

Connecting dots creates picture

by Ian Robertson (Delta Optimist, September 2006)

As a child you likely took part in a puzzle where you drew lines between several dots to make a picture. Only after most of the dots had been joined could you make out the eventual shape. This column is bit like that. There are several items, seemingly unrelated, and all of them will combine to affect your future here in Delta.

In the 1960s, the B.C. government under WAC Bennett outfoxed the feds when it expropriated many acres of Delta farmland to make the onshore components of what we know as the Roberts Bank Superport. Expropriation takes place when "a public agency takes property for a purpose deemed to be in the public interest".¹

The effect was that B.C. controlled the port, not the feds. This is dot No. 1. Time passed and a good portion of the land was found to be surplus to the port's plans and became termed "back up lands". Farmers requested, without success, to have the B.C. government return (at market prices). Dot No. 2

Treaty negotiations with Tsawwassen First Nation (TFN) got underway and we learned that new treaty lands are to become part of the settlement anticipated from the negotiations. That land will be the superport back-up lands. As negotiations proceeded - behind closed doors - we heard rumours the land that is to be offered to TFN is to be free of land use restrictions, so it will no longer be in the Agricultural Land Reserve. Another dot

The Vancouver Port Authority (VPA) is a federal Crown agency, accountable to the federal minister of transport. It is charged to manage the Port of Vancouver. VPA leaders assessed opportunities with containers - the new way to ship goods. VPA realized it could grab U.S.-bound traffic by expanding more quickly and beyond its original plan, and that the effect will be to make money for itself and the railroads. Another dot.

To achieve the eventual quadrupling in size, VPA needs more space than can be created by making its "port in the water" bigger. In 2004, behind closed doors, the VPA negotiated a deal with TFN to use much of the land yet to be gained from treaty negotiations. Another dot.

With the use of this land no longer controlled, and land being given, first to TFN, then leased back to VPA, VPA behaves like a private entrepreneur, not a public agency operating in the national interest.

A Freedom of Information request for disclosure about the agreement yields a document with many, many sections blanked out. To whom is VPA accountable? Another dot.

Transport firms and organizations got together and formed the Gateway Council. They have pleaded with government to fix the roads and bridges in the Lower Mainland so they can expand their work. Estimated cost is \$6 billion, to come from us taxpayers! Another dot.

VPA is dealing behind closed doors with TFN to use land now zoned ALR. VPA intends to use the land for industrial purposes, likely a massive container sorting and storage yard. It is circumventing our B.C. laws and regulations - all behind closed doors. No public hearings, no discussions, no environmental assessments, just swoosh - and it's gone forever. A final dot.

Do you have enough dots to draw the picture?

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