

HERITAGE RAIL PROJECT TO LINK OUR COMMUNITIES

Surrey and North Delta have been poorly served by public transit. There has not been a major infrastructure improvement south of the Fraser River since Skytrain was extended to the King George station in 1994. Given our combined populations and incredible growth, we are now quickly approaching a half-million residents and within the next decade we could surpass the population of Vancouver.

We are at a critical point in deciding the future for our region. If our growth is going to be sustainable, we need to get people out of their vehicles and onto public transit. Perhaps a transportation solution from early last century will become the solution for this one.

In 1910, the BC Electric Interurban Railway began running a freight and passenger service from New Westminster to Chilliwack connecting the forestry and farming communities on the south side of the Fraser River with markets in Vancouver. While passenger trains were discontinued in the 1950's the rail still exists. With the exception of a section of track east of Cloverdale, it is used by perhaps only two freight trains each weekday.

Surrey City council will soon be deciding on whether or not to provide important funding for their Heritage Rail Demonstration Project (HRDP). This project aims to operate a limited weekend passenger service to a ten kilometer section of this existing interurban line between Newton and Cloverdale by late 2009. The project would be running prior to the 2010 Winter Games and will become an Olympic Legacy for the city. Powered by a hydrogen/methane alternative fuel (similar to Translink's Port Coquitlam bus project), it will also support the Olympic sustainability objectives by utilizing hydrogen technology and be a key South of Fraser component of the BC Hydrogen Highway.

This is much more than just another old heritage train. In fact it could well be the crucial first step in connecting North Delta, Surrey, and later Langley with a modern, high capacity, light rail passenger network. If expanded to the entire twenty three kilometers of interurban track through North Delta and Surrey it would connect Scott Road SkyTrain, the Punjabi Market, Nordel Crossing, Newton Bus Station, Sullivan and Cloverdale. Like the Skytrain line in Vancouver, it will serve as the major transit artery for the region. Using convenient existing and expanded transit hubs along the interurban route it would connect many residential and commercial areas and bring people to their jobs, services, shopping, sports and schools throughout the region and beyond.

Cost of the HRDP is between \$5 to \$10 million and an estimated cost of the entire line through Surrey and Delta, including modern community rail cars, is about \$150 million.

It is a project worth supporting and I urge other community leaders to join me in getting involved with this exciting transit solution.

In my next newsletter, I will be exploring this and other environmentally sustainable initiatives for the region. I welcome your comments and suggestions.

Sukh Dhaliwal, Member of Parliament
Newton - North Delta

Unit 113 - 8532 120 Street
Surrey, BC V3W3N5
Phone 604-598-2200
Fax 604-598-2212
www.sukhdhaliwal.ca
dhaliwal@sukhdhaliwal.ca

