

A Long Term Strategic Approach to Transportation in the Southern Interior

The need for transportation infrastructure that encourages and supports economic growth is a fundamental element of a prosperous economy. However, the infrastructure that exists in many parts of the province not only does not support economic growth but in many areas is actually an active deterrent to communities' ability to prosper.

Nowhere is this more evident than in one of the fastest growing regions of the province – the Southern Interior.

With a growing and diverse economy, the region holds significant importance for the province as a significant engine of growth for the future. From manufacturing, agriculture, construction, education, tourism, high-tech as well as strong commercial and institutional development, the economic strength of the region has driven significant in-migration, both from other provinces and from abroad. This growth has had a profound effect on the region and on the transportation infrastructure that needs a continuing long term strategy.

As with any region in a province as vast and geographically distinct as BC, the viability of the local and regional economy is directly linked with the transportation network which serves it. This network includes provincial highways, local roads, transit service, cycling and pedestrian corridors.

This network is not only critical to the larger urban centres in the region but is also critical to the small communities and the rural areas that are an integral part of the social, environmental and economic fabric of the province.

The Chamber believes that along with the “traditional” highway corridor expansion projects, opportunities for innovative projects and initiatives exist, such as public transit and other initiatives directly and indirectly related to transportation issues, which are critical to the future economic success of the province.

In addition to the economic challenges the transportation network brings, there are also significant safety issues.

In recognition of these challenges, in 2004 Western Economic Diversification Canada partnered with the three regional districts in the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys to produce the report, “Okanagan Valley Transportation Corridor – An Assessment of Select Projects and Initiatives.”

This report delivered a comprehensive prioritized list of transportation infrastructure projects, focused on the corridors between Osoyoos and Enderby and along the corridor between Osoyoos and Princeton (in essence, Highway 97 and Highway 3).

The Chamber welcomed the recommendations of the report which focus on highway expansion and enhancement projects as well as public transit options. The panel also welcomes the efforts made by

the report's authors to prioritize the projects using a benefit-cost analysis to balance the benefits which a project produces against the costs of producing that benefit.

The Chamber notes the significant improvements to the highway 97 corridor by the provincial Government since 2007. While the Chamber welcomes this initiative, it should be noted that these projects do not fully deliver on all of the important on the improvements required.

It is recognized that the footprint of the 2004 study does not address the entire region. As such the Chamber believes that the 2004 Report be used as a base for a long-term vision for the entire region. The scope of the report and the detailed analysis of the various projects are such that an updated study would be prudent in establishing the long-term strategic vision for transportation in the Southern Interior.

The Chamber warmly welcomes this recommendation as both a good idea for the Lower Mainland but also a good idea for other regions of the province where a capacity and need exists, such as the Capital Regional District, and the Southern Interior.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS:

That the Provincial Government

1. Review and take immediate action to update the Okanagan Valley Transportation Corridor-An Assessment of Select Projects and Initiatives:
2. Create an integrated, multi-modal transportation vision for the Southern Interior region that builds on the Okanagan Valley Transportation Corridor – An Assessment of Select Projects and Initiatives report: and
3. Work with the regional districts to explore the branding of Highway 97 through the Okanagan, as a valley-wide economic development initiative.
4. Work with municipalities and regional districts to include the tributary highway of the Southern Interior.