

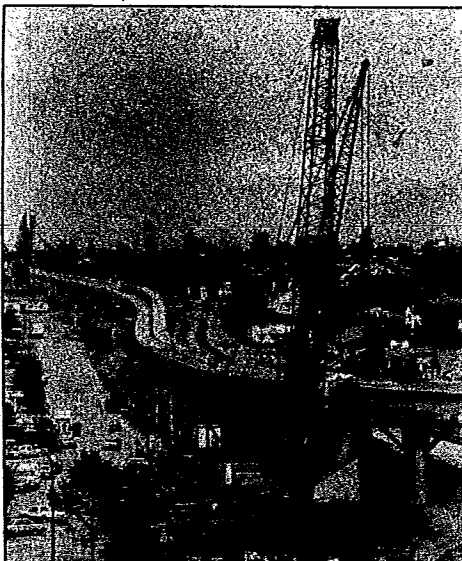
Lewarne favors highway

A Coquitlam connection for SkyTrain would be three-times more cost effective than a new line to Whalley, Mayor Bill Lewarne told Burnaby Now last week.

But the mayor, who was removed from the chairmanship of the transit commission earlier this spring, said he favors a new waterfront highway between Cassiar and Port Moody rather than any rapid transit extension, because it would be cheaper and less disruptive to build.



SEKORA . . . Why on God's green earth would people leave downtown Vancouver to go to Surrey to shop?



Where will next extension of SkyTrain be built? A year-old provincial government study says a Coquitlam extension is three times cheaper to build than one to Whalley. Photo above, taken in 1984, shows construction near Boundary Road.

Story by David Spaner

As well, Lewarne said the provincial government has given several commitments to extend SkyTrain to Whalley, and "I think that is a commitment they would have some difficulty breaking," Lewarne said.

A war of words on SkyTrain and its future has raged for the past several weeks, ever since Coquitlam Mayor Lou Sekora accused transit minister Rita Johnston of having a conflict of interest when she said she favored plans to extend SkyTrain to Whalley, rather than Coquitlam.

But Sekora points to a year-old provincial government document which states: "The Coquitlam extension to Lougheed Mall yields the greatest benefits to the transit system relative to its costs and the lowest annual cost per new rider attracted to the system."

Lewarne had been chairman of the transit commission until Johnston removed him from the appointment earlier this spring, along with Port Coquitlam Mayor Len Traboulay and North Vancouver Mayor John Loucks.

Traboulay says the transit commission has no clout, adding: "We used to call ourselves flack catchers." He said the three men were "unceremoniously dumped."

"We did not want decisions being made like the one Johnston has made without input from local people," Traboulay says. "I think myself that Mrs. Johnston has decided to take SkyTrain into Surrey at any cost."

What is at stake for Burnaby is the impact of potential traffic along the Hastings corridor from a planned 5,000-lot housing development on the Westwood Plateau in northeast Coquitlam, as well as a proposed rapid transit extension to Coquitlam from east of Royal Oak Station through Burnaby, stopping at Kingsway, Canada Way and Cariboo Road, before reaching Lougheed Mall.

That proposal raised the hackles of some Burnaby residents when it was released last fall, and Lewarne says there would be an uproar if the line was run through the "quality residential community" near Robert Burnaby Park.

Last week, Lewarne stood by his controversial comment earlier this year that SkyTrain won't be extended to Coquitlam in his lifetime.

"If I put the SkyTrain down the Edmonds alignment, I sure as hell won't live very long," joked Lewarne, who is up for reelection this fall.

Although Lewarne says he's concerned about the disruptive effect of an Edmond's alignment, he concedes that an extension to Coquitlam through Burnaby would also have a positive impact, reducing commuter traffic and reviving Hastings Street as a neighborhood shopping area with local traffic and adequate parking.

But Lewarne maintains that a waterfront highway from the Second Narrows Bridge to an expanded Barnet Highway would have the positive impact of a SkyTrain extension without the disruptions or the cost.

He says the four-lane Burnaby highway would cost \$30 million while a SkyTrain extension to Coquitlam would cost \$100 million and the highway would provide mass transit via fast buses.

Technical transportation planning staff from Burnaby, Vancouver, Port Coquitlam, Coquitlam and Port Moody are preparing a feasibility study for the highway and when it is completed a delegation from the five municipalities will approach the minister of highways to include the plan in its five-year capital construction program.

Port Moody Mayor David Driscoll says designs for a widened Barnet have been completed and some property in the area has been expropriated.

Driscoll has long been a proponent of the commuter rail line along the CPR corridor on the north slope, noting that it would cost \$40 million to establish the line from Vancouver to Port Moody while it cost \$900 million to build SkyTrain from Vancouver to New Westminster.

Driscoll, a member of the transit commission, points out that rapid transit has traditionally been constructed in urban areas, and although Surrey has a fast-growing population SkyTrain "may be of marginal use to residents of Crescent Beach or Cloverdale."

Instead of extending SkyTrain throughout the Lower Mainland, cheaper commuter systems could be linked to an urban-oriented line.

"It's a high-density system going into low density areas," he says.

Although Driscoll gives his "blessings" to Sekora's efforts, he adds that SkyTrain requires a funding formula before it should be extended.

"None of it will enjoy my support until I know the funding formula attached to it," he says.

The fare box currently accounts for 36.5 per cent of SkyTrain's operating costs, with the provincial government supplying 60 per cent of the remainder and local government the other 40 per cent through hydro levies, a 2.5 cent per litre gas tax and non-residential taxes.

Port Moody Mayor David Driscoll... Cheaper commuter systems could be linked to an urban-oriented line.



There is a no funding formula in place, however, for SkyTrain extensions and everyone involved agrees that the transit commissions' structure needs revamping.

"We've been promised by the premier that the new funding formula and structure will be in place by April 1988," says commission chairman Don Ross, Surrey's mayor.

Lewarne, meanwhile, says the provincial government should foot the entire bill if it announced the timing of the Whalley extensions before it has determined where the money is coming from.

"I would suggest that if it is the provincial government that makes the announcement, the provincial government should pay for it," he says.

Johnston says the government is currently hammering out a funding formula.

"We're also going to be looking to the feds for funding," she says, adding that "we're led to believe" there has been federal contributions to some rapid transit systems in eastern Canada.

SkyTrain funding critics such as Traboulay say the provincial government should pick up the entire tab for future guideway extension costs — as it does for highways — and it should provide 80 per cent of the purchase cost of trains.

Johnston said SkyTrain would spur development similar to Metrotown and a "very major" \$130 million project would begin once a timetable is set for extending rapid transit from Scott Road to Whalley.

"I'm not going to tell you who it is or what it is but it's there," she said of the development. "New Westminster was dead before SkyTrain came and Whalley needs a shot in the arm."

She said the development would be consistent with "the dumbbell plan," the name Surrey has bestowed on its plan to develop a town centre along 104th Avenue between Whalley and Guildford.

Johnston says the Whalley station is necessary to draw visitors to Surrey.

"Nobody's going to come to Surrey to be dropped off at Scott Road. We've got to get them up the hill (to Whalley). To drop people off at Scott Road will provide little more than a faster means of getting out of Surrey," she says.

"For her to spend \$100 million of taxpayers' money to make some dumbbell plan work in Surrey is totally out of order," Sekora said.

"Our (Coquitlam) town centre is working well. It wasn't a dumb plan. It was a very good plan and it's growing rapidly." Sekora takes exception to Johnston's argument that SkyTrain would bring shoppers to Whalley.

"Why on God's green earth would people leave downtown Vancouver to go to Surrey to shop," he says. "It really bothers me to hear that kind of statement from a minister of transit. It's a ridiculous statement."

Johnston slammed Sekora's comments about Surrey's lack of appeal to shoppers.

"That's got to be one of the dumbest statements I've ever heard," she says. "I think that is really being very cheeky. We'd put our community up against his any day of the week." Sekora vows to continue of his fight against the Whalley extension.

"I'm still hopeful it can be stopped," he says. "If I see something that's wrong I'll fight. And I think what she's doing is wrong — very, very wrong."