

Doug Ward, Vancouver Sun

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The era of cheap gasoline is over, and projects such as the B.C. government's Gateway Program will lead to developments that will soon become obsolete, University of B.C. professor William Rees said Monday.

Rees, who is among a number of prominent planners and academics attending the World Planners Congress in Vancouver this week, said urban planning is largely based on the misguided belief that cheap energy will be around forever.

The Gateway Program, which includes expanding Highway 1 and twinning the Port Mann bridge, will exacerbate land use patterns that will become unsustainable as gas prices rise sharply in coming years, he said.

Transportation infrastructure being built now "may be seen in a very short period of time as a colossal waste of public resources and the Gateway project fits into the category," he said.

Sixty of his fellow planners agreed strongly enough to sign a giant petition on the wall of the conference calling for the B.C. government to halt the Gateway plan to expand Highway 1 and twin the Port Mann bridge. The petition says the Gateway Program will spur more car dependency and sprawl.

Andres Duany, a prominent North American planner and critic of suburban sprawl, similarly said the cost of fuel is "going to change our living arrangements. And that is happening right now."

Duany warned that new alternative energy sources, including wind and tidal power, will also be expensive.

Meanwhile, Vancouver planning director Larry Beasley said the city needs to provide choices of dense living other than downtown highrise towers.

Beasley said "putting a house in a rear garden or putting one more unit in the main house or putting some townhouses at the end of the block to me is equally important as the downtown towers."

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