

BEST says questions must be answered before Port Mann Bridge/Hwy 1 expansion plans proceed

Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST), the region's sustainable transportation watchdog organization, is again calling on Transportation Minister Kevin Falcon to address questions and concerns that have been raised about the B.C. Government's plans to twin the Port Mann Bridge and expand Highway 1.

In 2004, when Falcon first announced his government's intentions to proceed with this project, BEST and numerous municipal and regional officials raised a number of questions about potential negative impacts. Several municipalities passed resolutions questioning the rationale or need for this project.

On the eve of Falcon's anticipated Port Mann/Hwy 1 announcement Tuesday morning at a Vancouver transportation "summit" hosted by the B.C. Business Council, those questions still remain unanswered.

"Mr. Falcon has been asked to provide evidence to back up his contention that twinning the Port Mann Bridge and widening the No. 1 freeway is going to solve the traffic congestion problems in that corridor," commented BEST Executive Director, Marion Town. "I suspect the reason he hasn't responded to this question is that he has no evidence, because what evidence is out there clearly demonstrates just the opposite. No city has solved their traffic congestion problems by building more and wider highways," said Town.

Town said that BEST is still waiting to hear answers to a number of other vital questions they and others have asked of Minister Falcon since he first announced his Port Mann/Hwy 1 project intentions.

Other questions that Falcon has not been willing or able to answer include:

- Will the additional traffic on an expanded freeway add to air quality problems and greenhouse gas emissions? If air quality is reduced, have the resulting health costs been factored into the cost of the project?
- How is highway expansion consistent with the Livable Region Strategic Plan (LRSP) or the Sustainable Region Initiative (SRI)? Would highway expansion encourage the kind of sprawl this region seeks to avoid?
- Have affordable and effective alternatives been looked at, evaluated and priced?

"We strongly believe that a range of alternatives exist, which would offer a far more sustainable and affordable solution. The minister should listen to the many voices around the region that have been telling him that we simply don't need this project," said Town.

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