

24 May 2016 The Vancouver Sun Dr. Perry Kendall is B.C.'s provincial health officer, Dr. Patricia Daly is chief medical health officer for Vancouver Coastal Health and Dr. Victoria Lee is chief medical health officer for Fraser Health Authority.

## **Improved public transit a good way of achieving better health**

### **Better transport options just the ticket, writes Dr. Perry Kendall, Dr. Patricia Daly and Dr. Victoria Lee**

This plan has strong potential to put us on a path to a healthier region.

As public health physicians, our job is to prevent disease and promote health for everyone in our regions.

Today, we are advocating improved public transit because it is a proven road to better health for all.

Is transit really a public health issue or should we just stick to germs and vaccines?

The reality is that our biggest health challenges in the 21st century are injuries and chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

Together, these conditions are responsible for three quarters of the burden of disease and health care costs in British Columbia.

We know the “vaccines” that are effective against these problems: physical activity, good nutrition, not smoking, sufficient sleep, stress reduction, a healthy and safe environment, social connectedness — and sufficient income to achieve all of these things.

Increased availability and use of public transit has been indisputably shown to affect many of these parameters: Less air pollution. ■ Fewer deaths and injuries from vehicle ■ crashes.

More physical activity. Every bus/train/sub■ way ride starts and ends with a walk.

Less commuting stress. Someone else does ■ the driving for users; fewer vehicles on the road for drivers.

Cheaper, by several thousands ■ of after-tax dollars a year.

More equitable. It improves access to ■ jobs, services, friends, and family, especially for those with low income, disabilities, and seniors.

That's why today we are calling attention to public transit. Evidence shows that investment in public transit translates into tangible health benefits.

In Metro Vancouver, we are one step ahead of the game.

We have a regional transportation plan which sets us on a path to a world-class, modern transportation system.

Investing in a comprehensive plan gives the best value because it considers the diverse needs of the whole region, and builds up a complete system rather than unconnected fragments here and there.

This plan has strong potential to put us on a path to a healthier region.

If realized, 70 per cent of residents will live within walking distance of frequent transit. That's more than 1.75 million people. The plan commits to 300 km of new protected bike paths; 30 per cent more HandyDart service; an 80 per cent increase in Night Bus service; 50 per cent more SeaBus service; a new light rail line service in Surrey and Langley; a Broadway subway; 200 additional SkyTrain cars; and 400 new buses, among many other highlights.

The federal government understands the value of transit investments.

The federal government has recently announced that it will invest \$372 million in public transit for Metro Vancouver.

This funding brings us a step closer to muchneeded improvements to our transportation system, but it still needs to be matched by B.C. and local funding.

We are writing today to urge local and provincial governments to seize this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fund critical transportation infrastructure and to build a modern, healthpromoting transportation network.

The result will be significantly fewer of our citizens burdened with avoidable illnesses and injuries — and healthier, more livable communities for all.