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April 30, 2012

To all concerned,

As a small community hemmed in by five other municipalities; Burnaby, Surrey, Richmond, Delta and Coquitlam, it can be said that New Westminster has become a drive-thru for hundreds of thousands of vehicles on a daily basis.

Already assaulted by too much noise, congestion, fumes, brake and tire dust ground off and spun into the air and into our lungs, what quality of life does continued densification and a new bridge portend in the future for our little boxed in city?

While studies conducted by major tire manufacturers' claim there are no adverse effects to inhaling tire dust particles, other studies suggest lesser known effects warranting further research such as;

**In conclusion, our results, although preliminary, lend support to the evidence that the organic part of tire debris is potentially harmful to spermatozoa even at 10µg/ml and in particular over a threshold level (50-75 µg/ml), inhibiting their motility and compromising their morphological integrity.**

<http://www.benthamscience.com/open/toandroj/articles/V003/8TOANDROJ.pdf>

Is there an alternative worth looking at?

I believe there is. That is if we are prepared to open the lid, think outside of the box, and bring in tunneling experts from Norway to show us how it was done in their country and how this can be done in ours.

Firstly, the Patullo Bridge foundations are sound. While the decking needs to be re-done and widened, it is wasteful to scrap the entire bridge, spending 800 million plus dollars on a completely new one. Better to renovate the current bridge and spend the surplus on creative ways to effectively deal with traffic once and for all in New Westminster, ensuring a better quality of life for future generations.

In a paper presented to the World Tunnel Congress in 2008, authors note that “three of the ten longest road tunnels in the world with lengths exceeding 10km are located in Norway: the Lærdal tunnel (24,5km), the Gudvanga tunnel (11,4km) and the Folgefonn tunnel (11,1km)” and that “cost-wise construction of long tunnels in Norway is extremely competitive.” <http://www.ctta.org/FileUpload/ita/2008/data/pdf/92.PDF>

Envision one tunnel through and under McBride Boulevard, straight through to the Stormont Connector at Hwy 1, and another tunnel through and under Royal Avenue,

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connecting to Stewardson Way. Filtration systems to scrub the air, traffic flowing without city stoplights, children safely walking to schools without having to dodge, or be killed, by hundreds of thousands of noisy, polluting vehicles using our city streets as a thoroughfare.

The idea of tunneling is not a new one but one that simply is not being considered anymore by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to inform decision-makers. On its website, you will find the New Westminster Area (Study Level 3) consultant's key findings and concepts. Here are the pertinent excerpts concerning Stormont-McBride;

**Stormont-McBride Connector in a trench, 2+2 lanes. The trench option was introduced at the start of the Final MAE, in response to concerns regarding the at-grade concept. This Concept places the Connector in an open trench, allowing for a pedestrian overpass at 13th Avenue and a vehicular crossing at 16th Avenue. It therefore represents the "middle ground" between the at-grade and full-tunnel alternatives.**

**Open trench alignment. With fewer intersections and a higher speed limit, this Concept increased the user benefits. It was less intrusive on the neighbourhood, and a proposed pedestrian overpass at 13th Avenue reduced neighbourhood severance when compared with Concept 4A [street-level]. Construction costs were \$14 million higher, but benefits increased even more so the NPV rose to \$187 million.**

**The above represents the finding of the provincial consultants, and is provided as reference material for use by decision-makers.**

[http://www.th.gov.bc.ca/publications/reports\\_and\\_studies/southcoast/newwest/level3.htm](http://www.th.gov.bc.ca/publications/reports_and_studies/southcoast/newwest/level3.htm)

In other words, the same street level mess and a new 'open-trench' highway bisecting not just our city, but also Burnaby, is being proposed. Increased traffic at higher speed limits; assaulting residents with even higher levels of noise, fumes, tire and carcinogenic brake dust. Is this the poisonous 'concept' we want for our community, to further compromise our children and grandchildren's physical and mental health?

Findings recently released by SFU researchers indicate that schools built less than 75 metres from major traffic routes have an adverse effect on children.

**A study by Simon Fraser University researchers shows Canadian public schools in low-income neighbourhoods are more likely to be located near major roads, exposing students to elevated levels of air and noise pollution.**

**"Studies of children who live near major roads have found that traffic-related air pollution is associated with lower lung function, impaired lung growth, asthma, ear infections, and lower cognitive functioning," says SFU geography grad student Ofer**

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**Amram. “Similar studies of traffic-related noise have found links with increased blood pressure, reduced sleep quality, and cognitive deficits.”**

<http://www.sfu.ca/pamr/media-releases/2012/school-location-a-factor-in-student-health-performance.html>

Currently, New Westminster has five schools built within 75 metres of major traffic routes; Glenbrook Middle, Herbert Spencer, NWSS, Tweedsmuir and Robson. With the new elementary school to be built on the St. Mary’s site, this will bring the total up to six representing lower lung function, impaired lung growth, asthma, ear infections, lower cognitive functioning, increased blood pressure, reduced sleep quality, and cognitive deficits associated with over four thousand, or 2/3, of New Westminster’s children.

It is long overdue for us to start to consider whether to continue past practices of exposing our children and the community to the dangerous effects of being a surface drive-thru, or to demand a different option for our city. Having traffic flowing through and out *under* our streets is a legacy worth striving for.

The Norwegian Tunneling Society is the professional association of the rock blasting and tunneling industry of Norway, and provides information “based on the extensive experience cumulated through decades of rock blasting and underground excavation” resulting in over 5000 km of tunnels being built since founded in 1963 (<http://www.tunnel.no>).

Information found on its website also states;

**The work to initiate co-operation and exchange of experience takes place in committees and project groups. These organizes courses, conferences and member meetings, they work with profiling the industry, establishing contacts in international environments, and with different projects within the special fields that are included in rock technology. All this work is done by members on a voluntary basis. NFF has no employees of its own, but the companies that the individual committee members work for, carries the costs for this work.**

In order to give future generations a better future than the dismally diseased and ‘blindness on’ concept offered by the consultant to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, we, as residents must take action before it is too late. If our government lacks the knowledge it needs to build a comparably short urban road tunnel, look to the experts in this field. *Learn from them.*

Thinking outside of the box, I would like to propose forming a committee of New Westminster and Burnaby residents in order to contact the Norwegian Tunneling Society. Holding a fundraiser would pay for two of its members to come to us and assess how it can be done effectively. By bringing in experts with decades of experience at their

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disposal, perhaps this would convince our government to put the idea of building tunnels under and through our cities on the table.

Should this move forward, I would also like to propose an idea as to how to raise funds for the tunneling project without imposing more tax on the already over-burdened taxpayer. Similar to the War Bonds idea, all Canadians could be given the opportunity to invest funds to help pay for the project. Once complete, a small toll on using the tunnels could repay investments plus interest.

Sincerely,

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