

Bridge the gap

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We applaud the completion of the new sidewalks and suicide prevention barriers on the Ironworkers Memorial Second Narrows Crossing.

At \$20 million to widen the sidewalks and install the fence, this is a big cost but we are convinced we are getting value.

The fence might not be the prettiest sight but it's better than seeing a family needlessly in grief. The Ironworkers, along with four other Lower Mainland bridges, was the source of 50 per cent of all suicides by jumping in the province. Numerous studies have found that if people are physically prevented from acting on a fatal decision in a moment of crisis, they can be helped. The vast majority won't go on to attempt suicide again.

But the fences are just part of what makes this a good project. We expect more cyclists and pedestrians to take advantage of the wider sidewalks. Clearly, during its design 60 years ago, these people were an afterthought. It's cheaper to do something right the first time than to retrofit it later.

There are a number of road infrastructure projects in the works on the North Shore and around the Lower Mainland and we'd like to think they will all be multi-modal. That means they'll work for drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. A startling number of our streets still don't even have sidewalks.

As they say in urban planning circles when asked to justify the expense of bike lanes: It's hard to justify a bridge based on the number of people swimming across a river.

To put it another way: If you build it, they will come.

A better question: If we build it, how many will come? A cost-benefit analysis, not just political correctness, should be applied to justify all publicly funded projects. - cjk

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