

## **Extract from the Richmond Review February 18, 2006**

### **Tunnel will be twinned**

*Matthew Hoekstra, Staff Reporter*

The George Massey tunnel will be twinned and both Highway 99 approaches widened from four lanes to six once the province's more pressing transportation projects are complete, Transportation Minister Kevin Falcon said Thursday.

Ministry officials considered adding the massive project to its recently announced \$3-billion Gateway Program, but left out upgrades to the 47-year-old link for now.

"What we have done is noted that that is part of our longer range plan. So post-Gateway, the next project that would come onto the radar screen would be the Massey Tunnel," Falcon said.

The Gateway Program includes the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge, the widening of the Trans-Canada Highway on each side of the Fraser, building new perimeter roads on both sides of the river and erecting a new Pitt River Bridge.

Falcon said the twinning the tunnel isn't an immediate priority of government since tunnel bottlenecks occur only during the morning and afternoon commutes.

"The latest numbers show us that that's not the crisis point. In fact when we go ahead with the Gateway Program, especially the new South Fraser Perimeter Road, we believe we will see increased flows of traffic through the Massey Tunnel because of traffic diversion."

The Gateway Program definition report says twinning the tunnel would also require improvements to other crossings over the North Arm of the Fraser, such as the Oak Street and Knight Street bridges, or a new crossing to connect with growing central Burnaby.

Falcon said the plan is to twin the tunnel and pay for it in part through tolls after the Gateway project and other major infrastructure projects, such as the Sea-to-Sky Highway widening and Golden Ears Bridge, are complete. That puts tunnel upgrades at least 15 years away.

But veteran Richmond Coun. Harold Steves said the time to move on the tunnel expansion is now.

"I wanted Richmond council to get involved a year ago and insist that they should twin the tunnel. Instead we end up with a motion of council that we tabled saying we should twin the Port Mann Bridge," he said, referring to a Jan. 15, 2005 motion supporting the bridge project.

"Why are we worried about the Port Mann when we've got an opportunity of twinning the tunnel?"

Steves said he discovered two years ago the Transportation Ministry was considering twinning the tunnel, largely due to the impact of the Vancouver Port expansion at Roberts Bank, which would add a third berth to the existing two-berth Deltaport terminal, in addition to a new three-berth terminal.

Steves said a tunnel expansion wouldn't impact farmland as another idea floated years ago would—abridge connecting with No. 8 Road. And now that it's part of the province's long-term plans, the city should go 'full out' in trying to secure the project, including expanding and elevating Highway 99, which could also act as a mid-island dyke.

A twinned tunnel could also incorporate light rail transit, said Steves, and ultimately connect with the Richmond's future Canada Line.

'I don't think it's a matter of the money or when to do it, because they're looking to do it with tolls.'

To solve the problem of getting traffic out of Richmond, Steves suggested the idea he floated last year—a ferry terminal at Iona Island. That would put less traffic on the highways, and a new bridge connecting Iona with Vancouver would alleviate stress on other links, he said. Otherwise a new bridge to Burnaby could be built.

'The sad part of the Gateway Project was it's been so secret,' he said. 'On the Gateway Project we've had no role on it, and I think it's time we did.'

Falcon said he's willing to sit down with Richmond council and discuss the timing of the tunnel project. But he cautioned the province can only take on so many projects at one time or risk straining the workforce and drive up prices.

Mayor Malcolm Brodie said any step to create more capacity over the Middle Arm of the Fraser is 'important.' He said twinning the tunnel is the logical solution, but might not be the only one—although he ruled out a new bridge that would drive highways through farmland.

'To me, the biggest need in terms of decongesting that corridor is in relation to the movement of goods, because we have the land in the Fraser Port in the southeast corner of Richmond, and we're hoping as part of any kind of major improvement that they would put in a Blundell interchange. That will enable the land to be fully developed.'

Progress on a new Highway 99 interchange at Blundell Road has stalled, as a provincial feasibility report is already a year behind schedule.

Brodie fears provincial transportation planners might wait until the tunnel is twinned before building the Blundell interchange.

Public works and transportation committee chair Coun. Linda Barnes said she's skeptical of massive road improvement plans. She said a balance needs to be struck between new roads and bridges with rapid transit and dedicated truck lanes for goods movement.

'I'm not sure at this point that just simply twinning is going to make a difference, whether it's twinning the Port Mann, or twinning the tunnel.'