

Rapid transit for UBC-Broadway corridor key to economic success

BY GREGOR ROBERTSON AND STEPHEN TOOPE, SPECIAL TO THE SUN MARCH 6, 2013

Every day, 110,000 people travel through the UBC-Broadway corridor by transit. Whether you drive or take the bus, you know our transit system exceeds capacity, and it's choking the Metro Vancouver region. Over half a million bus riders are passed up annually - that's 2,000-plus pass-ups every weekday - and once you do get on a bus, chances are you're standing for your entire trip.

Now add an extra 150,000 people. That's how many more people will be living and working in the corridor by 2040 - and the majority of them will be taking transit.

The UBC-Broadway corridor is North America's busiest bus corridor - and with 50 per cent of transit users from outside of Vancouver, it serves the entire Metro Vancouver region. That's because, after downtown, its B.C.'s second largest employment centre, with more jobs than the next eight town centres combined.

It's also Western Canada's largest health care precinct, with millions of British Columbians visiting VGH, UBC Hospital and BC Cancer Agency each year. The University of British Columbia, our largest university, contributes \$10 billion to our economy each year and anchors the corridor. With more than 150 spinoff companies, UBC innovations support one of North America's fastest growing life sciences and technology hubs, which is growing twice as fast as the rest of the B.C. economy.

A report released by KPMG last week outlines the tremendous economic opportunity that exists within the corridor. With job and employment growth projections from just two years ago already being surpassed, and new office and research space being developed along Broadway and at UBC, we have the ability to secure our position as a global leader in health research and life sciences. But our failing transportation system puts this massive economic potential at risk. Cities with world-class technology hubs like Toronto, London and New York all have rapid transit to connect their job corridors with top academic institutions, enabling efficient movement of goods and people. The KPMG report found that these cities have a competitive advantage over Vancouver when it comes to attracting and retaining top talent and investment in technology opportunities. A reliable, efficient public transit system is crucial to ensuring local companies can thrive and compete with businesses from around the world.

When it comes to the UBC-Broadway corridor, rapid transit is the only solution. Studies done by Trans-Link and the City of Vancouver show that bus capacity along the corridor is maxed out, and a streetcar system would be unable to handle the population growth we

know is coming. With four rapid transit lines feeding in to Broadway between Commercial and Cambie - the Expo, Millennium and Canada Lines, and soon the Evergreen Line - the demand for better, faster east/west transit through the corridor to UBC is only going to grow.

Without rail-based rapid transit along the UBC-Broadway corridor, we can't meet the significant growth that is coming our way, and stand to lose out on new investment in our economy, with top talent moving to other cities.

Instead of developing medical breakthroughs and launching new high-tech companies, we'll be stuck in gridlock - literally - as cars and buses fight for space on a road that does not have any more space to give.

A rapid transit system that connects UBC to the Broadway corridor and the entire region is an investment that makes good economic sense today - and is crucial for the future of our province.

Gregor Robertson is mayor of Vancouver. Stephen Toope is president of the University of British Columbia.

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