

Keep Pacific Gateway Business Moving

Issue

BC is Canada's Pacific Gateway, the preferred gateway for Asian trade to North America and the world. A unique alliance of government and the private sector ensures seamless and reliable movement of containers, bulk and break-bulk, and air cargo. Transportation is a key support for economic growth and development, and that's why it is singled out for special focus in the 2012-2020 Pacific Gateway Transportation Plan. More than any other sector, it serves the dual purpose of generating direct employment and underpinning job creation, development and progress throughout BC.¹ While significant progress has been made in some parts of that strategy, a major deficiency exists in B.C.'s Fraser Valley which requires re-consideration of priorities from the Provincial and Federal governments.

Background

From semi-trucks and trailers hauling freight, to logging and industrial trucks serving the resource industries, to smaller trucks serving local businesses, trucking supports our economy and helps to maintain a high quality of life for all British Columbians. The trucking industry accounts for 2 percent of BC's GDP, employs about 40,000 people, and is larger than other major industries, including forestry, pulp and paper, and oil and gas.² There is tacit acknowledgement of the importance of our industry to BC's economy in the 10-year plan, which embeds a trucking strategy.

Each year, more than \$3 billion in goods are trucked between our gateway ports and the rest of Canada, and over one million trucks cross to/from the U.S. via the three Lower Mainland border crossings. For many communities and transportation stakeholders, increasing the economic efficiency and safety of the commercial trucking industry is critically important.

In 2015 the provincial government presented its 10-year Transportation Plan - BC on the Move³ that looked to initiate design for the construction of six-laning on Highway 1 from Langley to Abbotsford. Construction of a new Port Mann bridge, widening of Highway 1 to 200th Street and addition of the South Fraser Perimeter Road had already been completed. Consultation recently wrapped up this spring on a \$59-million project in Langley to build a new interchange at 216th Street and widen the highway between there and 202nd Street. Construction on that project is expected to take 18 months.

On March 28, 2017 the BC government announced commitment of \$113 million in its share of funding for Phase 2, a federal-municipal project to six-lane the highway from 216th Street to 264th Street. The full project is estimated to be \$235.5 million and the provincial government is seeking funding from the Government of Canada and the Township of Langley. Design work is expected to start in the fall of 2017.

The 2016 Census indicated that Abbotsford's population grew by 5.9% in the last five years, above the national and BC average. Abbotsford's neighbours have been growing quicker with Mission up by 6.6% and Chilliwack up by 7.5%. Lower housing prices, compared to Metro Vancouver, will continue to bring even more population growth in the future.

A recent report on industrial land supply in the Lower Mainland, completed for the City of Abbotsford⁴, indicated that strong BC provincial economic performance has helped drive development and leasing interest in the region. However, a lack of new supply has created a very supply-constrained market characterized by extremely low vacancy rates. Conversion of industrial land in Metro Vancouver to residential use also added to this shortage.

¹ http://www.pacificgateway.gov.bc.ca/documents/120402_Gateway_Strategy.pdf

² <http://www.bctrucking.com/news/bc-move-road-map-gets-it-right-trucking>

³ <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/DownloadAsset?assetId=6BDC5827613C454E81820AE9792CCB72&filename=bconthemove.pdf>

⁴ <https://abbotsford.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/?preview=51140>

The Fraser Valley has long represented a primary supply of industrial zoned land and the scarcity of land options in Metro Vancouver and rising values in recent years have accelerated the migration of industrial owner-occupiers eastward toward more affordable options in the Fraser Valley. The Abbotsford market is among the fastest growing with an annual inventory growth of 6.4% and Chilliwack is at 4.8% compared to Surrey (4.2%) and Langley (3.1%).

Meanwhile, ministry stats show both the amount of traffic and number of accidents on the Hwy. 1 corridor through Abbotsford is only getting worse. Traffic is growing at 1.4 per cent per year, and the increased congestion is slowing median traffic speeds, which can drop to 60 km/h near intersections during peak periods. Figures provided by the Insurance Corporation of BC (ICBC) show the number of crashes has risen from a low of 140 in 2011 to highs of 190 in both 2012 and 2013 (the most recent year Abbotsford figures were available) – an average of roughly one crash every two days. ICBC statistics for the Lower Mainland overall indicate that from 2013 to 2015 crashes increased by a further 18%.⁵

Completion of the South Fraser Perimeter Road, replacement of the Port Mann Bridge, adjacent improvements to Highway 1 to 200th Street and the recently announced Phase 2 construction will have all put an increased burden on Highway 1 in the Fraser Valley. While the highest priority of need is the improvement in the section from 264th Street to Whatcom Road, consideration needs to be given to future needs to extend the six-laning to Hope where Highway 1 provides an entry to three main provincial highway routes.

Highway 1 congestion, accidents and daily stoppages and delays have become a way of life for commuters, students and business traffic on the Highway 1 section between Langley and Abbotsford. Alternative routes are limited to local rural and residential roads or the two-lane Fraser Highway, which is already highly congested and not suitable for commercial traffic.

While commuters get a lot of the media attention it is important to remember that the movement of goods and services from the Pacific Gateway is a critical part of the economy in the rest of Canada. Commercial trucks account for approximately 8.5 per cent of the total traffic on the Abbotsford section of the Trans-Canada Highway.⁶ With the increasing volume of cargo through Port Metro Vancouver, continued growth of the Vancouver Airport and the migration of logistic facilities eastward into the Fraser Valley the demands by commercial traffic on current Highway 1 road infrastructure are reaching crisis proportions.

BC's economy depends on a safe, reliable and efficient transportation network. It's only a short leap of logic from that statement to recognition that a strong and healthy BC economy relies heavily on a vibrant, thriving, efficient trucking industry to keep that economy moving.

Recommendations

That the federal government work with the provincial government to:

1. Recognize the priority of the Fraser Valley portion of Hwy. 1 as a major economic enabler and establish a higher priority timetable for necessary widening and upgrades from 264th Street in phases to Whatcom Road in Abbotsford and then to Hope.
2. Ensure that a funding commitment is made by both levels of government to ensure timely project completion.
3. Revise and update the Pacific Gateway Transportation Plan to reflect the shifting base of industrial and commercial activity into the Fraser Valley.

⁵ <http://www.icbc.com/about-icbc/newsroom/Documents/quick-statistics.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.abbynews.com/news/387000041.html>