

Sunshine Coast fixed link questioned

Province funds \$250K study to explore highway, bridge options

[Brent Richter](#) / North Shore News

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file photo North Shore News

The province is moving ahead with a study into the feasibility of building a bridge or highway to the Sunshine Coast.

The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure announced this week it will pay civil engineers R.F. Binnie & Associates \$250,000 to report back on whether a highway link around Jervis Inlet or direct bridge connections along the coast are technically possible, and what the costs and benefits of each option would be compared with existing ferry services.

A fixed link to the Sunshine Coast would be a boon to tourism and investment on the coast, according to Transportation Minister Todd Stone.

But tourism and trade in Powell River and Sechelt could mean headaches for communities on this side of Howe Sound. West Vancouver's acting mayor Craig Cameron said the obvious concern of a new highway leading into his community is traffic.

"They query whether there would be a lot more traffic because there's already a substantial amount of ferry traffic. Would that many more people move to the Sunshine Coast with a fixed link?" he asked. "There may be an increase, and in any event, we're seeing Squamish and Whistler growing and the traffic from Squamish and Whistler growing and adding to the general North Shore traffic, which just seems to be getting worse every year. Ultimately, there's two ways to get out of the community. ... You've got the highway and you've got Marine Drive and there's many times of day when it's just impossible to get through that intersection.

The idea also isn't going over well with the Horseshoe Bay Business Association.

"Of course, for us, it would make a significant impact if they were to take the Langdale ferry off this route and drive

people wherever it is they're heading," said association president Holly Kemp. "Is that really where we should be spending our infrastructure dollars? Because it will be horrendously expensive."

Kemp says she predicts the study will show a fixed link is technically feasible but too expensive to carry out.

"It's billions and billions and billions of dollars to make that happen," she said.

That potential for cross-Howe Sound strife is not lost on Jordan Sturdy, West Vancouver-Sea to Sky MLA.

"Gathering the data, assessing the practicality of options and the orders of magnitude of costs will all contribute to an informed discussion of the long-term plan for connecting the upper and lower Sunshine Coast to the Lower Mainland," Sturdy said in a release. "This issue has been a hot topic as long as I can remember and I look forward to meeting with the communities to hear their perspectives."

A final report from the feasibility study is due in the fall.

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