

[Databases selected:](#) Multiple databases...

## **No joy in sight for B.C. commuters The partisan advantage of keeping Vancouver-area planning decisions to itself has become apparent to the provincial New Democratic government**

ROSS HOWARD. *The Globe and Mail*. Toronto, Ont.: Jul 11, 1995. pg. A.6

### **Abstract (Summary)**

THE PROBLEM The Vancouver region's growth in population and vehicles is expected to produce car-commuter paralysis and choking pollution in the next 25 years. But there are no new mass-transit routes in progress. THE OTHER PROBLEM British Columbia's Byzantine political system gives the provincial government control of the municipal transit system. The regional government is powerless. The individual municipalities can promote or curb urban sprawl.

### **Full Text** (1362 words)

*All material copyright Bell Globemedia Publishing Inc. or its licensors. All rights reserved.*

No joy in sight for B.C. commuters The partisan advantage of keeping Vancouver-area planning decisions to itself has become apparent to the provincial New Democratic government

Tuesday, July 11, 1995

ROSS HOWARD

Vancouver BC -- BY ROSS HOWARD British Columbia Bureau Vancouver WHEN several lanes on one of the bridges into Vancouver were closed in early June for lengthy repairs, commuters and commentators were enraged.

The surge of rush-hour traffic over the Oak Street bridge became an hour-long crawl. Sociologists - and fuming drivers - predicted Los Angeles freeway-style violence by midsummer. Congestion spread to the half-dozen other bridges and into the downtown core. On June 14, police charged 100 car drivers in 45 minutes for sneaking into a van-pool lane.

Callers to talk shows demanded more expressways and bridges and asked about possible alternatives such as subways and high-speed, high-capacity rail lines.

Vancouver's suburbs are the largest and fastest-growing in Canada. Over the next 25 years, the West Coast's benign climate and economy are expected to draw one million more people to join the 1.7 million jammed into the Fraser Valley and along the littoral.

Vehicle ownership is expected to double and send air pollution soaring. Fewer commuters use public transit and no mass-transit line is under construction, approved or even agreed on.

Warren Gill, an urban geographer at Simon Fraser University, said the "Byzantine political structures and rivalries of British Columbia" have created a costly nightmare for the regional and provincial governments.

Construction of enough rapid transit to prevent constant commuter paralysis in 25 years would cost \$10-billion. Enough roads to accomplish the same thing, including an estimated 36 more bridge lanes, would cost \$14-billion.

But the municipal and provincial politicians cannot agree on where to spend even the first \$558-million. And there are no plans to spend any more.

Vancouver has one rapid-transit line, called SkyTrain, snaking 28 kilometres from the downtown core part way into the suburbs. The \$1.2-billion automated and elevated service was built hastily by the previous government for Expo 86. The world's fair is long gone, but SkyTrain rumbles on, its debt consuming 40 per cent of fare revenue.

B.C. Transit and the regional government, known as the Greater Vancouver Regional District and comprising politicians from all 20 municipalities in the area, have technical maps projecting a network of rapid-transit lines for the region that could accommodate the additional one million residents, but there is no political map on how this would be accomplished.

The regional government has no schedule for rapid-transit development, nor any authority to impose one. The provincial government has the authority, and some cash, and plenty of political priorities. Like its mostly conservative predecessors, the New Democratic government has discovered the partisan advantage of keeping major urban planning and transit decisions to itself.

The B.C. government announced recently a plan to put a commuter train on CP Rail tracks from the bedroom community of Mission into Vancouver. The route will cost at least \$170-million to launch and require 70-per-cent taxpayer subsidization at the fare box. Although potential

ridership figures are bitterly disputed, the service will be up and running, through seven NDP-held ridings, before the anticipated provincial election in 1996.

Sometime before the election call, the government will select Vancouver's first rapid-transit route since the SkyTrain.

The government is expected to pick a line that runs along a major artery, Broadway Avenue, across the city into the suburbs through ridings held by the Premier, the Transit Minister and a half-dozen NDP backbenchers.

This line was not rated by the region as its No. 1 priority.

Mr. Gill said the line would not serve the route to Vancouver from Richmond, the area with the most crushing traffic and jammed buses. Building that line would require "real political courage" because it would cut through the city's richest neighbourhoods.

Broadway Avenue is the lowest-risk choice because it would draw lots of riders in the city's core and also boost suburban development.

Vancouver is the only major city in Canada without authority for planning and running its mass transit and "we may be the only such urban area in North America," regional chairman Gregory Halsey-Brandt lamented.

Although rapid transit is a powerful determinant of urban growth, the B.C. government has done almost nothing major for most of the past 25 years, said Mr. Halsey-Brandt, a former urban planner. It has also left each municipality to build its suburbs helter-skelter.

He noted that in Metropolitan Toronto, industry, commercial development and compact housing followed construction of the Yonge Street subway line. Ottawa-Carleton's Transitway for buses played the same role, he said, and Calgary makes transit part of its land-use planning.

In Vancouver, however, regional growth has been a low-density sprawl of bungalows beside highways across former farmland - a developer's dream initially, but now expensive to service and requiring long commutes by car to get downtown.

In December, the regional council favoured a route from New Westminster to Coquitlam for a first new transit line, costing \$558-million. The decision ended a five-year struggle for consensus on curbing urban sprawl by promoting higher-density development and building mass transit. The consensus means that some mayors have to turn away suburban developers.

The route was meant to shape population growth by cutting across the suburbs and allow people to live and work in the same area.

On June 2, the regional council changed its mind and endorsed two lines that would cost at least \$1-billion: the New Westminster suburban route and the Broadway Avenue line to serve the city and neighbouring Burnaby's declining industrial strip.

"It's a terrible waste of money," Coquitlam Mayor Lou Sekora said. "The city gets its way again.

"That Broadway line is meant to boost Burnaby's dying malls."

The two-line scheme is "pie-in-the-sky," he said.

A B.C. Transit long-range planner, Martin Kubuyakowa, agreed. "It would be a lot to ask for the province to (finance) two transit lines within the next 10 years."

Mr. Halsey-Brandt said the regional council endorsed the Broadway line when B.C. Transit released studies justifying the choice - after the government appointed Burnaby councillor and NDP activist Derek Corrigan as chairman of B.C. Transit.

Regional planners say the B.C. Transit studies are misleading.

The City of Vancouver favours the Broadway line, because it would generate a property boom in the city's neglected east end at no cost to the city. Another peculiar aspect of British Columbia's transit structure is that the provincial government pays all the capital costs of transit. In Ontario, for instance, municipalities pay 25 per cent.

The Broadway route "doesn't bear much relevance to regional planning and trying to shape growth," Mr. Halsey-Brandt said. He said the region did not know how much the B.C. government planned to spend, so it opted for both on the off chance that it would get them.

A University of British Columbia planning professor, Fetty Fendekur, said the member municipalities, including Coquitlam, ignore the regional council's directions and continue to approve suburban sprawl.

"Where's their commitment?" he asked. "We're still a frontier mentality.

"They (the suburbs) have done nothing to seriously influence density. At least the province pays for it, so it can call the tune."

The municipalities refuse to pay public-transit operating costs from their taxes. So B.C. Transit buses operate on fares, a gasoline tax, an electricity tax and a non-residential business property tax.

"The B.C. system is really bizarre," Prof. Gill said.

"The question," said Ben Marr, the region's top civil servant, "is what comes first: mass transit to shape regional growth or to serve existing residents?"

"I have to believe good planning will rise above politics."

## PARALYSIS LOOMS

**THE PROBLEM** The Vancouver region's growth in population and vehicles is expected to produce car-commuter paralysis and choking pollution in the next 25 years. But there are no new mass-transit routes in progress. **THE OTHER PROBLEM** British Columbia's Byzantine political system gives the provincial government control of the municipal transit system. The regional government is powerless. The individual municipalities can promote or curb urban sprawl. **THE QUESTIONS** Should B.C. provincial politicians control municipal transit? Should mass transit shape future population growth or serve current demands? And serve partisan interests?

### Indexing (document details)

**Author(s):** ROSS HOWARD  
**Dateline:** *Vancouver BC*  
**Publication title:** The Globe and Mail. Toronto, Ont.: Jul 11, 1995. pg. A.6  
**Source type:** Newspaper  
**ISSN:** 03190714  
**ProQuest document ID:** 1119666871  
**Text Word Count** 1362  
**Document URL:** <http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/pq-dweb?did=1119666871&sid=3&Fmt=3&clientId=3667&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

---

Copyright © 2011 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

