

If you have any questions, I would be pleased to answer them. Also, Ian Radnidge, our Director of Engineering, is here. He keeps more numbers in his head than I do in mine.

Thank you for listening. I would be pleased to provide you with a tour of Delta so that you can see for yourself what is happening.