

# Editorial: Region needs transport plan

Langford's new West Shore Parkway will help ease traffic congestion in the community, save time and cut greenhouse-gas emissions. It is a valuable piece of infrastructure that once again highlights Langford's can-do attitude.

That said, we need to ask if we aren't heading down the wrong road.

While the capital region flails around in fruitless search of a transportation policy, we are building new roads and expensive interchanges that, within a few years, will be just as clogged as the old roads and intersections.

On Oct. 4, the 3.5-kilometre parkway opened a link between the Trans-Canada Highway and Sooke Road, at a cost of \$22.5 million.

The goal, according to Mayor Stew Young, is to move commuters and goods faster, connect businesses with the city's industrial park and reduce gridlock, which will also cut greenhouse gases. He envisions as much as \$500 million in economic spinoffs.

"It connects people from Sooke up to the Malahat, it just gives us this economic zone from the Malahat all the way down to Sooke or Renfrew, and it's exciting for the West Shore, for sure," he said.

All true. But here's the catch: Once drivers realize the benefits to be had by taking the new parkway, traffic volumes will increase. The road will not be able to handle the flow of vehicles. One lane in each direction will prove inadequate, so there will be calls for the parkway to become a four-lane thoroughfare.

The same congestion is to be expected on the 3.5-kilometre Bear Mountain Parkway, which will connect the Leigh Road interchange and the Bear Mountain development.

Young expects that after that road is opened, the community will need no more major road projects for 20 years. Don't count on it.

All those new people, goods, cars and trucks won't stay in Langford. They will flood onto regional highways that are already overtaxed. Once the McKenzie interchange is finished, they will flow off the Trans-Canada Highway only to be bottled up on McKenzie or be stuck at Tillicum. The Colwood Crawl will become an even longer parking lot.

Ultimately, we need a regional transportation plan.

After he opened the new parkway, Young called on the provincial and federal governments to fix the Trans-Canada between the McKenzie interchange, in Saanich, and Langford. He urged residents and businesses to push their leaders for action.

But simply widening the highway just buys us a few years before the arteries harden again. Unless everyone works in the municipalities where they live, some form of mass transit is the only way to ease the Colwood Crawl.

Young is right in arguing that high-occupancy vehicle lanes for car-pooling and transit would ease the crawl. He is right that the E&N rail corridor has to be put to effective use for buses or trains that would move a lot of people quickly.

Langford, to its credit, has built a strong web of infrastructure.

Unfortunately, that web is connected to other municipalities only by frail threads inadequate to the task.

Young warns against letting the Capital Regional District get involved. Well, if what passes for regional government isn't the answer, who does that leave? Higher levels of government had to be dragged into the imperfect McKenzie interchange project, so don't look to them for direction.

Without a regional co-ordinating authority, any hope of change rests on co-operation among the municipalities.

Even if we get them to co-operate, they have to co-operate to a common purpose. In other words, we need a plan. We cannot pave our way out of gridlock.

It's time to look ahead, with a regional plan for mass rapid transit.