



April 25, 2007

## Taken For A Ride: Ministry of Highways Manipulated Media to Undermine Better Transit Option for Port Mann Bridge

### For Immediate Release

Surrey, BC- A report released today by the **Society Promoting Environmental Conservation** (SPEC) and the **Livable Region Coalition** (LRC) exposes the manipulation of the media and the public undertaken by the Ministry of Highways over its Gateway Program. The new report, *Taken For A Ride* uses documents obtained through Freedom of Information requests to show how the Ministry misled the media about transit solutions for Port Mann Bridge congestion. One Ministry email reads:

"the transit mode share of 20% was assumed for the markets that the new transit routes were serving and not all demand on the Port Mann. Therefore, the actual mode share [is] around 10% [but] I've worded it in such a way [that it] plays up the 20% mode share".

"The province is trying to trick the public into thinking that the Gateway Program is the only option for our region. We have shown that they will say anything to get their way and even manufacture false evidence to back their claims," said David Fields, campaigner with SPEC

The Minister of Highways has told anyone who will listen that the competing transit plan promoted by the LRC will not work. However, documents secured through FOI requests show that the provincial government had in fact concocted its own transit plan that was made to fail and lead the media and public to believe it was the LRC proposal.

"An express bus service crossing the Port Mann Bridge from Surrey to Coquitlam was due to be online this year. Most of what is in our better transit proposal already appears in regional transportation plans and can be implemented quickly. The only thing standing in the way of putting rapid bus service across the existing Port Mann Bridge is the Minister of Highways," said Eric Doherty, report author.

"The Premier has adopted the goal of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions by 33% by 2020. We support this goal but can we trust him?. The Premier's planning is done in secret and they have

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already been caught trying to lowball the emissions from Gateway. Now they have been caught again trying to steer the public away from a better transit approach in favour of its car-centred plan to twin the Port Mann Bridge.” said Fields

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**Backgrounder:**

In February 2007, SPEC released *Cooking the Books, Cooking the Planet* that showed how the province tried to minimize the findings of its own greenhouse gas study of the Gateway Program. SPEC found that the Gateway Program would result in a 31% increase in road source emissions.

As discussed in the LRC report *Transportation for a Sustainable Region: Transit or Freeway Expansion*, a bridge crossing rapid bus, the Surrey-Coquitlam Bullet, would use a bypass lane at the 152<sup>nd</sup> St. on ramp and priority measures to avoid traffic congestion and so keep a schedule. The suite of measures proposed by the LRC could be implemented in 2 to 3 years for a cost of \$330-\$500 million. If started now, this better transit option could be incorporated into South of Fraser transit plans now in development and support plans by municipalities like Coquitlam and Surrey to build healthy, people focused town centres. Federal parties have shown strong interest in supporting public transit expansion.

A recent TransLink staff report has shown that transit ridership in the region must more than double if the Premier's goal of a 33% reduction in GHGs by 2020 is to be achieved.

**Done Deal or No Deal?**

Despite the spin from the Ministry of Transportation and Highways, freeway expansion is far from a “**done deal**”. So far, it’s “**no deal**.” Here are the **Fabulous Five** reasons why:

1. **No Money:** The Federal government still refuses to provide funding for the bridge twinning and freeway expansion while it gives money to other parts of the Asia Pacific Gateway Strategy. David Emerson, federal minister for the file has said that the bridge twinning is “not essential” to the trade agenda.
2. **No sense:** The cost of construction has risen by 27% <sup>1</sup> since the \$1.5 billion project was announced. We can buy enough transit to solve the problem today for \$300 to \$500 million.

Note 1: According to a survey of 44 U.S. states and 2 Canadian provincial (Alberta, Ontario) highway departments completed in March 2006, highway-building costs increased an average of 27% over the previous year (2005-2006). The survey was conducted by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

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3. **No Proof:** Highway expansion has never solved a congestion problem anywhere—it makes it worse. Experts from around the world have condemned this project, and the province has not produced any evidence to support its claim that, ‘this time, it’ll be different’.
4. **No Support:** The GVRD, representing 2 million people, has voted to strongly oppose the project.
5. **No Time:** People want real solutions to climate change and traffic congestion *now*. We can’t wait ‘till 2014—or whenever—to start taking this seriously.