

# Lower Mainland commuters want better transit !

**\*Frank Luba and Ethan Baron, The Province\***

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Lower Mainland commuters are in highway hell, burned up and burned out by traffic congestion that's thickening right in front of their eyes.

"It's the worst I've seen," said Carlos Rodrigues, 58, a cleaning-company owner who commutes to downtown Vancouver from Port Moody. "It's very frustrating."

What started as a 40-minute trip in 1989 has become a journey of up to an hour-and-a-half, said Rodrigues. He tried taking the West Coast Express but found it took even longer than driving his van.

"I want to be able to use the transit, but you can't do it," he said.

**On trips to England and Portugal, Rodrigues found public transit efficient and simple.**

**"In those big cities in Europe, it does work. It's so easy, everywhere. They have to do that here. They're spending a lot of money, but they're not doing anything."**

Coquitlam's Sharlene and Aaren Terrett drive to downtown Vancouver together. "We get the HOV lane," said Aaren, an account manager for a recruitment firm. "That does help a lot."

It still takes them an hour to get downtown in the morning, a drastic increase from when Aaren, 32, started commuting to Vancouver a decade ago.

"It's night and day," he said. "They designed the city when there were 300,000 people in the Lower Mainland. The infrastructure can't handle it."

It's cheaper for the couple to drive their Ford Taurus wagon, paying for gas, insurance and parking, than it is to take the West Coast Express, Aaren said.

Better transit is the only realistic solution, said Sharlene, 35, an office manager for an architecture firm. "Make it available to absolutely everybody, make it affordable," she said.

The traffic picture isn't any prettier from the air. Lara Dewitt, who monitors traffic from a helicopter for AM 730 and sister station CKNW, said congestion is "terrible. The last two weeks, this is the busiest I've ever seen it. I am very happy to be flying above it all. I don't know how these people do it every day."

Surrey Coun. Marvin Hunt, on the boards of TransLink and the Greater Vancouver Regional District, doesn't see any quick solution. "That's a simple reality as you put in more people," Hunt said. "Unless we have forms of mass transit to move them, we will also have more vehicles on the road and therefore more congestion."

About 32,000 more vehicles were registered in Greater Vancouver and the Fraser Valley from Whistler to Boston Bar in 2005 than in 2004, ICBC said. In the GVRD, the average annual increase in registered vehicles over the past 10 years is about 28,000.

"It seems like September, October and November are the worst," said GVRD chairwoman Lois Jackson, the mayor of Delta. "Everybody's home, everybody's working, everybody's going to school. It's just numbers."

TransLink keeps adding more service but the 210 hours a day added in September amounts to an increase of 1.56 per cent.

But there have been fewer pass-ups -- where full buses pass waiting passengers. There were 160 to 170 pass-ups daily out of the Surrey transit centre last year, but that has dropped to about 120, said TransLink spokesman Ken Hardie.

Statistics Canada said about 86 per cent of commuters use a car to get to work, virtually unchanged for more than a decade.

## POPULATION BOOM

- The approximate number of vehicles registered by ICBC (as of Dec. 31) in the Lower Mainland from Whistler to Boston Bar keeps growing every year:

2002: 1.318 million

2003: 1.337 million

2004: 1.365 million

2005: 1.397 million

Statistics from ICBC

The population of Greater Vancouver from Abbotsford to Lions Bay  
also keeps growing:

2002: 2,095,113

2003: 2,114,061

2004: 2,131,340

2005: 2,155,880

Stats from GVRD

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