

# New plan is really just an update

**Sounds familiar:**  
Many of the roads, bridges and other transportation projects have been touted previously



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The advance billing from the government had Transportation Minister Todd Stone taking the wraps off a 10-year transportation plan Tuesday, but the actual presentation was more like an update on a work in progress.

Stone re-announced the first three years worth of funding at \$2.5 billion, those dollars having been previewed in the budget tabled in the legislature a month ago.

Many of the roads, bridges and other projects mentioned in the five dozen or so pages of the B.C. on the Move report had been touted previously as well.

Still, here and there, the document provided indications of where the B.C. Liberals will be moving on transportation before the release of the next iteration of the plan, probably on the eve of the 2017 provincial election.

For instance, the Lower Mainland section of the report declares it will be a priority "to advance development of the George Massey Tunnel replacement project," first announced by Premier Christy Clark in the last campaign.

The ministry has already spent \$18 million on preparatory work for what is likely to be a multi-billion-dollar toll bridge and the project is booked to consume a further \$53 million over the next two years. Final approval is still up to cabinet, subject to completion of a business plan.

But Tuesday's release from the Transportation Ministry contained a reference to the merits of going ahead with the replacement: "The new bridge is estimated to save the average peak-hour commuter 30 minutes a day or more, with travel time and reliability benefits forecast to be more than \$80 million in the first full year of operation."

Sounds like the rough draft of a press release for a sod-turning by the premier during Campaign 2017.

With the completion of the twinning of the Port Mann crossing and adjacent sections of Highway 1, the plan announced a next-phase commitment to "initiate design for the construction of six-laning on Highway 1 from Langley to Abbotsford."

Other commitments were hedged. The plan repeated the provincial commitment to "fund one-third of the cost of new rapid transit projects and



GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

The B.C. on the Move report released this week re-announced a number of projects long since unveiled, such as the George Massey Tunnel replacement project, introduced by Premier Christy Clark in the last election campaign.

the Pattullo Bridge." But with this caveat: "provided they can be accommodated within the provincial fiscal plan and the investments are supported by a business case."

All very iffy, and meant to be so in light of the plebiscite on a regional sales tax to cover the local government third of transportation expansion.

Stone also reiterated a pledge "to work with the region to secure federal funding for rapid transit projects." Which helps explain the timing on his release of the plan — the province will be pitching for its fair share of the promise-making action in a federal election year.

This being a plan for the whole province, many of the biggest-ticket projects were for roads and bridges outside the Lower Mainland.

The Liberals have already spent and committed \$450 million to three- and four-laning about half the distance of Highway 97 through the Cariboo Corridor and are promising to build out the rest in the years ahead. Likewise they will press onward with four-laning the Trans-Canada from Kamloops to the Alberta border, about half the

distance being still of the two-lane variety.

By way of a reminder that truckloads of dollars don't go that far building roads in B.C., the plan contained an update on the cost of upgrading the Trans-Canada through Kicking Horse Canyon, near Golden.

The federal and provincial governments have already spent in excess of \$300 million on the project, an amount dwarfed by the preliminary estimate for the final phase: "up to \$650 million." Just to rebuild and widen a mere four kilometres of the Trans-Canada.

One recalls the observation of former highways minister Alex Fraser, that one could pave over the entire province of Saskatchewan for what it costs to build a few kilometres of road through the mountains of B.C.

As another reminder of the costly nature of road-building, the plan reports that on the recently completed South Fraser Perimeter Road, the federal and provincial governments spent \$60 million on "environmental measures such as the creation of fish, bird and amphibian habitat, along with stream enhancements, wildlife underpasses

and the planting of more than 50,000 trees and plants."

Looking ahead to other possibilities, B.C. on the Move pledges to "continue planning and initiate community engagement for a future second crossing of Okanagan Lake."

The five-lane William R. Bennett crossing of the lake is still spanking new by the standards of most bridges in the province, having been completed in 2008. But the report maintains that "initiating planning for a future second crossing now will ensure that the province is ready when the extra capacity is needed."

Just as a precaution, you understand. I'm sure it is only a coincidence that the Okanagan has been a reliable bastion of support for the Liberals, including the provision of a refuge for Premier Clark when she lost her seat on the west side of Vancouver — something to keep in mind when weighing the likelihood that the Liberals will be in any rush to fund a SkyTrain extension to Arbutus Street, that being the threshold of the riding that dumped the premier in the last election.

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