



December 7, 2006

Ms. Jody Shimkus
Project Assessment Director
British Columbia Environmental Assessment Office
1st Floor, 836 Yates Street
PO Box 9426 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9V1

Dear Ms. Shimkus,

RE: Draft Application Terms of Reference for Port Mann/Highway 1 Project (PMH1)

On behalf of the Livable Region Coalition (LRC), a group of Lower Mainland sustainable transportation advocates that includes Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST), the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF), the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC) and SmartGrowth BC, as well as many individuals, please accept the enclosed in response to the EAO request for comments on the proposed Port Mann/Highway 1 project.

Having reviewed the Port Mann/Highway 1 Project Terms of Reference (TOR), we would like to make the following comments on what we believe to be deficiencies in the TOR:

Section 2 – Information Distribution and Consultation

The substance of consultations undertaken by the proponent to date has been wholly inadequate, in that no opportunity has been provided to discuss the merits of the project versus alternative solutions, which many believe could achieve similar or indeed superior outcomes. No substantive information about possible alternatives was provided during the consultation process, and little or no data was provided to substantiate proponent claims in the TOR that the project will in fact:

- Address congestion
- Improve the movement of people and goods in and through the region
- Improve safety and reliability
- Improve quality of life
- Reduce vehicle emissions

In the Gateway Program Definition Report dated January 31, 2006 the following was stated on p. 57 with regard to public consultation:

The Gateway Program recognizes the importance of consultation and ongoing communication with interested parties and is committed to a comprehensive consultation program as well as an ongoing community

relations program to ensure that community and public input is considered in the development of the Program.

It is hard to understand how the Pre-Design Public Consultation Program undertaken to date, which has already been endorsed by the EAO Project Director, meets the requirements recognized by the Ministry or the requirements of the *Public Consultation Strategy Framework for Lower Mainland Infrastructure Projects* which is identified by the Proponent in the draft terms of reference as the document upon which their Public Consultation Program is based.

The guide states that effective consultation requires that that “[p]articipants are provided opportunities for meaningful input and public issues/concerns are considered in developing the project design and making project approval processes.” To date this requirement does not appear to have been met as there has been no attempt to “[p]rovide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the projects, problems, alternatives and/or solutions” or to consult and “obtain broad-based public feedback on analyses, alternatives and/or decisions generated for the overall project.”¹ [emphasis added]

The PreDesign Consultation Topics discussed in the pre-design consultation are stated in the June 6, 2006 Pre-Design Consultation Report dated June 6, 2006 to be limited to the following topics:

- a. A potential toll on the Port Mann Bridge
- b. Reduced tolls for HOVs
- c. Variable tolls for peak and off-peak periods
- d. A toll-free period overnight
- e. Extension of HOV lanes
- f. HOV and transit priority access
- g. Commercial vehicle priority access on/off ramps and dedicated ramps
- h. Cycling improvements
- i. Interchange improvement goals²

While the feedback guide focused on, and was confined to, these topics and did not seek to determine if the public supported the Project as proposed, only a quarter of those who provided additional comments thought that the Port Mann/Highway 1 Gateway project was needed or overdue. Further, the Ministry was forced to acknowledge that “the most frequent suggestion was that the respondents wanted more effort concentrated on mass transit solutions like public transit and rapid transit, including the expansion of SkyTrain in the eastern part of the region.”³

The Terms of Reference for the EA should include a detailed analysis of each of the HWY1 project benefits as identified by the Proponent, for public review and discussion, while also providing an opportunity to publicly discuss alternatives to the project.

¹ *Public Consultation Strategy/Framework for Lower Mainland Infrastructure Projects* April 2003 p. 2.

² Pre Design Consultation Summary Report Port Mann/Highway 1 Project June 6, 2006 s. 2.3 p. 3

³ *Supra*, p. 19.

Section 3.1 – Project Background and Rationale

The rationale for the PMH1 Project is set out in s. 1.2 Project Rationale of the Project Description, Final Draft – 11 May 2006 submitted to the EAO by the Proponent, the Ministry of Transportation. The concluding paragraph of s. 1.2 states the following:

Without action, congestion will get worse, quality of life will suffer and economic opportunities will be foregone. Investment in the Port Mann Highway Corridor is required to improve the region's livability and its competitiveness as a trading centre and a place to do business. Users of the Highway 1 corridor would benefit in the form of travel-time savings, reduced vehicle operating costs and improved safety. Long term economic benefits include improved regional, provincial and national competitiveness for trade. Long-term community benefits also include providing better cross-highway connectivity, maintaining local streets for local use, and providing transit opportunities that would not otherwise be available.

The proponent should be required in the Terms of Reference to provide the data to substantiate these claims.

The specific goals of the PMH1 Project are set out in paragraph 1.3 of the Project Description which states the following:

The goals of the Port Mann/Highway 1 Project are to:

- Reduce travel times for trips along the corridor and increase their predictability;
- Reduce congestion at entry and exit points to Highway 1;
- Reduce travel times for trips across the corridor and improve connections within and between communities;
- Improve access to and egress from the corridor for goods movement;
- Facilitate the introduction of transit service along the corridor and the improvement of transit service across the corridor;
- Facilitate opportunities for better transit service between growing municipalities by providing greater reliability of transit times and considering transit priority measures such as queue jumpers and Park&Ride facilities;
- Expand HOV, cycling and pedestrian network along or in the vicinity of the corridor; and
- Improve safety for vehicle operators and passengers, cyclists and pedestrians.

The EA Terms of Reference therefore should focus on how this project delivers on these goals, as it is unclear that any of these goals are being achieved through this project.

The proponent should be required in the EA Application to establish the volumes of traffic that will be generated by the project being built. This information has not been made available. In order to estimate the potential environmental impact of the proposal, it is essential to establish the expected volumes of traffic that will arise once the project is commissioned, with consideration given to latent and induced traffic demand in this corridor.

In articulating how the proposed project “complements other existing and proposed transportation infrastructure in the region”, the environmental assessment should evaluate how this project challenges or even contradicts other existing and planned/approved transportation infrastructure and policies in the region. For example, the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority (GVTA) has estimated that peak period ridership on the Expo SkyTrain Line would be diminished by 9 percent as a result of this project, and ridership on the planned Evergreen Line would be diminished by 5 percent. With losses of more than half a million dollars, this has significant bearing on the financial outlook of the GVTA. The system-wide impacts on transit ridership and revenues must be included in the Terms of Reference for the PMH1 environmental assessment.

Section 3.2 – Alternatives to the Project

Operational Policy Statement OPS-EPO/2 – 1998 issued by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency defines “alternative to” the project as functionally different ways to meet the project need and achieve the project purpose. There is presently no provision for such considerations in the Draft AATOR. This deficiency should be addressed by requiring that the proponent address technically and economically feasible alternatives, which could achieve the project goals stated in the EA Application, along with an analysis of the costs and benefits of such alternatives.

The project introduction states that the “improvements will facilitate increased opportunities for demand management and congestion-reduction strategies including transit and HOV capabilities, priority access for transit, HOV and commercial vehicles and provision for tolling of the Port Mann Bridge.” Therefore, the Proponent should also report on whether ‘alternatives to’ the project being advanced in the EA are also able to achieve these goals. This examination should include realistic transit investments as alternative modes for moving people (i.e., as included in plans already approved by the GVRD or the GVTA). To date, the Proponent has only offered cursory consideration of limited alternatives, and these have been considered in isolation, rather than as part of a comprehensive package of measures.

Since the proposal includes using road tolls as a traffic control (transportation demand management) mechanism, we believe it is imperative that the proponent be required to provide analysis of the impact that tolling the existing facility would have on managing existing traffic demand. This is a critical component of a package of “alternatives” to examine.

Section 3.4 – Project Constraints

Project constraints addressed in the EA should include the policy goals of the Livable Region Strategic Plan and the position adopted by the Greater Vancouver Regional District to “strongly oppose” this project. A Board-approved GVRD staff report on this project states that this project is “inconsistent with the Livable Region Strategic Plan.”⁴ Approved land use and transportation plans for the cities of Vancouver and Burnaby are also at risk as a result of this proposal.

⁴ GVRD Board Minutes, September 22, 2006, Page 9.

Section 5 – Scope of the Assessment

The EA should address land use impacts of increased road capacity on regional and municipal plans in the Greater Vancouver and Fraser Valley regional districts, in particular, the impacts on agriculture, environmentally sensitive areas and green space.

As the project context describes the Port Mann/Highway 1 Project as “one of three strategic road and bridge projects sponsored by...the proponent that comprise the Gateway Program”, the negative cumulative impacts of all these projects need to be accounted for in the EA, particularly with regard to increased traffic and negative land use impacts.

Section 7.2.1 – Regional Air Quality

“Benefits to emission output from reduced travel times and congestion,” as used in this section, should be replaced with neutral language that does not pre-judge the outcomes of studies yet to be submitted, or misrepresent the findings of existing studies. The notion that adding new bridge and highway capacity in this corridor would create “benefits to emission output” is widely disputed.

Greenhouse gas emissions analyses should include estimates of emissions for all construction materials and fuels to be used, regardless of where these emissions are to be released. Greenhouse gas emissions should include projections associated with increased traffic on the roadway once widened.

7.2.2 – Local Air Quality

Many of the negative effects of air pollution are assigned to PM_{2.5}, a largely localized pollutant. Recent studies have demonstrated a direct correlation between proximity to a busy highway and elevated incidences of respiratory disease in children. The EA should identify which neighbourhoods in the corridor will be particularly impacted by the increased levels of this pollutant that will be produced as a result of added highway capacity.

As it is generally accepted, both by the Proponent and others, that the widened highway would reach capacity within 10 years, air quality models must reflect the impacts of this increase in vehicle trips on the corridor.

Section 8.3 – Socio-community

The geographic scope of the assessment must be broad enough to account for the impacts of additional vehicle trips in large sections of the region as a result of the project. Traffic impacts are expected to be regional in scope, and not simply limited to increased traffic on connecting streets.

Again, the impacts on transit ridership and revenues must also be examined.

8.9 – Tolling

The TOR requires an assessment of potential shifts in demand to other routes. It is important that the shift in demand to and from other modes of travel also be evaluated.

8.10 – Traffic/Transportation/Road User Issues

The language in the TOR assumes there is currently a “...lack of feasible transit options across the Port Mann Bridge”, and that there is “...limited potential for further feasible (demand management) options within the constraints of the existing highway infrastructure.” Both of these points have been widely disputed by local experts. The assessment must address transit and demand management alternatives that many believe *could* work within the existing highway and bridge infrastructure.

The TOR should request that the Proponent provide an assessment of traffic conditions on this corridor 10-20 years into the future, rather than operating on the assumption that the additional road capacity would create permanent benefits for all road users on this corridor. Transportation experts predict that the project will result in increased traffic, putting the roadway back at capacity within 3 to 10 years of its opening. Alternative long-range measures, as proposed in GVRD plans, should be considered.

10.3 – Cumulative Environmental Effects

The concept of cumulative environmental effects recognizes that the environmental effects of individual human activities can combine and interact with each other to cause aggregate effects that may be different in nature and extent from the effects of individual activities.

Cumulative environmental effects are defined by the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office as:

The effect on the environment which results from effects of a project when combined with those of other past, existing and imminent projects and activities. These may occur over a certain period of time and distance.

To address cumulative environmental effects means thinking cumulatively and considering:

- The temporal and geographic boundaries of the assessment; and
- The interactions among the environmental effects of the project, and past and future projects and activities.⁵

As the project proposes to increase general roadway capacity, more vehicles travelling greater distances are expected. Greenhouse gases and other air pollutants associated with this increased traffic volume need to be estimated. As the expanded capacity will also result in more urbanisation through land use conversion, the proponent should provide an assessment of the environmental effects of such urbanisation.

The proponent has identified the Port Mann/Hwy 1 project as one of a suite of three “critical” Gateway projects. It is our position that the PMH1 project is not needed in order

⁵ A Reference Guide for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act: Addressing Cumulative Environmental Effects, Prepared by the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office, November 1994, p. 135.

to achieve the Project goals, and is inconsistent with the objectives of the Gateway Program and the regional plans for growth. If the other two Gateway Projects are granted environmental certification, the cumulative effects of increased traffic in the form of greenhouse gas emissions from all three projects, and the cumulative impacts of all three projects on the adjacent neighbourhoods also need to be addressed in the PMH1 EA.

The opportunity to participate in this process is greatly appreciated. If there are any points of clarification required to advance these issues, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours truly,

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