

## **Singing about “the Cut” and all that jazz**

“Life is a highway. I want to drive it all night long.”

It’s unlikely that Canadian performer Tom Cochrane was thinking of the “Cut” when he penned those lyrics in 1991. But he could have been. Because nighttime is among the relatively few non-peak periods when you can drive that stretch of Highway 1 at the posted speed limit.

Most of the time a more appropriate tune might be James Taylor’s 1977 hit “Traffic Jam”.

A more comforting melody for me recently has been the sound of bulldozers, graders and jackhammers working since last May on the new Mountain Highway Interchange.

It’s the first of four phases of a sprawling \$198 million project – which includes a \$66.6 million federal contribution.

Construction to complete the entire plan will extend into 2021 but we’ll be seeing gradual improvements in traffic flow along the way, as I learned in a recent update discussion with officials from BC’s Ministry of Transportation.

### **Coming this fall**

For example, this fall traffic will begin travelling over the new Mountain Highway overpass providing additional Highway 1 access that will better distribute traffic and relieve pressure at other interchange choke points.

In June, site preparation and advance work will begin on the Keith Road/Seymour Parkway Interchange and the Lynn Creek Connectivity Improvement Project – slated for completion in late 2020. This will involve:

- Widening Highway 1 with two new bridges on either side of the existing 4-lane Lynn Creek Bridge
- Building a Mountain Highway on-ramp providing Lynn Valley residents with direct access to Highway 1
- Improving east/west traffic flow by aligning Mount Seymour Parkway with East Keith Road including a new 5-lane Keith Road overpass over Highway 1. It’s estimated this will result in a 38% reduction in travel time for drivers travelling eastbound down the Cut to Mount Seymour Parkway.

The need to upgrade the 50-year-old Highway 1/Lower Lynn Interchanges is about more than traffic congestion. Safety is a real concern. These interchanges have a higher collision rate and incident severity than the provincial average. When complete, the project is expected to reduce traffic incidents in the Lower Lynn section of Highway 1 by 20 to 35%. Widened shoulders will also allow for safe pull-off in case of an incident without impacting travel lanes.

Pedestrians and cyclists will share the project benefits with 3.5 kilometers of new bike paths, multi-use pathways and trails and sidewalks. Two new tunnels will provide safe crossings beneath Mountain Highway and the Mount Seymour Parkway westbound on-ramp.

More public transit use will be encouraged by improved bus access to Highway 1, project coordination with Phibbs Transit Exchange upgrades and three new bus bays at East Keith Road, Brooksbank Ave. and Mount Seymour Parkway.

All of this is being done with a close eye to potential environmental impacts. Fish habitat will be improved through decreased highway drainage runoff into Keith Creek. A revegetation plan includes the planting of over 5,000 trees and 20,000 shrubs.

### **Blacktop alone not the answer**

This project is significant and its progress is encouraging, but I think we all know by now that we can't simply "blacktop" our way out of North Vancouver's congestion woes.

The development of additional options is currently under discussion within the Integrated North Shore Transportation Planning Process. All three levels of government plus Translink are actively working to produce a coordinated transportation vision for the North Shore.

Public transit enhancements are on the way including a new B-line along Marine Drive, enhanced bus service and more frequent Seabus departures over-town. But transportation planners doubt that will be enough – particularly given the unique and challenging geography of the North Shore.

Possibly the toughest construction project is still ahead – building social consensus on controversial measures such as mobility pricing, urban density and rapid transit to the North Shore.

It will take real political leadership and strong a sense of urgency to get there.

But when we do, I'll look forward to hearing a different tune. Perhaps the Beach Boys!... "I Get Around."