

**Colin Hansen, Minister of Economic Development
Speech to the Vancouver Board of Trade
Friday, October 7, 2005**

Check against Delivery

It has now been four years and four months since British Columbians elected a B.C. Liberal Government under the leadership of Premier Gordon Campbell.

I am extremely proud of what we, as a province have been able to accomplish over that period of time.

It is tempting to take the next twenty to twenty-five minutes to brag about how this province is a much better place today than it was in 2001.

I could talk to you at length about why British Columbia's economy is back. About why, over the last four years in B.C., we have made some significant strides forward.

I could tell you all about the economic indicators that are showing great improvement: why construction is booming; how retail sales are up; unemployment is down; jobs are at record numbers; why people are no longer fleeing the province; and why those who left in the 90's are moving back.

Instead this afternoon, I want to talk to you about the future:

The fact is – as much as these seem like very good years for British Columbia – I am convinced that the best years for this province are the years yet to come.

There is generally a rule that a Minister doesn't share the substance of a private conversation with the Premier but I'm going to risk doing just that:

Shortly after being sworn into this responsibility on June 15th, I met with the Premier privately to chat about his expectations

My actual title is "Minister of Economic Development and Minister Responsible for the Asia Pacific Initiative and the 2010 Olympics".

The Premier said to me, "I want you to know that the most important part of that is the Asia Pacific.

The Olympics, as exciting as they are and will be, are not an end in themselves – they are a means to an end.

They give us a huge opportunity to showcase British Columbia to the world and to generate long-term interest for people to visit, to invest, to buy products and to come here to live.

The Economic Development part is to put in place the strategies that will generate jobs and economic growth for the decades to come.

The Premier has set as one of our great goals for the next decade the goal to generate more jobs per capita than any other province.

Economic Development is about our future and the key shift that is being led by the Premier is that our future IS the Asia Pacific.

Those of you who have known me for many years will know that this has been a passion of mine going back to 1983.

Twenty years ago I was serving as Vice President of the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada.

We knew then that the Asia Pacific would offer tremendous opportunity for Canada in the 21st century.

When I was at the Foundation, I gave numerous speeches in various parts of Canada and, two weeks ago, I came across a speech that I gave to the Hong Kong Canada Business Association in Saskatoon on May 11, 1988.

I started that speech by saying:

“During the past 15 years, we have witnessed the start of a major realignment of the world economy. It is a realignment that will have a major impact on every Canadian and yet, we are only just beginning to try to position Canada to meet the challenges of that change.

“The change I refer to is the emergence of the Asia-Pacific region as a major player in the economy of the Western World.”

Today, the Asia’s economies are developing at an phenomenal rate:

The International Monetary Fund said last month it expected China’s economy to grow by nine percent this year.

India – whose economy is growing at nearly seven percent – recently announced its state-owned domestic airline was replacing the entire fleet with (43) new jets to help meet the needs of its growing middle-class.

The IMF has also doubled its growth forecast for Japan this year.

With that growth, come opportunities for British Columbia to play a huge role in the flow of trade and investment across the Pacific.

To capitalize on those opportunities, we must build our strategies around our existing strengths.

By far, our greatest strength in this Province is our people: educated, experienced, skilled, traveled, knowledgeable people.

That’s why I believe the key to our success in the Asian market is as close as your co-worker, your friend or your next-door neighbour.

If Trade Mission’s are about building face to face relationships that will lead to international trade and investment, then our trade missions should not just take us to China, or Japan or India – but they should take us into our own communities – in our own backyard.

These days, four in five immigrants to B.C. come from Asia.

In fact, stats now show 22 per cent of B.C.’s population is of Asian heritage, that’s the highest of any place in North America – and it’s nearly three times higher than it was 20 years ago.

B.C. is an incredible culturally diverse province, now home to literally thousands of immigrants who grew up in many of the countries that make-up the Asia-Pacific.

For example, some 88,000 people from Hong Kong alone now live here in British Columbia¹,

That's 88,000 people who have relatives, friends and business associates back in Hong Kong.

For too long, we have failed to capitalize on the great business skills that these new Canadians can bring to the table.

These are people who have worked in Asia, who have the know-how to do business there, who speak the language, who know the culture --and who still have contacts there.

They're in a unique position to be our most credible ambassadors, business agents and our tutors.

To help develop our Asia Pacific strategies, we have recently established the Asia-Pacific Trade Council.

... Its mission is to guide us as we seek opportunities to take advantage of the province's unique gateway location to maximize commerce with the Asian market.

The Council brings together a range of people from various sectors to help us set out a long-term vision for B.C. – identifying issues, opportunities and challenges for investment and trade.

We have some of the pieces in place -- their job is to help ensure that we are doing everything possible to connect the people with future prospects and opportunities.

...and if we're not, we want them to tell us -- not just government, but all British Columbians -- what needs to be done to make that connection.

When you flip open the newspaper these days, I think it is becoming more and more evident that, when China looks for places to invest and do business, British Columbia is increasingly a player.

Just last month, China's President was here in British Columbia.

Another opportunity to build on this will come later this month, when a delegation from China's Pearl River Delta will make their way to B.C.

The Pearl River Delta, home to Guangdong Province, Hong Kong and Macao, has become one of the world's most dynamic economic centres.

Hong Kong and Canada have a very close economic and trade relationship - more than 150 Canadian companies have offices in Hong Kong (ranging from technology, engineering and construction to financial and insurance services.)

Guangdong is one of the key manufacturing bases in China, with massive market potential, a comprehensive infrastructure and advanced transportation and communication networks.

Guangdong accounts for about one-ninth of China's national GDP

...and accounted for more than one-fifth of the trade between China and Canada in 2004.

The Governor of Guangdong Province and the Chief Executive of Hong Kong will visit Vancouver along with some 300 senior business executives and government officials.

Part of the delegates' trip will include a one-day business forum – a chance for businesses there and businesses here to connect, to discuss our successes, to unveil new investment opportunities -- and to seize them.

The purpose of the forum is to provide the Canadian business community with a better understanding of the current economic development taking place in Hong Kong and Guangdong,

...and to promote investment opportunities on both sides of the Pacific.

The group will unveil more than one-thousand business opportunities in China and they will bring a list of trade opportunities totaling \$200 million US.

They have the opportunities, waiting - we have the people and the skills, ready.

China's investors also know that when they invest in British Columbia, they are gaining access to the U.S. and other key markets.

We have ongoing efforts to eliminate barriers to trade and investment within Canada.

We need to be able to assure investors that when they do business in British Columbia, they're doing business in a region that is serious about building a highly competitive and attractive location in which to invest, live, work and carry on business.

The other side of the equation is boosting opportunities for British Columbia's businesses in the Asia-Pacific.

British Columbia has long pressed the federal government to seek preferential trade agreements with our Asian trade partners.

Last week, I met with Federal Trade Minister, Jim Peterson.

I told him that BC wholeheartedly endorses the current negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement with South Korea.

We shouldn't stop there – the federal government should continue to seek out agreements to facilitate trade and investment with the booming economies of the Asia-Pacific.

I also told him that British Columbia looks forward to progress at the upcoming WTO talks in Hong Kong...

We would like to see an end to agricultural subsidies that create such huge disruptions in export markets, particularly in the developing world.

We are looking for greater access to new markets for our high quality goods and services; and

We are looking for improvements to trade remedy rules that would provide certainty of access to export markets.

Just as important as the people-connections and the policy directions, are the physical-connections.

Canada as a whole needs to ensure that we have the infrastructure in place to take advantage of the forthcoming opportunities.

Asia-Pacific container traffic to North America is forecast to expand by 300 percent in the next 15 years.

While China still accounts for (just) 6.5% of world trade, it has a quarter of the world's traffic in shipping containers.

In fact, the Chinese government is talking about expanding its facilities – they want to move an extra 16.5 million more containers in the next few years.

To put that in perspective, that's the equivalent of adding ten Ports of Vancouver to their already huge container traffic capability.

These are phenomenal numbers. For us, just a one percent increase in B.C.'s total container traffic equals 4,000 new jobs and a quarter-billion dollars each year for our economy.

That is why we are making key investments in provincial infrastructure, like the Port of Prince Rupert.

If the Pacific is North America's highway to Asia, then Prince Rupert is its fast-lane:

Prince Rupert is 36 sailing hours closer to Shanghai than Vancouver; and

...a total of 68 hours can be shaved-off a voyage to North America by going through Prince Rupert rather than Los Angeles.

It's important, though, that we don't have bottlenecks in moving this cargo – which is why ground transportation capacity is also critical.

To help keep goods moving, we're ensuring that investments are made in the road and rail networks that connect our ports to markets throughout North America.

Air transport is crucial too – so we're ensuring important investments are being made in our airports:

Vancouver is home to North America's second largest, west coast international passenger gateway -- 16.4 million people are expected to fly in and out of Vancouver International Airport this year, eight million of them internationally.

And through the provincial Transportation Partnerships Program, dozens of smaller airports in B.C. are receiving funding for critical infrastructure upgrades to feed that Vancouver traffic.

In fact, infrastructure projects are underway across the Province.

As more and more projects come on-line, the need for skilled workers in B.C. is going to grow.

More than one-million job openings are projected over the next 12 years. Our challenge is going to be filling those jobs with skilled British Columbians.

We will continue with our efforts to attract skilled immigrants from around the world.

But we also have to do everything possible to ensure that our young British Columbians have the opportunity to get the training they need to fill these careers of the future.

Eighteen months ago, we established the Industry Training Authority with a budget of over \$70 million per year.

At that time, there were 14,676 registered apprentices in BC.

Today there are over 23,000.

In spite of that success, there is still a challenge...

... and a huge opportunity.

The challenge is that even with record numbers of young British Columbians going into trades training, we need to train more.

The good news is that more young people than ever before are interested in going into the trades.

Today, we have waitlists for entry into apprenticeships for electricians, carpenters, plumbing and others.

That's why I'm pleased to announce today that -- through the Industry Training Authority -- we are making an additional \$2.2-million in funding available open up 1,450 more apprenticeship training spaces between now and next April.

It is our expectation that these new funds will virtually eliminate those waitlists.

There are now fewer than 1600 days until the opening ceremonies for the 2010 Olympics.

The Games are bringing huge opportunities for B.C. companies to seek their own Olympic gold.

For the 2010 Winter Games, VANOC will require things like:

temporary bleachers to seat 56,000 people;

1.2 million square feet of temporary flooring; and

more than one million square feet of tenting.

And that's just a start.

For the Salt Lake Games, for example, organizers needed 3,300 ponchos, 7,500 hockey pucks and 46,000 folding chairs, to list but a few. It was businesses that filled the need.

We are developing new programs to ensure all British Columbians have access to the opportunities the Games provide -- both through business development and tourism.

The 2010 Commerce Centre, which is part of my Ministry, is trying to capture all 2010 related business opportunities.

As we get closer to the Games, their website will host a flurry of opportunities for businesses that can provide a vast range of goods and services.

If you're not already registered to receive these opportunities by email -- do so.

Go to 2010CommerceCentre.gov.bc.ca - it costs nothing and could mean a lot for your company.

Recently there have been postings for:

Proposals to design a snowmaking water reservoir up at Cypress Mountain;

Replacement of the Comox Valley Sports Centre's roof; and

Tournament signage for the 2006 World Junior Hockey Championships

These opportunities are all tied to sport and to the hosting of the 2010 Winter Games. And they are available, now.

We live in exciting times – for us, for our kids, for all British Columbians.

We're now only in the eighth month of the Golden Decade the Premier has been talking about,

...a decade that reaches out five years before - and after - the 2010 Games.

We know we need to prepare for our province's future – because without preparation we will miss opportunities.

With the Olympics now literally on the horizon, there are an unlimited number of economic opportunities across this province for us to take advantage of.

In a province linked by sea and air and culture to Asia, with a diverse population that has roots in the region, it simply makes sense to capitalize on the opportunities that lie there.

I want to put this challenge out to you, as B.C.'s business leaders, to find new ways to reach out to those new Canadians who have those all-important connections in Asia.

We have the links to Asia,

...we're building the physical infrastructure to ensure we can keep pace;

...we know our strengths and

...we're working to ensure we have the skills in place.

But, to get there, we need you...

...we need you to think beyond where we are now –

...to think of the connections, the people, the events, the opportunities that will truly make this a Golden decade.

Together we can continue to move British Columbia's economy forward,

... we can continue to lead the country in economic growth –

...together we can capitalize on the opportunities in Asia,

...building on the last four years of economic prosperity and

...showing to the world why we are the best place on earth to live, work and invest.

Thank-you.