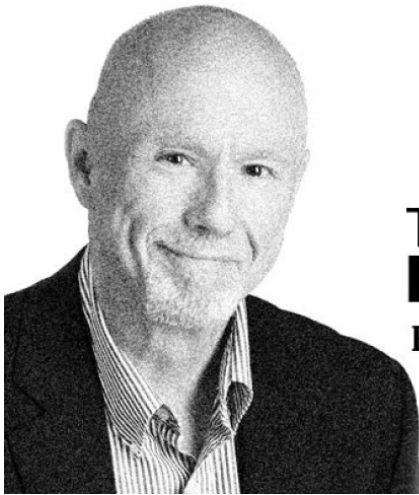


north shore news

SULLIVAN: Finding cure for the Cut a colossal challenge

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The
NORTH SIDE
Paul Sullivan

How much can we expect from our politicians?

Right now, you can imagine the retorts and snorts. But it's not a rhetorical question, especially these days when **the most successful politicians routinely overpromise and inevitably under-deliver.**

I was prompted to ask this question when my mailbox yielded the Fall Update from Jonathan Wilkinson, North Vancouver MP.

Before I go any further, full disclosure: I worked on Jonathan Wilkinson's election campaign, resigning only when I agreed to write this column.

If anyone asks, I think Jonathan is the template for a great MP: smart, rational, dedicated, idealistic, well-connected ... if more politicians were like Jonathan, politicians wouldn't be fighting it out for the honour of least trustworthy profession along with used car salesmen, and, uh, journalists.

Still, the headline on his latest bulletin made me go hmm: Easing Congestion on the Cut. The rest of the piece outlines what Jonathan has done to date to deal with the mother of all traffic jams: "Over the past eight months," he says, "I've been working with federal, provincial and municipal representatives – initially assessing options, and feasibility and more recently, reviewing potential designs. Solid progress is being made."

Well, it's not in a league with "Make America Great Again," but for anyone who has tried to get from Westview to the Second Narrows Bridge any time after 2:30 p.m., the promise of "solid progress" is right up there with manna from heaven.

So why do I have, in the immortal words of Han Solo, a bad feeling about this?

Is it because “solid progress” could mean just about anything but: “traffic will flow freely again within the next few days?”

Months? Years? Decades? The arrival of self-driving cars? Teleportation?

Any fool can see that there are so many moving parts to the problem, it's no wonder there's a traffic jam. At least something's moving.

And while our federal MP is assessing options and reviewing designs, other politicians are busy building highrises that pour more traffic onto the Upper Levels, ramping up the difficulty of the problem that's not going to be solved by a couple of freeway exits and the replacement of the orange bridge.

The only actual solution, as far as I can tell, is to build rapid transit from a central location on the North Shore across (or under) Burrard Inlet, connecting up to SkyTrain service on the other side. And that's simply not going to happen, at least not while anyone old enough to read this piece is still alive. Surrey and Vancouver come first, so the North Shore can just suck it up.

Yet we want our politicians to do something, so it makes sense for Jonathan to make a federal case out of it. Of course, it's not really his jurisdiction. The municipalities build the local roads; the province builds the highway. Ottawa does come bearing infrastructure dollars, so the federal government has some leverage, beyond moral suasion.

So here's the thing: Jonathan Wilkinson is one of the North Shore's best politicians, but is it fair for him to raise expectations about easing congestion on the Cut? Can anything short of the Apocalypse ease congestion on the Cut?

The problem almost defies belief, never mind resolution. I frequently drive by it going the other way, and quite often, the jam starts at the foot of the Second Narrows, then extends to the Cap Road exit; although most of the time, it starts at Westview. Movement is painfully slow. Add rain and a fender bender and you might as well catch a nap while you're waiting for the car in front of you to move.

It's unacceptable, maddening, dangerous, and pollutes the atmosphere. At least Jonathan is trying to take it on. Maybe I should be encouraging him rather than casting shade. Maybe

I'm wrong and the efforts of a single individual with a vision and a will can indeed ease congestion on the Cut. Maybe I should dare to hope.

Remember “Hope is a town in Arkansas”? Or the Canadian version: the last stop before the mountains heading east. It's hardly a word to use in the same sentence as a politician, except when the sentence is: “I hope he gets arrested.”

But OK, I'm all in. When Jonathan Wilkinson says “working to address North Vancouver's transportation needs will remain a high priority for me in the coming year,” I'll take him at his word. As the year rolls (or lurches, stop and go) along, I'll expect more “solid progress.” Either that, or I'll get fooled ... again.

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