

North Vancouver infrastructure projects lacking provincial funds

Where's the money? North Vancouver mayors ask province

[Brent Richter](#) / North Shore News

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Mountain Highway north of Keith Road will be closed this weekend for relocation of a gas line at the Highway 1 overpass. During this time, the off-ramp towards Lynn Canyon will remain open but the off-ramp towards Keith Road will be closed. photo Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

Work is underway for two major North Shore infrastructure projects but municipal leaders are getting nervous about whether provincial funds will arrive to help pay for them.

The new Lions Gate Wastewater Treatment Plant is in its design phase and must be online by 2020. Work crews are already clearing trees and excavating for the Mountain Highway interchange project.

Typically, the costs for major infrastructure projects like these are divided three ways between the municipalities, the province and the federal government. The federal government committed \$212.3 million for the roughly \$700-million sewage plant in the 2016 budget and Metro Vancouver's municipalities have settled on a formula for how the Lower Mainland municipalities will pay their share but the province hasn't yet committed funds, said City of North Vancouver Mayor Darrell Mussatto, also chairman of Metro Vancouver's utilities committee.

"We have been liaising with the province for the last couple of years and it's gone from one ministry to another in terms of responsibility," Mussatto said. "We are just anxiously awaiting a response from the provincial government."

Without a significant provincial grant, finishing the plant would result in a big hit to local utilities bills over a 15-year-ammortization, Mussatto said.

"We have made it known to them that it's the No. 1 priority in the region for Metro Vancouver," he said. "It has been for at least three years now."



The North Shore's MLAs have been supportive, Mussatto said, but the critical step in getting the project funded is having it come before the Ministry of Finance's treasury board, a committee of government MLAs headed up by Finance Minister Mike de Jong. **Mussatto said he's cautiously optimistic that will happen this fall.**

"They might want to be getting the best bang for their buck so to speak, get it closer to the election," he said. "If they're going to announce significant dollars, do you do it in the summer when people are away on holidays and not really paying attention to news? Or do you do it in the fall?"

Despite not being able to pin down a location, Victoria's sewage plant already enjoys a one-third commitment by the province, Mussatto noted. Mussatto added the new federal Liberal government has "reinforced" the 2020 deadline.

North Vancouver-Lonsdale MLA Naomi Yamamoto said she and her fellow North Shore MLAs have had more meetings about the treatment plant than on any other subject. "We know that this is a real important project for the region," she said "We've met with folks in government to let them know how important this is to us. ... It does have to go through the treasury board cycle but I'm not at liberty to comment when that happens."

And unlike Victoria, the North Shore has selected a location – at the foot of Pemberton Avenue in the Norgate neighbourhood – and received buy-in from neighbouring residents and businesses, Yamamoto added.

In the case of the Mountain Highway interchange, the province has already committed \$23.5 million for its share of the \$50-million project. But in 2015, the two sides began investigating a new design, which physically separates express lanes headed for the bridge from collector lanes intended for use by people heading for the interchanges at the bridgehead. In order to do that, the old orange Lynn Creek Highway 1 bridge would have to be replaced with a wider option. The province wasn't intending to replace the 1960 bridge, however, for another 10 years.



District of North Vancouver Mayor Richard Walton said he questions the wisdom of proceeding with work on the old designs when it's unclear whether the province will fund the new one.

"The district's position is quite clear – that we don't think it makes sense to move ahead without ... widening the orange bridge simultaneously," Walton said. "It just doesn't make any sense. Obviously, if you're going to try to improve the traffic flow through there, you need to deal with the one choke point that seems to be causing a lot of problems."

North Vancouver-Seymour MLA Jane Thornthwaite said she believes staff and elected members from all three levels of government are on board for a new bridge, but determining the cost and how much each level will pay is expected to take some time.

"I know that everybody would like to do it and my understanding is that our people are talking to the federal government in addition to the municipality. It's definitely not off the table. It would be compatible with the construction that's going on right now because the ministry has made sure that anything that comes available in the near future can be easily incorporated into what they're doing now."

As part of the project, Mountain Highway will be closed for the entire weekend from 7 a.m. Saturday, until 7 a.m. Monday, Aug. 15 while FortisBC moves a natural gas pipeline.

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