

Subject: [Fwd: Seymour Bridge on Dollarton - a "Loser" project?]

Date: Sat, 07 Jun 2003 18:04:01 -0700

From: Brian Platts <bplatts@shaw.ca>

To: Corrie Kost <kost@triumf.ca>

Subject: Seymour Bridge on Dollarton - a "Loser" project?

Date: Sat, 07 Jun 2003 15:38:59 -0700

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I promised a councillor an info package re this. My view remains that spending millions

on this bridge is largely a waste of money UNTIL the real bottleneck - the Second Narrows entrance - is fixed. The story is below. It may be of use to you when this comes up. It also, in my view, brings into question why we are spending money on studies for this bridge.

The big risk to council on this one is you spend the \$6 MM (or is it nine now?), and it does what I believe is the case - almost nothing.

The twinning will only help the (roughly) one car in 10 crossing the Dollarton Bridge that is going west toward Lonsdale, and the buses to Phibs (which is good). The twinning does nothing for the other 9 heading across the Second Narrows to the south shore. They remain bottlenecked as before - by the Second Narrows bridge entrance. (Note staff used about 1 car in 5 in their work, but an e mail from them says this was a count by a district resident. I counted it several times in 2001 and get 1 in 10 to 1 in 13 in the morning rush hour.)

So you spend \$6 MM and it's obvious to most that it is of no help to them.

The provincial Dept. of Highways seems to support this concern - from a March 2002 e mail from Mr. Keiser which he has agreed I may send you:

"This means if twinning is to happen, it must be in concert with other infrastructure improvements in the area" and "from the provincial perspective, twinning the Seymour River Bridge in isolation from any other improvements to the north bridge head and the Dollarton I/C would not achieve the desired results".

So the province supports the twinning, at least in concept, but with that caveat, unless he has changed his mind.

I also note that when staff were given the bridge job, they were not given a "do nothing" option.

SEYMOUR BRIDGE TWINNING PROJECT

EMAIL TO MAYOR AND COUNCIL DECEMBER 11/99

This subject may come up "early next century" and I thought I'd provide some information on the project. I have a number of questions to Staff and when I get the answers I'll update this assessment. Personally, after considerable study, I think this bridge twinning project is a loser.

I note that not ONE of the facts below was put to the electorate in the "1999 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION" DNV information paper (the large fold-out paper) regarding referendum question 2 - the bridge project. There is a hint about the "1 in 5 cars" issue mentioned below - but only a hint - unless you know the project, you can't decipher it.

Sorry about the mix of colours, but the blue is an update.

Having some time on my hands, and with a background as a planner, I took a look at the DNV referendum question which asks if we want to twin the Seymour River bridge on the Dollarton Highway. Talking to district staff, and reviewing the 1998 DNV Annual Report, I came to the following conclusions, which lead me personally to vote "NO" on this referendum question:

* The cost for this project will be about \$6 MM. This is nearly as much as the \$7.9 MM spent on all "roads, sidewalks, street lighting, and other public works" in 1998, according to the DNV Annual Report. Relative to normal district capital expenditures, it is a lot of money, especially for one project.

* The project will allow those driving west on Dollarton to the cities of North Van. and West Van. to bypass the line-up waiting on Dollarton for the Second Narrows Bridge, but will not help those who cross the Second Narrows Bridge. Their bottleneck is the Second Narrows Bridge itself, and its entrance from Dollarton. Note that the DNV information to the electorate said (correctly, in my view) that a benefit of the project is "reduced queue length for traffic destined for Highway 1". Yes, the queue will be shorter, because the cars not going to the south shore will bypass the south shore bound queue. BUT although the line-up heading for the south shore will be shorter up to the bridge entrance ramp, it will not be faster, except to where the Second Narrows bridge entrance ramp starts. >From that point to the bridge itself, nothing has changed and no time is saved going to the south shore. So people may have read this as "I'll get to the south shore faster", which I believe is false.

* District Staff estimate that one in five vehicles driving west on

Dollarton in the morning rush hour will save time due to this project (these are the people not going to the south shore). Staff could not tell me with any certainty how much time this one in five will save on their morning journey, but guessed 5 to 10 minutes normally, and much more if there are accidents delaying traffic onto the Second Narrows Bridge. Citizens surveyed this several times and find it is more like one car in ten at morning rush hour is going

* Staff told me that no financing plan is in place for the project. However, if one assumes it is financed and amortised as was the \$12 MM borrowed for the 1996 Referendum Projects, taxes would have to rise about 0.6% for 20 years for this one project, assuming zero maintenance costs for the bridge project. DNV debt, which was near zero in 1997, and was \$12 MM at 1998 year end, would increase by 50% over the 1998 level due to this project, assuming it is financed by DNV debt rather than raiding the Heritage Fund. So we continue to live beyond our means, now by raiding the debt markets instead of the Heritage Fund.

* Staff could not tell me the value of the savings in time. I would expect, as a help to a recommendation, one would calculate an estimate of the total time saved in a year by residents, and assume an average hourly wage and hence the total dollar value of the savings. Now this approach is very rough because you do not know what people will do with the saved time (sleep in, or work?) nor the value of the saved time to the people or to society. But one can make a generous estimate and assume they all work that extra time and let's assume the value of their time to society is twice their wages and that they average \$25/hr wages (about \$50,000 income per year). For the roughly 260 cars surveyed in June 1997 in the peak AM hour, and assuming each saves 15 minutes by bypassing the line-up on Dollarton as they head along the North Shore, time worth \$390,000 per year is saved based on these assumptions and one worker per car. In simple payout terms, the bridge, assuming zero maintenance, pays for itself in 15 years. Not something I'd invest in!!!

* Now I appreciate you cannot do everything in financial terms - you'd never build parks if you did. But it does give some idea of value for money spent.

* I also would want to understand what happens when the Second Narrows entrance or bridge itself is debottlenecked. This would presumably solve the Dollarton line-up for all parties, regardless of destination. Would the bridge twinning then be largely wasted money? If so, we'd be better to put the \$6 MM against a Second Narrows entrance project and try to accelerate it, particularly where the bridge payout time may be 15 plus years.

* The DNV information to the DNV electorate speaks of "portions of the existing infrastructure are substandard and unsafe". However, I cannot find these issues mentioned in the June 9/99 Report to Council on the project so I cannot comment as to whether this is a real driving force.

In summary, based on the information I have to date, by expending \$6 MM, a large sum especially for one project, we add about 50% to DNV's debt. Taxes for all DNV residents could rise by about 0.6 % for 20 years (excluding

maintenance costs), to help one in five cars (from Seymour only, and only those in Seymour that use Dollarton) to get to work in the morning perhaps 5 to 10 minutes earlier on normal days. Is this fiscal responsibility? Are there not more important projects? And did the electorate have the proper information to judge in the referendum - I think NOT. Can we afford this type of marginal project when we are again building DNV debt?

While any improvement in traffic is welcome - and I personally would benefit from it - this does not sound like a bargain to me.

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