

Wilkinson Column January 19.18

I can imagine folks stuck yet again in traffic fuming: “Just what we need – more talk and study on North Shore congestion. What we need is action!”

I can understand why that might well be the response of some to news this week of the establishment of the *Integrated North Shore Transportation Planning Process*. “Analysis paralysis” is the last thing we need in the face of our community’s crippling traffic problems.

But I’m a strong supporter of this new process and will be an active partner on behalf of the federal government because it addresses one of the root causes of the issue – the myriad of governments and agencies involved in transportation planning on the North Shore - and Metro Vancouver more generally - not talking to each other, over the years, in a sufficiently coordinated and collaborative way.

For example, there is not currently a collective vision between these bodies on what a long-term transportation plan for the North Shore ought to look like. One of the many consequences of this is the difficulty it presents for me as North Vancouver’s representative in Ottawa to successfully advocate for federal transportation infrastructure funding.

In case you missed it, the line-up of core partners for this new process initiative is impressive: the three North Shore municipalities, the provincial and federal governments and Translink. Special partners will include the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh governments, the Port of Vancouver, Metro Vancouver, CN Railway and more.

The mandate of the inter-jurisdictional Staff Working Group for this initiative, as outlined in the terms of reference, provides a sense of the objectives:

- Aim to improve the movement of people and goods on and off the North Shore as well as within the North Shore while taking into account local community development plans;
- Take into account transportation infrastructure for all modes of transit;
- Identify opportunities for transportation improvements throughout the North Shore both in the near-term and long-term;
- Provide proposals and recommendations... based on data and modern day best practices that are free from political interpretation and influence.

The timeline for this process is appropriately aggressive – a final report is due in June with recommendations that can be incorporated into Translink’s 30-year Regional Transportation Strategy update which is being developed this year.

But, at the risk of stating the obvious, a 30-year horizon for a fix is not feasible. The economic and personal costs and consequences of this issue are all-too painfully significant and accelerating.

One need look no further than a just-released North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce survey of 150 owners and managers of some of North Vancouver's larger employers:

- 40 percent said they are giving consideration to relocating from the North Shore
- 74% percent reported that traffic congestion is negatively impacting their ability to retain employees with 84% saying it is hurting their ability to attract new employees.

Said one employer: "How can we ask people to work for our company when it takes them two hours to commute here?"

To its credit, the Chamber is proactively enlisting the business community to participate in an action plan which includes working with major employers in geographic hubs to find short and medium term solutions and sharing HR policies that support transit, carpooling and vanpooling.

And the launch of the Integrated North Shore Transportation Planning Process is a signal that all levels of government recognize that we need to up our game to a new unprecedented level of urgency, collaboration, innovation and resolve. And we will.