

## Business Examiner Column November 2010

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### Transportation Chaos- The Highway One “parking lot” and the WestShore

*Its 7:35 a.m. and I along with my fellow Westshore and up Island community members are stuck in traffic, bumper to bumper crawling along at a snail's pace. We are all silently steaming, and muttering under our breath and cursing (in a polite Canadian way) the civic leaders who have not had the foresight to see these problems coming, nor apparently the fortitude and creativity to do something about it. We are having the experience of rush hour traffic jams along Highway One and tributaries, worse than ever before. Our fellow “steamed” motorists are calling radio and TV stations and complaining, loudly and understandably, to their local politicians.*

Indeed when the construction on Old Island Highway finishes in March, View Royal Mayor Graham Hill warns us that “it’s only going to get worse!” and unfortunately he’s right. The so called temporary jam ups on Highway one are only symptomatic of the failure to create a long term, system wide coordinated multi faceted plan. Our Chamber members are suffering at the till from those who want to travel to the West Shore to shop, visit and play and our colleagues downtown are suffering from the loss of those who want travel into the downtown and are increasingly deciding not to.

**Everybody is losing many precious hours a day away from family and work and businesses are suffering in the disaster that has become the Highway One parking lot.**

So what can be done? Firstly, BC Transit is trying hard to come up with creative transit solutions and that is greatly appreciated although we would like to see a lot more consultation with the Westshore Communities rather than just the Downtown usual suspects. Whether we have “streetcars” dedicated HOV lanes or whatever, these will be helpful but they are still only short term temporary solutions.

In the midterm, we must turn to rail transportation of some kind. Using the E&N rail corridor seems logical. Langford Mayor Stew Young says that his city’s density will only be built along that corridor. The recent Island Corridor Foundations/MoT study released in July, says that the future success of the E&N rail line is dependent on a number of factors including: “*Increased population growth and transit-oriented development near the E&N corridor*” and “*Increased industrial and commercial development along the E&N rail corridor that would benefit from rail*”. We all know by now that the Westshore is growing at the phenomenal rate of 2.5 % per year and the population will likely double in the next decade. Economic Development has never been stronger.

**If nothing changes imagine, the state of the “Highway One parking lot” in a decade!**

In the long term the solution to these transportation nightmares lies in the fact that we need to have more and more jobs and businesses on the West Shore and beyond. Already transformed far beyond the bedroom communities we might have once been, more and more people want to live work and play in the Western communities where costs are about 30% lower for businesses and homes compared to downtown Victoria. The result will be regained time and business for all, lower carbon footprints and healthier communities.

Time for our politicians at all levels, municipal, CRD and Provincial, to stop sniping, griping and positioning and get their acts together to make sure we are creating healthy communities not parking lots!