



Second Session, 38th Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF
DEBATES OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
(HANSARD)

Monday, February 20, 2006
Morning Sitting
Volume 6, Number 5

THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

ISSN 0709-1281

PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

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SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2006

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

Prayers.

L. Mayencourt: I seek leave to table a petition.

Mr. Speaker: Leave granted.

Petitions

L. Mayencourt: Shawn Hunsdale, Lori MacDonald, Brooke MacRae, Johanna Hoover and Tiffany Kalanj visited me in my office this past weekend and presented this petition. I'm putting it forward on their behalf. It's in regards to tuition fees.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Statements

GATEWAY PROJECT

R. Hawes: It's a pleasure to be back and to be speaking on this, our first day when we have private members' statements.

Today I'm going to be speaking on the Gateway project, which is a major transportation infrastructure project that is being undertaken by the Ministry of Transportation and that, for my riding for sure, is long overdue.

[1005]

Before I go into what the Gateway project is all about, I just want to review a little bit of history. In the early 1980s I was a lowly bank manager who got asked to sit on a committee of folks from the Fraser Valley, from the north side of the Fraser River from Port Moody on out through Mission. There were a number of mayors and there were some business people, etc., on this committee. It was an economic development committee. It looked at anything that could be done to promote economic development activity on the north side of the Fraser River.

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

At that time, the early 1980s, we were asked by the MLA of the day — Austin Pelton, who was a Socred MLA from Maple Ridge — to outline what the highest priority was for all of those cities on the northern side of the Fraser River. After a great deal of concentrated effort and study, we came up with what we called the northern corridor route, which was a high-speed transportation link from the Fraser Valley into Vancouver. The path of it had been laid out. In fact, as I understand it, there was some Crown land reservation on the route.

The Socred government, over a number of years, talked about building this for the folks in the Fraser Valley, who knew that we were approaching gridlock on the Lougheed Highway, Highway 7, on the north side of the Fraser River. This was a critical piece of in-

frastructure, and it was seen as the most important economic development undertaking that could be done by the government to help build an economy in that part of the Fraser Valley.

Well, that fell apart, and subsequent governments scrapped the plan entirely. There was to be no northern corridor route. We were left with Highway 7, the Lougheed Highway, as really the only major transportation link from the Fraser Valley and through the Fraser Valley into Greater Vancouver on the north side of the river. That has had, over time, in my belief, near-tragic consequences in terms of both the commuting time into Vancouver and the movement of goods through the Fraser Valley on the north side of the river.

Of course, on the south side of the river, those of us who live out in the valley and have travelled into Vancouver, particularly during peak times in the morning or coming back in the evening, know what happens. As traffic starts to build up and it's approaching Langley now on... Around 200th Street it starts to build up so that you're just creeping along every morning. The amount of traffic through the entire day is tremendous. It's long, long past due that something was done. For 30-plus years, people in the valley have understood that something needs to be done to improve the movement of goods and people to and from the Greater Vancouver area.

Movement through the Fraser Valley is not just for the folks who live in the valley or who live in GVRD. These are Trans-Canada Highway links. This is for the people right across the country who travel to and from Vancouver, which is not a small destination point. It is a pretty major part of this country, particularly when you consider that it is the main port on the western shores and that it is the gateway to the Pacific.

In terms of what gridlock does to our economy, you need only look at what it costs to move goods from the Port of Vancouver through Greater Vancouver. A lot of those goods are travelling through Vancouver and the Fraser Valley and out into parts right across the rest of Canada, and a lot of that traffic is by way of truck. If you take a look at our closest competition, which is Seattle, and you look at the problems we have encountered over time at our port in Vancouver and couple that with the transportation problems, in order for us to remain competitive, in order for us to continue to have a major port and grow the port in Vancouver, it's critical that we start being able to move goods through.

[1010]

For me, the bigger challenge is the movement of people. If you consider what the effects of gridlock are on families, if you think about... Those of us who've done it know — and probably most in this House have experienced being stuck in a huge lineup — the tension and the frustration that grows as you sit in your car. Now imagine doing this day after day and the effect that it has on your psyche and what happens when you get home and have to deal with your kids and your family. It's very difficult.

Anything that can be done that would make this situation better, that would alleviate some of the tension, is a very positive step, I think. We have the West

Coast Express, which moves people from the valley, but not everyone can take the West Coast Express. It doesn't run at the kinds of hours that a lot of people who live in the valley need. The whole Gateway project is going to alleviate some of that problem.

On the north side of the river, where I live, the high-level crossing on the Pitt River is absolutely critical. The existing bridge is a swing bridge that, when boats that are too high come up the Pitt, has to swing open to let them go by. It can be long periods of time before any cars pass.

Madam Speaker, I have a little bit more to say, but I know that the opposition wants to respond to the Gateway project. I look forward to their comment, and then I'll conclude.

D. Chudnovsky: Madam Speaker, good morning to you and to other members in the House. I note that it's going to be Gateway morning here this morning. It appears that we'll have a number of opportunities to speak to the Gateway project. That's as it should be, because there are many, many questions that need to be asked about the proposals for the Gateway program, and we need answers to them if we are going to develop the appropriate transportation strategy for the lower mainland and for the broader province.

I think that from our point of view on this side of the House, the discussion of the Gateway needs to begin with an acknowledgment, as the previous speaker did, that there are significant and real frustrations with respect to both the movement of people — commuters — and the movement of goods in the lower mainland, and that this has an impact on social, economic and environmental life across the region and across the province. We want to acknowledge the real frustration that people feel with respect to transportation infrastructure in the lower mainland.

Having said that, the strategy that's developed and brought forward by the province needs to be a rational one for many reasons, the most important of which is that we're talking about a truckload, if I could use the term, of money here. The proposal for the Gateway program that comes from government, from the minister — and the Premier has spoken to this as well — is for a series of projects which together are called the Gateway and which will cost \$3 billion.

The first question that we on this side would ask of government with respect to that figure is: who are you trying to kid? Everybody knows that the \$3-billion estimate that's been used by government, by the minister and by the Premier is dramatically — not just a little bit, but dramatically — under what any reasonable person would put forward for the projects that are under consideration.

That's not the opposition's point of view. We didn't invent that assessment. We take some advice from some unusual sources on this question. For instance....

Interjections.

D. Chudnovsky: We take some advice from some unusual sources on this one. For instance, Mr. Hochstein, the head of the....

Interjections.

D. Chudnovsky: You know, Madam Speaker, these guys are going to get a chance to speak. We look forward to hearing from them and to the answers to the questions.

For instance, Mr. Hochstein estimates that construction costs will increase by 50 to 55 percent in the next four or five years. The minister tells us that the project doesn't even get started for the next four or five years.

[1015]

For instance, the *Vancouver Sun* editorial last week. The *Vancouver Sun*, as we all know, is no big friend of the opposition party in this Legislature, but they, too, warn us that the estimate being put forward by this minister, this Premier and this government is substantially under what this project is going to cost.

So the first thing that we as the opposition have to say to government with respect to the Gateway is: don't try and kid the people of the province. Talk about the real costs. Talk about the real projections and our estimate based on the increases in the projections for all the other major capital projects in the province: the Sea to Sky, the RAV, the Olympics, the Okanagan Bridge. Our estimate — one that we stand by and that we have some support from the *Sun* and the independent contractors on — is probably closer to \$4½ billion. Now, a billion is a thousand million of the people's money, so we would suggest to government that they come clean with the people about what the cost and the projected costs of this project are going to be.

Question two. Question two has to do with the tolling that the minister is proposing. The tolling that the minister talks about.... The minister is a recent convert to tolling, as we know, and we need to unpack the minister's statements and projections about tolling. The minister has talked about....

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, member.

Interjections.

D. Chudnovsky: Oh, I'm finished?

Well, luckily, minister.... Thank you, minister. I'll be back.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, member. Your time's up.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members.

R. Hawes: You know, I would prefer.... Rather than talking about what might be, I think we should talk about what the cost of not doing this project is, and it's far, far greater.

If a project like this had been undertaken in 1991 when the NDP government took office for the first time, we would already have an efficient transportation system probably at half the cost or less than it is really going to cost us now. The projections that have been put forward by the ministry have been researched by the ministry. As we move closer, those figures, of course, are going to be made more solid. But I'm less concerned about if this project will cost us more than what it will cost us if we don't do it at all.

We could sit around, and we could navel-gaze and worry and fret and never do this project, but that would not be the right thing for the people who live in the lower mainland of British Columbia, nor would it be the right thing for people who live all over this province or, in fact, this country. As I've said, this is a part of the Trans-Canada Highway. This is not just about the people who live in GVRD or the lower mainland.

The bottom line here is that we are moving ahead. We are committed to a project that's going to make life better for the folks who live here in the valley and in GVRD. As I have to keep saying, the cost of not doing it will be far greater than any dollar figure that could be affixed to this project.

I think what we need to do is understand that this is moving ahead with full public consultation and that certainly the communities out in the valley are absolutely committed to this. Now, the big thing...

Interjection.

R. Hawes: The member opposite will have an opportunity if he wants to speak later, and I certainly hope he will. His riding benefited from the Island Highway, which ran significantly over budget and was really a sop to... You know, the infrastructure that was put together for the union participation there really was of benefit to their party but not so much to the people who live on the Island.

The key for me here is that the folks who live in the Fraser Valley whose lives are absolutely devastated by the kind of time they have to spend on an increasing basis on the highway.... Their lives are going to be made better.

[1020]

The social benefits of this can't have a dollar figure attached to them. I beg the members opposite to come forward and tell us how much money that social improvement to the lives of those people is worth to them. For me, living in the Fraser Valley, I don't want to put a price on it.

I'm just so proud of this government and that minister for bringing this project forward, for persisting and saying, in the face of some opposition from the members opposite: "No, we have to do this." It's for the people who live in the valley. It's for the people who live in the lower mainland. This is a project whose day has come, and I'm proud that it is moving ahead.

HOMELESSNESS

D. Routley: I'm going to attempt to be helpful to the government in this presentation. I'm going to at-

tempt to help the government decipher the words of British Columbians, because I'm quite sure they haven't heard the words.

I've travelled the province speaking to people working in this sector, and they are very eager to be heard. They are very eager to be listened to. They are very eager to have their words reflected in policies from this government that actually make sense, so I'll be asking, in a supportive way, for this government to be conservative or, in other words, cautious — which they certainly are not.

I'll be proposing something. My first proposal is that this government recognize its role in the dramatically increasing homelessness numbers in this province, and that this government face the change in the face of homelessness that we see — children and working families on the street, young people leaving shelters and going to schools from these shelters. I want this government.... I want its words to equal actions, and thus far they certainly don't.

I'll bring you some words from Kelowna, where the drop-in centre has operated for 17 years. Five years ago it got about 50 visits per day. Now it's between 200 and 350 per day. There's one young person who can't get into the shelter because he's a minor. He sleeps behind the centre and gets up every day to go to school, because that's where he lives. He lives by a fence behind the shelter. That's what this government should be listening to, not the words of its friends and insiders and supporters.

The words of this government need to mean more. They talk about this province confronting the scourge of crystal meth. They talk endlessly about that, but what are their actions? I'll tell you. The youth detox centre that was running in Kelowna and being funded through NHI closed in June. Youth were forced to go to Kamloops to get help. To have help in their communities is what they need. To have help where they have support is what they need, not to be put on the streets of another big city. This government needs to listen to those facts and acknowledge them.

Interjections.

D. Routley: The Iridian Centre was opened, and 160 youth went through, ages 12 to 18, and 49 of those children were absolutely homeless. The words of British Columbians will speak over the heckling of this group because they don't want to hear it. We're here to tell them. People have seen the faulty idea that building facilities just to help people get off the street will somehow increase the problem. Well, no. The majority of these people are our residents, and 40 to 45 percent of the people in Kelowna who are homeless are the working poor. They are the residents of Kelowna, and they are the constituents of this government that have been abandoned. That's what British Columbians are saying.

There's an expectation that communities will pick up the slack, take on the responsibility, organize the shelters and keep their streets clean and safe — not this

government, because it has dropped its role there. Tillicum Lelum Centre in Kelowna will run out of funding December 16. Now, 289 children went through that centre last year. The urban aboriginal population is getting nothing from this government.

Many parents are trapped, losing their children because they don't have adequate homes. Then they lose their homes, and they can't get them back. This is happening in British Columbia — the successful British Columbia for the few, the many paying the price for that. That's the reality — a reality that this government doesn't want to hear about but that we're here to tell them about.

[1025]

What they need to do is listen to the communities and listen to the people on the ground. There are examples of programs that are working. Every year, though, under this social entrepreneurialism that this wonderful group has brought to us where every group must compete for their funding on a yearly basis — funding, funding, funding... It's about funding, stupid — to paraphrase the well-known political phrase. It's about funding.

These groups that support the vulnerable people that your government has abandoned are being left behind. Every year they need to paint themselves a new colour. This year will be red. This year will be blue. Next year may be green.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members, please remember that if you wish to speak, you must do so from your own seats.

D. Routley: Every year they must paint themselves a new colour and requalify, and this is called mandate slippage. Service providers who got into the business because they wanted to do good by their neighbours are converted into proposal writers by this government, because it doesn't care. They lose their qualified staff because they can't guarantee employment beyond the ten months that their funding is guaranteed.

Here's a suggestion for the member who shakes his head in disbelief because he hasn't been listening to those voices in British Columbia. Here's a suggestion. Once these fine groups qualify, once you've recognized their services....

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order.

D. Routley: I suggest a streamlined assessment, a streamlined auditing, a guarantee of package funding that goes beyond one year, something that can help them survive and help them continue to give service to the people of British Columbia — service that your government has refused to give.

That's what this province needs. This province finally needs a government that will be businesslike, a

government that will stand up and recognize that it costs \$28,000 to \$35,000 of this province's public taxpayer dollars to support a homeless person on the street when we know very well by their own studies that it will cost at least \$10,000 less to house them and to give them proper support and dignity like every British Columbian should expect.

That's what it would cost — 50 percent less to do the right thing. Be businesslike. Do the right thing.

Deputy Speaker: The member for Vancouver-Burrard has the floor.

L. Mayencourt: First I'd like to thank the member for Cowichan-Ladysmith very much for raising an important issue. It is uncommon for us to hear from that side of the House that we should be more conservative or we should be more businesslike, but it is a refreshing statement from that side, and it is something that we actually do in our government.

The member quite rightly raises the fact that there are a number of people who are homeless in our province, and that is a crying shame. That's why our government has put so much into serving the homeless in our communities. I wish that member was actually in government, perhaps, in 1996 when Glen Clark froze and cancelled hundreds and hundreds of housing units as a result of just an indeliberate to actually respond to people.

I wish that member was in government when the number of people on the wait-list for social housing...

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order.

L. Mayencourt: ...ballooned from 9,000 to 30,000. I wonder if that member would have been able to stand up to that Premier at that time and say: "Please be businesslike. Please provide housing for vulnerable people, for vulnerable children, for vulnerable women."

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order.

L. Mayencourt: I wish that member was in this House when his predecessor's government put a paltry \$17 million into social housing in 1999 — paltry.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members, please let the member speak.

Continue, member.

L. Mayencourt: I wish that member had been here when they slashed the budget for housing. I wish that member had stood up and defended the poor and the vulnerable. Instead, he sits here and criticizes.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, order.

L. Mayencourt: He criticizes a government and a minister that has put almost \$200 million into social housing this year. That's something I'm proud of. That's something my government does. That's something your government couldn't do.

The people of British Columbia finally have a government that is managing its finances in a way that it can....

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, members. Members, the House listened very nicely when the member for Cowichan-Ladysmith spoke. I would expect the same respect for the member for Vancouver-Burrard.

Please continue.

L. Mayencourt: I want to continue on with the idea that the members put forward, which is that government should be in the business of supporting vulnerable people in British Columbia.

[1030]

But we could never do that under the previous government because they were so mired in debt. They were so mired in silly projects. He talks about...

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Member — member for Cowichan-Ladysmith.

L. Mayencourt: ...non-profit agencies being captivated by paperwork and proposal writing. This is from a former government that was the foundation of bureaucratic paperwork. British Columbia housing agencies, as recently as two weeks ago, met with the Housing Minister. I was here. I brought them — the B.C. non-profit housing sector, the people who are working with us to find actual solutions so that we can get rid of the wait-lists that you left us with as a government, a wait-list that is unforfeably long. Our government has been doing....

I wish that member had been here when his government was only building 600 units of social housing a year — 600. You know what we did last year? It was 1,800 — three times. That's because our government knows how to manage its budget so that it can help the truly vulnerable, so that we can actually reach those individuals.

When you see the new housing policy that comes from this government to reduce those wait times, to increase access, you'll see a government that finally is generous enough, wise enough, to look after those vulnerable people. We don't want to see kids sleeping on our streets. That's why we have been.... One example of that, and this is just this week — Fraser Health Authority working with us: \$100,000 for services to the homeless and \$47,000 for cold-wet weather.

You know, in my time in this government, two years ago I spent a week on the street. My government doubled the number of cold-wet-weather beds in British Columbia. Our Housing Minister said to me, our Minister of Human Resources said to me: "No one will be turned away in the cold-wet-weather strategy — no one."

We gave that instruction to every member of the housing societies, and they supported us. They said: "You know what? We need more money." We gave them more money, because that's what was needed. We did it, and it was the right thing to do.

I wish that member had been in the government of 1996 so that he could have defended the vulnerable in that previous government.

Deputy Speaker: Time's up. Thank you, member.

D. Routley: I understand that the opposite members have difficulty listening to the people of British Columbia and listening to the facts, but 20 percent of Surrey's homeless population, which has doubled under this government's watch — 20 percent of those people, 371 strong — are working people who live in shelters. That's the reality in British Columbia.

Project Comeback, a project that supported people's efforts to re-enter the workforce, supported them with boots and transportation — all of those kinds of integral issues to taking away the dominoes and hurdles that stand in the way of success for low-income earners that your government put there. That project was cancelled. How is that a commitment to the homeless and to the poor of British Columbia?

It's a lack of commitment by this government to stand up to its most basic principle — to protect those British Columbians who are vulnerable, to protect those British Columbians who don't have a voice of their own.

Well, they do have a voice, and it's on these benches. It's coming in loud and strong at this government that they can't drop their responsibility to the children, the parents and the poor of British Columbia. The food bank in Surrey feeds 13,000 people per month. Mostly those are at risk of homelessness; 45 percent of the food bank's clients are children and babies. That's the grim reality of this government, the golden and grim reality of what they've done to British Columbia. This program is economically efficient. It saves us money; it helps people.

What businesslike government could cancel things that save us money, help people and improve their contribution to our economy, get them back into the workforce, create good taxpaying citizens out of them? What kind of businesslike government could take an approach that would rule out those kinds of programs? I don't know. But I do know it would take an ideology, a commitment to an ideology gone wrong. It would take a government that's willing to throw down the gauntlet to British Columbia and say: "We don't care. We're going to privatize to our friends. We think that business will do it better, no matter what."

[1035]

We can show you. We can show you how much it costs per month to take care of these people on the street — that it costs more the way this government is doing it, or not doing it, than it would if they did the proper job.

It's time for this government to recognize these realities — the realities that face these people every day no matter how cold, no matter how wet, no matter how lonely, no matter how degrading, no matter how difficult that existence is. This government doesn't care. It's not listening. I call on it to perk up, listen, apply some good business sense and do the right thing.

FRASER HEALTH AUTHORITY:
REAL PROGRESS

M. Polak: Judging from the perceptions commonly held in British Columbia today, one would think that our province's health care system is in steady decline. Yet using nationally established measures, the Conference Board of Canada determined that British Columbia's health care system is leading the country. What accounts for the gap in perception?

I would say that perhaps part of the answer is the way in which the health care dialogue is framed in the 21st century. Too often our desire to solve immediate and pressing challenges obscures our view of the real progress being made around us. I want to take a moment to highlight for this House some examples of the real progress that is being made in the Fraser health region, but first a bit of context.

The Fraser Health Authority oversees one of the most populous and complex health regions in the province. FHA serves a population greater than one-third the population of British Columbia, and those people come with a wide range of communities — from Burnaby to Delta to Boston Bar. The FHA has responsibility for 12 acute care hospitals containing about 2,000 acute care beds. It employs 21,000 people, works with 2,200 physicians and manages a budget of \$1.8 billion. It's one of Canada's largest health care organizations.

As the Fraser health region has grown and changed, the health authority has been hard pressed to respond. Nevertheless, a determined focus on improving patient care has ensured steady progress, and now the results of that determination are bearing fruit. The health region is experiencing improvements on a scale not seen in over a decade.

In Surrey, British Columbia's fastest-growing city, long-awaited work to expand the capacity of Surrey Memorial Hospital is finally underway. Approximately \$200 million will go toward a new emergency department facility, extensive renovations to the hospital and a stand-alone outpatient care building that will include family medicine. Construction on that project is due to begin in 2007.

Already, though, Surrey Memorial has acted on a number of fronts to respond to the changing needs of its community. Last year alone, SMH added eight new emergency department beds, hired additional specialist

caregivers in emergency, expanded ambulatory care services from five to seven days a week, created 25 new full-time home health positions and added 18 new geriatric medical beds.

At the same time, Surrey Memorial has added 12 new subacute beds and converted eight existing beds to create a new 20-bed unit focused on rehab services for patients who are preparing to return home or move to residential care. In December 2005 a new 4,000-square-foot minor treatment unit was opened, which will allow people with non-life-threatening injuries and illnesses to receive quicker care.

Surrey Memorial has also responded to the growing diversity within Surrey and surrounding communities. The hospital now provides dedicated Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu interpreters in emergency, along with telephone-accessible interpretation in over 130 languages. Through a diversity services position, Surrey Memorial is able to respond to the special needs of patients and residents from a diversity of cultural backgrounds.

Further east, the Abbotsford regional hospital and cancer centre, another long-awaited project, is beginning to take shape. The new Abbotsford hospital is the result of a new partnership between the B.C. Ministry of Health Services, the B.C. Cancer Agency, the Provincial Health Services Authority, the Fraser Health Authority and the Fraser Valley regional hospital district.

When completed, the new Abbotsford hospital will be three times larger than the current MSA Hospital. It will give patients improved access to a wider range of acute care services and reduce travel for 330,000 residents of the upper Fraser Valley.

As we return to the Greater Vancouver area, construction is moving ahead on the expansion of the emergency department at Delta Hospital. The expansion will support improvements in patient care and improve the working environment for our valuable health care providers.

[1040]

The emergency department and ambulatory-care unit at Ridge Meadows Hospital will also be expanding with construction beginning in the spring of this year. The new construction will complement the new health services building adjacent to Ridge Meadows, which is already nearing completion.

Improving care for people at the end of life has also been a high priority for Fraser Health. In 2005 my own community of Langley welcomed the opening of a new ten-bed hospice residence, as did Surrey and Mission.

Fraser Health is also working to expand its medical detox services. In July of 2005 nine new withdrawal management beds opened in Chilliwack. In the spring of 2007 a new 30-bed withdrawal management facility, including six youth treatment beds, is scheduled to open next to Surrey Memorial Hospital. Fraser Health will also be funding a youth detox-home detox pilot program for Maple Ridge. The program will serve youth from 16 to 25 years of age and will see approximately 182 clients per year.

Clearly, the health investments made by this government are showing real progress. We're seeing it in

the reduction of wait times for surgeries. We're seeing it in the new and specialized services that are being provided. When we look at MRIs, we're increasing the scans being done annually. CT scans are increasing annually. Technology use is now allowing us to have physicians and radiologists interacting on line to look at patients' diagnostics and make sure they are in a timely way.

We know now that many surgeries in B.C. are never wait-listed, that 97 percent are done within 12 months, 75 percent are done within three months and 25 percent are done in less than two weeks. We are really fortunate in British Columbia to have some of the most dedicated and committed health care staff and service providers in the world. With organizations like Fraser Health, this government will continue to lead the way by putting patients first.

It's interesting to me that as I come to the end of my time to speak initially, what I've not managed to do is list off all the areas of progress that have been shown by Fraser Health. The list is just too exhaustive. There are too many things going on. I hope I'll have an opportunity shortly to address some more of those after the member opposite responds.

I think it's really clear that if we work together with organizations like Fraser Health, we can ensure that the investments are there to make sure every British Columbian has access to the quality care they deserve and that it's something they enjoy as part of living in the best province in Canada and what we think is the best place in the world.

G. Gentner: I rise to remind the members opposite and the member for Langley that things are not as rosy in the Fraser Health Authority as she may surmise. After all, I'm from the municipality that saw its hospital gutted, and across the Fraser I witnessed the destruction of St. Mary's Hospital. The '90s was a decade of caring and compassion. Well, today we're well into the Liberal government's second term, the decade of deceit. Indeed, deceit — a falsehood of accomplishments.

Regarding health care, let's look at the leadership approaches. On one side we have a Premier touting a media circus to Europe in the throne speech, while on the other is a leader — the member for Victoria-Beacon Hill — who today, as we speak, is inside Surrey Memorial Hospital on the front line examining the Liberal record.

Let's look at the comparative. In the '90s we saw the new south building of Surrey Memorial Hospital built and opened, which included a state-of-the-art operating theatre including expanded surgical services such as thoracic surgery, a new children's health centre, a new maternity unit, a new adolescent psychiatric unit, a new special care nursery, a new central processing department and 300 spaces of underground parking.

We saw government funding, including both capital costs and additional operating dollars to support the new and expanding programs; increased services for seniors, with additional funding for long-term beds; increased funding for community health-mental health

services; the first MRI for Surrey Memorial Hospital; and expanded renal dialysis services, just to name a few.

Today we've seen five years of Liberal betrayal of the citizens living in the Delta-Surrey hospital catchment area. We were told that regionalization was to save money and make things more efficient. The new structure has the same number of senior positions as its previous structure. However, it will be more costly than the previous structure due to the designated responsibilities, including elevations of positions to executive vice-presidents. How many vice-presidents for the Fraser Health Authority? Not two or three. Nope — 12. Count them — 12 vice-presidents all at a new premium cost. Of course, this is before the hiring...

[1045]

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order.

G. Gentner: ...of a new CEO, who will and should have the right to change things.

Madam Speaker, after four arduous years of core reviews, do you think this government would get it right?

I understand the need for a vice-president of acute programs and a vice-president of medicine. After the horror stories of this government, I further understand the need for a vice-president of patient quality and safety. Yes indeed, the taste-tester for thermalized food finally at a hospital near you.

Can you imagine that, Madam Speaker — a government boastful for deregulating and privatizing, and it has to hire a senior executive to manage quality control? Now, that's what I call Liberal efficiency. There's no vice-president for finance.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order.

G. Gentner: One looks at the corporate flow chart, and behold, we find instead a vice-president of corporate services. At first blush this should mean that finance and associate corporate resources would come under the one umbrella — corporate service — thereby saving us money. But no way. Instead, we see more fat — vice-president of strategic planning, vice-president of professional integration, vice-president of clinical system redesign. Which clinic will have its hands in this one?

Vice-president of organizational development. Here's a whole department dedicated to restructure the newly restructured outfit that had previously been restructured. The chaotic management model is one to deliberately run public health care into the ground. We have a vice-president of capital planning and process improvement — another department that could have come under corporate resources.

What's left? The never-ending bulge of public relations — not one but three departments: vice-president

of knowledge, management and information; vice-president of health promotion; vice-president of — you guessed it — communications. Boy, are we going to have fun with this officialdom.

M. Polak: I guess the first thing that interests me about the response of the member opposite is that while he touts the decade of the '90s as the decade of decline, I have a longer list of what this government has accomplished in Fraser Health in the last four years than what he can pull out over the '90s. Of course, we're back to the same NDP mantra, which is slamming administration. Oh, and by the way, don't mention that they had 52 health authorities, and we are now down to six.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

M. Polak: Sticking with my theme, I want to enlighten the member about some of the additional progress that has been made in Fraser Health and in some significant areas.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order.

M. Polak: In the previous part, when I was speaking, I mentioned MRI scans and CT scans. Let's look at some of the statistics. These are amazing. MRI scanners at Surrey Memorial and Royal Columbian are now staffed to operate at maximum capacity. What that means is that in '04-05, 9,200 MRI scans were performed at those two sites alone. That's more than ever before. That's an increase of 2,000 MRI scans from '03-04 and is more than double the number performed in '01-02. That's something that they've accomplished by working with private service providers. About 2,500 additional scans were performed by the end of March 2005.

CT scans are another area that is increasing dramatically. We are now operating seven days a week; 7,000 more scans were performed in '04-05. That's an increase of 10 percent. In Abbotsford, MSA was able to add 2,600 scans a year to its roster by operating on weekends as well as increasing weekday hours. That represents a 37-percent increase in the number of CT scans performed at MSA alone.

[1050]

I have list after list of things that have been added to the services in Fraser Health, ways in which we've invested in health care in Fraser Health. We could take, for example, the expansion of nurse education. The \$3.2 million in funding since 2001 has meant that 346 registered nurses have been trained to care for patients in specialty areas.

Clearly, what the members opposite don't understand is that you have to get your fiscal house in order not so that you can save money for the sake of saving

money, but so you can invest in health care. You can invest in creating what has now become the best health care system in Canada, and you can deal with the challenges that are before you in making sure that we have the best health care system in the world in the future. That's what we're heading towards. That's what we're investing in, and we're going to do that because we have a government that's moving forward, building a strong economy and making sure that British Columbians are getting the positive and good care that they deserve.

BIODIESEL

M. Karagianis: Madam Speaker, I will beg your indulgence with my cold here. It's not really an Eartha Kitt impression at all; it's just my head cold.

I rise today to speak about biodiesel, a biodegradable alternative fuel. Biodiesel is a safe, non-toxic, renewable fuel. It's produced from sources such as vegetable oils and animal fats as well as oil crops like canola and soy.

Biodiesel can be run on any engine that runs diesel fuel. In fact, a German inventor, Rudolf Diesel, actually designed the engine to run on peanut oil. However, fossil fuel was cheaper at the beginning of the 20th century, and it became the fuel of choice. One can only imagine what the power of the peanut lobby would be today, or even the commentary from the peanut gallery, had we in fact pursued peanut oil as the fuel of the day. But now at the dawn of the 21st century, the original concept for Rudolf's engine.... Its time has finally come around. As petroleum product is on its way out, biodiesel is on its way in.

Fuel markets that can benefit from biodiesel include bus and truck fleets, heavy equipment, diesel cars and boats, oil heating furnaces and even electric generators. Biodiesel is like regular diesel but has a reduced environmental impact when it burns. Biodiesel minimizes air toxins, greenhouse gases, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and black smoke. It also contains no sulphur dioxide, which produces acid rain. Biodiesel can easily be integrated into any existing diesel fuel distribution system. Typically blends of 5 percent to 20 percent, called B5 to B20, are integrated into the system, although cars can run on 100 percent biodiesel without any modifications.

Now, biodiesel provides many benefits when compared to petrodiesel. There is 90-percent reduction in carbon dioxide emission, two-thirds reduction in unburned hydrocarbons, 48-percent reduction in carbon monoxide emissions, 47-percent reduction in particulate matter emissions and 100-percent reduction in sulphuric emissions. With an increased independence from the national energy and comparable horsepower to regular diesel, I think it is a viable alternative. Biodiesel also has better lubricity than petrodiesel and biodegrades four times faster, as well as being non-toxic.

Pilot projects have confirmed that there are great advantages to biodiesel. The city of Vancouver has

converted its entire fleet of garbage trucks to biodiesel. Right now here in the CRD and in my own constituency of Esquimalt-Metchosin, the Vancouver Island biodiesel evaluation study called VIBES was completed just last year. The VIBES project is the largest cross-sector test of its kind ever undertaken in Canada and included eight fleets from three levels of government. Fuel efficiency was the same or better, and there were no changes in vehicle performance or maintenance needs in those automobiles.

Europe now produces about two billion litres of biodiesel a year, and the United States produces 300 million litres a year. There are more than 1,700 filling stations in Germany and Austria, and in France most refineries add biodiesel to motor fuels for sale in proportions ranging from 2 percent to 5 percent. More than 19,000 new jobs have been created in Germany in the production and marketing of biodiesel.

Both Europe and the U.S. have subsidies in place for biodiesel, but in Canada we're a bit slower off the mark. Our domestic consumption is only about eight million litres, and most of that is burned in government fleets. Some retail locations have opened in the lower mainland, but for motorists in most of British Columbia and especially here on the Island, there is virtually nowhere to purchase biodiesel blends. This has got to change.

[1055]

Biodiesel is exempt from federal and provincial road tax, and this is a very good thing. In fact, my congratulations to this government for, in the 2004 budget, amending the alternative Motor Fuel Tax Act, making the biodiesel portion of the mix exempt from provincial fuel tax. The government of Canada, in fact, exempted it from federal excise tax in March of 2003.

The alternative fuel sector says that we are not doing enough to develop this biodiesel product, and I agree wholeheartedly with them. We can and should be doing much better. For instance, British Columbia has not yet enacted a renewable fuel standard. Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have all implemented this act, which mandates how much ethanol or biodiesel is required to be present in petroleum-based fuel.

By moving forward to promote biofuels, we could not only reduce harmful tailpipe emissions, but we could generate new jobs in a rapidly emerging alternative energy sector and help stimulate Canada's agricultural sector. Seed crops from northeastern British Columbia could soon be powering buses and other diesel vehicles across the province.

Without a renewable fuel standard and a provincial commitment to biofuels, B.C. could well miss out on future expansion of the industry. Without a mandate, investment is likely to go to the provinces that have already implemented such a standard. In the last round of Canadian ethanol expansion more than 90 percent of the funding went to provinces with that mandate. British Columbia received nothing at that time.

By requiring a minimum blend, consumers will quickly realize that alternative fuels are fully competitive and capable and will establish a foundation for a

market that will support increasing higher blends. Faced with high demand for petroleum products, many petroleum companies are now looking at how they can implement biofuel supplies.

Countries around the world are aggressively putting in place programs to expand the renewable fuel industry. The U.S. government provides an exemption of federal road tax of 52 cents per gallon for ethanol and offers up to \$1 per gallon for blended biodiesel. We need to make sure that our biodiesel industry here in Canada can compete in that industrial playing field.

Unfortunately, biodiesel is not yet manufactured commercially in British Columbia. Several groups are in the process of developing commercial-scale biodiesel manufacturing plants in various locations throughout the province. I've been in touch with some of them and will continue to pursue that.

V. Roddick: Unfortunately, it is the time of year for colds.

Our province has encouraged the use of biodiesel and expanded commercialization of the biodiesel industry in B.C. by supporting the development of production facilities, fuel tax reduction, funding of pilot projects and a \$25,000 grant to support market development of biodiesel. The B.C. government contributed \$15,000 to conduct a detailed feasibility study of the potential for commercial biodiesel production in B.C., aimed in particular at opportunities that may exist for small- to medium-sized business.

In 2005 the Ministry of Environment contributed \$35,000 to a six-month pilot project, as the member for Esquimalt-Metchosin said — Vancouver Island biodiesel field test or VIBES — to show owners of fleet vehicles that biodiesel is a viable alternative to regular diesel fuel. Biodiesel can be used either as a substitute for conventional diesel or as a blend. In both its pure and blended forms, biodiesel reduces emission of air toxins, CO₂, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and that noticeable black smoke from the vehicles. When blended with traditional diesel fuel, it reduces both greenhouse gases and most tailpipe emissions.

Since its first production on a commercial scale in Germany in 1991, global production has increased rapidly. In the U.S. a blend of 20 percent biodiesel with 80 percent petrodiesel, referred to as B20, is quite widely used. In fact, this weekend I watched a short program on the BBC about certain villages in France producing their own biodiesel from sunflower seeds to power their municipal vehicles and garbage trucks.

[1100]

However, we do have to recognize that the cost-saving factor here is the lack of tax. So the big question to be solved is: how do we blend the environmentally friendly and the tax issue to everyone's satisfaction?

In Canada biodiesel remains in the early stages of market development. Several bus companies are doing trials with imported biodiesel, and the first biodiesel service station was opened in Toronto two years ago. In British Columbia a variety of fleets — such as the cities of Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, North Van-

couver and Delta, as well as some private fleets — use biodiesel. Right now there are actually three retail outlets in B.C. — Burnaby, Port Alberni, and a new one just opened in North Delta — which sell B5, B10 and B20 fuel blends.

A major key to growth is establishing production plants in B.C. The province's first biodiesel plant has been commissioned in southeast B.C. near Fernie. Agri-Green Biodiesel will be the province's first commercial biodiesel producer with an initial annual output of two million litres starting within weeks.

Vancouver-based Canadian Bioenergy Corp., which was instrumental in the municipal pilot project, is in the final stages of setting up its \$15 million, 40-million-litre-a-year production plant. The site is conveniently located between the Prairies, where the canola feedstock is readily available, and the lower mainland, the market for the product.

Other B.C. green companies planning plants are Flower Power in the Okanagan and Victoria-based WISE Energy. Organized by WISE Energy co-op, the pilot project has eight fleet operators using the fuel to determine its operational effectiveness. The project was designed to build market acceptance for the use of biodiesel in fleets and to support a full-scale commercial biodiesel plant. Fleet operators taking part in VIBES include B.C. Transit, city of Victoria, district of Saanich, school district 62, B.C. Mail Plus, Canada Post, Vancouver Island Powerline and Columbia Fuels.

We must also think about the fact that it takes a lot of fossil fuel to grow an acre of corn, both in the tractor and the nitrogen fertilizer which is made from natural gas. But it took lots of hay and oats to feed those horses that used to work our fields.

M. Karagianis: I appreciate that the member for Delta South and I obviously concur on many of our views around biodiesel. On the front page of the Vancouver *Province* yesterday was a story about the enormous economic opportunities available in this field, and I think that we are going to continue to see the industry move in this direction.

Speaking as the Small Business critic, I see the potential for biodiesel to help business operators across the province. By bringing down fuel costs and by enhancing fuel efficiency as well as reducing engine wear and emissions, I think that there is an opportunity here for small business and all consumers to benefit.

But I will say that the retail opportunities are still very challenging. As someone who, in fact, purposely bought a vehicle this year with the intent of using biodiesel, I have been severely frustrated by the inability to obtain any biodiesel product here on Vancouver Island. I know that my constituency assistant also recently bought a diesel-fueled automobile with the express purpose of using biodiesel and, again, was frustrated by this. Right now the only opportunity available is for large commercial users to obtain biodiesel.

I would hope that together both sides of the House here could work towards promoting more easy access for retail purchase across British Columbia. We do see

that there are a number of opportunities coming up in Alberta and here for more distribution centres, for more production of biodiesel, and I would hope that together we can actually work to make sure that all consumers have a chance to use this product.

[1105]

Last year while campaigning, I remember talking to a young entrepreneur who had started a very lucrative and successful gardening business but was extremely frustrated by the inability to run all of his gardening equipment on biodiesel. I have promised that constituent that one of the things I will do is continue to explore and encourage more opportunities and more access to retail biodiesel here on the Island. I would hope that we can all work together to promote that.

R. Fleming: I would ask the House to seek leave for the purpose of making an introduction this morning.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

R. Fleming: It's my great pleasure to introduce Ms. Brown and parents and students from Cloverdale Elementary School who are here at the Legislative Assembly this morning. I would ask that all members of the House please make these kids feel welcome.

Hon. G. Abbott: I call private members' motions, the first of which is Motion 36.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 36 without disturbing the priorities of the motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

Motions on Notice

GATEWAY TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

D. Hayer: I move Motion 36.

[Be it resolved that this House supports the comprehensive, wide-ranging \$3 billion Gateway Transportation Program to open up British Columbia's transportation network which will reduce congestion, meet the needs of our growing economy, increase Asia-Pacific trade, and a growing population.]

This program is critical to the future well-being of British Columbia and Canada. It addresses not only the huge economic impact that the movement of goods and services has on our provincial and national economy, but the impact that traffic congestion and the resulting pollution has on our people's lives.

This is a well-thought-out and well-planned solution that will save our economy \$1.5 billion a year in revenues — revenues that are being lost today, tomorrow and every day until this project is complete. Those

revenues, and taxes from those revenues, will help our health care, social and education programs.

It is a solution that will get workers to their jobs quicker, more refreshed and less stressed. It will get them back home to their families and loved ones sooner. This transportation program will mean that my constituents can live like other folks in this province, where the air they breathe isn't choked with exhaust fumes as thousands of cars and trucks sit idle in traffic jams. They will be able to travel between their homes and recreation or shopping centres within a few minutes instead of taking 45 minutes each way.

What this project will do is take this province into the 21st century. It addresses the needs of a rapidly growing, booming economy. Without it, all British Columbians will suffer. Our ports will decline, people will lose jobs, lifestyles will begin to deteriorate. Without the efficient movement of goods and people, our Asia-Pacific trading partners will look elsewhere to ship their goods and our own producers will seek easily accessible American ports to send their products to market — and take away jobs from Canada.

I want to make it very clear to all those who are against this project — those who live in Vancouver and Burnaby and other places who think that rapid transit is the only option — that this project isn't just about moving people. It is about expanding and improving a transportation system that was built more than 40 years ago when the lower mainland had less than half the population it has today — a system that must service, through our dynamic and growing port traffic, all of North America.

Our government has a vision. It looks at what is causing the problem today, and it creates a long-term solution: the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge; the North and South Fraser perimeter road; adding more lanes to the Trans-Canada Highway; improving the interchange and all the overpasses on Highway 1; a new six-lane Pitt River Bridge, allowing for the reintroduction of bus transit service and the potential for a future light rail transit system to move people; plus a \$50 million investment in cycling infrastructure, the largest in the history of British Columbia.

[1110]

Let me restate that again. It is allowing for the reintroduction of a bus transit service that was taken away in the late 1980s due to traffic gridlock, the potential for the future light rail transit system to improve our people's lives, plus a \$50-million investment in cycling infrastructure — the largest one in B.C.'s history. This province has invested in moving goods, moving people and moving services while protecting our environment — efficiently, effectively and economically.

Today's Port Mann Bridge, which was built in 1964 — the only significant link to the Pacific Ocean from the rest of Canada — handles over 120,000 vehicles a day. That is even more traffic than the famed Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco — another port city, which I'm sure would love to attract some of the business and the jobs that are flowing today through the British Columbia ports. Today's Port Mann Bridge car-

ries seven transport trucks every minute of the day. That is 417 trucks every hour, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Every minute they are slowed down, every hour they waste in traffic jams, costs every citizen of ours through the increased price of goods.

For my constituents and those of many of the constituencies in the Fraser Valley, there is also the price of poor air quality, increased health care costs and stress for them and for their family life. Many who are against this project say it will only increase traffic into Vancouver and its neighbouring districts from people who live in the Fraser Valley. Well, at 4:30 p.m. on any working day, the westbound lanes and entrances to the Port Mann Bridge are at a standstill, jammed with cars and workers who are leaving their jobs in Langley and Surrey to travel home to Vancouver, Burnaby and Coquitlam — yes, even Vancouver.

This incredible and far-thinking transportation project will get those workers, no matter where they live, to and from work much quicker. It will create a network of truck routes directly to and from the ports and to our ferry terminals. It will take large transport and service vehicles out of Surrey city centres as well as off the neighbourhood streets and away from residential areas.

Safer streets, less pollution and fewer traffic jams. This comprehensive plan addresses so many issues. I urge everyone, through the excellent public consultation forums that have already begun, to look at the big picture, to look at the program and its visionary plan for the future and that solves our problems today.

The Gateway program is long overdue. I have been working for it ever since I was first elected in 2001, and I can tell you that it has the overwhelming support of my constituents. It has been an honour to make this motion. I encourage every member in this House to support it with enthusiasm and vigour. It is the key component for the future of everyone who lives in British Columbia.

Also, I want to thank the Premier and the Minister of Transportation from Surrey-Cloverdale, as well as the past Minister of Transportation Judith Reid, who worked on this when she was the minister.

I also have a couple of questions in closing. I would like to find out today from the NDP MLAs for Surrey-Panorama Ridge, Surrey-Newton, Surrey-Green Timbers and Surrey-Whalley: will they support this project? Will the NDP MLAs support the people who run trucking or taxi businesses or who regularly use these roads to go to work or to visit their families and are regularly stuck in traffic?

Deputy Speaker: I will remind members again if they wish to make statements they must do so from their own seats.

D. Chudnovsky: Thank you to the member for Surrey-Tynehead for giving us the opportunity to continue this very, very important discussion on the Gateway, and more broadly, on the transportation policy strategy for the lower mainland and for the province.

[1115]

I want to briefly begin by repeating a question that I asked earlier this morning with respect to this project. We reiterate that question to the government side and, in this case, to the member for Surrey-Tynehead. The question is: why don't you come clean with the people of the province as to how much this project is going to cost? Come clean with the people of the province. Look carefully and realistically at the costs, and be clearer with people that the best estimate at this point is not \$3 billion; it's \$4.5 billion for the Gateway project.

It strikes us on this side that if we're going to have the legitimate consultation process that the member opposite talked about — which is very, very important, and the government has trumpeted it — it will look carefully at that consultation process to see how legitimate it is and what kind of consultation is being sought from the people of the province. Nevertheless, if it is going to be a legitimate consultation process, we have got to start with the facts. Come clean with the costs. The best estimate now is at least \$4.5 billion.

The second thing we need to say, the second question we need to ask of the government side, is that with respect to the proposed tolls, will you not be straight with the people of the province? Will you not be straight with the people of the region? The minister has talked about a potential toll of \$2.50 each way on the Port Mann Bridge. But we who use the Port Mann Bridge — and I did for 20-some years, teaching in Surrey and living in Vancouver — understand that people don't just go from one side of the bridge to the other. That's not the trip. They're coming from somewhere and going to somewhere.

The study that was used to propose the \$2.50 toll that the minister's talking about also talked about distance tolls — an estimate of ten cents a kilometre. So the real cost of the toll, and you should be straight with the people of the region and straight with the people who live south and north of the river.... The real proposal in the study that was used for the \$2.50 estimate is \$2.50 one way on the bridge, \$2.50 the other way on the bridge and ten cents a kilometre for distance tolling. This would mean if you were traveling from Langley to Vancouver and back, the price would not be \$2.50 times two, or \$5, but \$2.50 plus \$2.50 plus \$3.30 plus \$3.30, which is \$11.60.

It's a proposal. It's going to have consultation. Let's be straight with the folks in the region about what it is you are proposing they pay — not \$5, but from Langley to Vancouver and back, \$11.60.

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Order.

D. Chudnovsky: The proposal that's in the studies that the government took months and months to make public, the proposal that was leaked — not the NDP's point of view, but the proposal the government is working for — would include a toll of \$11.60 from

Langley to Vancouver and back to Langley. Not our figures. The leaked document that the government finally made public a couple of weeks ago — that's where those figures come from.

We on this side do not reject tolls out of hand as a transportation demand management tool, but we think there are three criteria that need to be included if tolls are to be used.

The first one is that there needs to be a public transit alternative for the folks who aren't able to use or don't choose to use the tolled infrastructure — the bridges and the roads. There isn't such a public transit alternative for people who live south of the river. That's a shame. That's something that needs to be changed if we're going to move to tolls.

The second criterion that needs to be there if we're going to use tolls is that there needs to be a free road alternative for those who don't choose to use the tolled roads. The minister has said on numerous occasions that the free road alternative is the Pattullo Bridge. I know the Pattullo Bridge. I drove across it for many years, and there may be those opposite.... The notion that the Pattullo Bridge is an alternative, a serious alternative, to a tolled entry from south to north of the river — to the city — is a joke. Talk to people in Surrey. Talk to real people in Surrey about the Pattullo Bridge as an alternative. Everybody there knows that it's not an alternative.

Then the minister, when he's confronted with that argument, jumps to the notion that the south perimeter road, which of course is only a twinkle in his eye at this point, is going to help. That road is not projected to go where most of the folks want to drive. It, too, is not an alternative. So the second criterion is a free road alternative. It's not there, and it needs to be there.

[1120]

The third criterion is that when we use tolling as a transportation demand management tool, the revenue from that tolling needs to be used for public transit. Otherwise, you're just going in circles. You are building a road or a bridge, and you're paying for it with tolls. It gets filled up. You build another road, and you pay for it with tolls. That's not a solution. That's not a strategy. So those three criteria have to be there. We're open to it. We think that the people of the province need to have a real discussion. We'll look forward to the consultation.

Now, I want to speak to the issue of the information that's available to the people, because we did canvass this issue of the Gateway program to some great extent in the estimates process last fall. I had a terrific time, the privilege of engaging the Minister of Transportation and his staff on the question of the Gateway. We had a lot of back and forth, and I asked very specific questions.

I said: "Are there going to be studies made public that will make it clear that the government has done their homework on a whole number of questions: transportation demand management, tolling, environment, whether in fact the proposed projects will solve

the problems that they're purported to solve — congestion?"

The minister said: "Oh, don't worry, you'll see those studies. They'll be made available to the people of the province." That, of course, was eight or ten months after he promised to make them public previously. "But don't worry," he said, "by the end of the year those studies will be made public," so that the legitimate questions that people have about these massive megaprojects can be answered.

Well, of course they weren't there by the end of the year, and we asked again. Finally, a week or ten days ago, what purports to be the studies, that purport to be the answers to the people of the province to the serious questions that they have about these projects, went up on the Net.

Well, there is nothing on the Net about transportation demand management, there is nothing about what impact the various elements of the proposed project will have on traffic congestion — which was specifically promised by the minister — and there's nothing about the environmental impact of the project. So the promises that were made to answer the specific and legitimate questions that people have about these projects weren't kept. We await. We await those studies because we're convincible, but we're not convinced by politics dressed up as transportation strategy.

We have four questions that we think need to be answered, specific questions that need to be answered if the people of the region and the province are going to be convinced that this is a good idea. I'll itemize those questions. The member for Surrey-Tynehead did us a favour in speaking to the first one. He spoke to the first one at length and I have, frankly, a lot of sympathy, and I'm sure most of the people in the region have a lot of sympathy for the notion that he put forward. He said the Gateway project "will reduce congestion." Those are good wishes, because there is congestion. The people in the region are right to be frustrated. They have a right to expect answers to their problems. All of that is true, and goods movement is a problem, and the people who are trying to move goods have a right to look for solutions to those problems.

But the simple, fundamental question hasn't been answered. The question is: will this project solve the problem of traffic congestion? It's an assertion from the member for Surrey-Tynehead, but we know that in every other jurisdiction in North America where bridges and roads have been built to deal with the problem of traffic congestion — which is a real problem and needs to be dealt with — the result has been to increase traffic congestion, because both the on-the-ground experience and the academic work that has been done on these problems show very clearly that building additional lanes of traffic and building bridges draws traffic. You end up with more traffic than you had before.

[1125]

Now, we on this side are convincible. I said before that we are convincible. Show us the data. Show us the evidence that it's going to be solved. But it hasn't been

done. It was promised. The minister promised that the studies would be made public and they would show incontrovertibly that we need to do this and that it will solve the problem. Not there. The people deserve better than that.

Question two: what impact will the proposed project have on land use patterns? The livable-region strategic plan is the consensus planning document for the region. One of the things we know from other jurisdictions and from the work that's been done by people who are transportation experts is that the building of wider highways and bridges in this way drives the kind of land use patterns that create traffic problems as opposed to solving them.

We asked in estimates: what is the government's assessment, and based on what studies and what work, about the impact the project will have on land use patterns? The minister said, "You will have the answers to those questions," and the answers are not there. They haven't been provided for the people of the region and the province, and they need answers to that

Question three: what impact will the proposed project have on the agricultural land reserve?

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order.

D. Chudnovsky: Madam Speaker, I note that there are members opposite who are uncomfortable that the opposition asks questions. That's too bad. It's too bad that the members opposite don't understand that in our system of government, government is held accountable...

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order.

D. Chudnovsky: ...by the opposition asking the tough questions. We're sorry, and we have sympathy that the members opposite are made uncomfortable. Nevertheless, we're going to do our job. So let me get to question three: what impact will the proposed project have...?

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, members.

D. Chudnovsky: What impact will the proposed pet project have on the agricultural land reserve? We all know that in the valley there is tremendous pressure on the ALR. We've discussed that in this House, and we'll continue to discuss that. Everybody in the House.... I haven't heard one person yet say: "Well, I'm for reducing the agricultural land reserve." There's nobody I've heard yet who says: "You know, the ALR is a mistake. We need to get rid of that." Yet....

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, members.

D. Chudnovsky: Oh, Madam Speaker, it's so uncomfortable to be asked questions — isn't it? Yet the question that was asked in estimates — and the minister said there would be answers — has yet to be answered. There is pressure on the ALR. We want to know — and so do the people of the province and the region — what impact this project will have on the ALR.

Finally, we asked a fourth question, and that is: what impact will this proposed project have on greenhouse gases and on air quality? The member for Surrey-Tynehead tells us: "Oh, this is an environmental..." By the way, there is no such answer in the studies that have been made public by the minister — not a word about the environment. Not one study, not one answer to the promise that was made in estimates that these questions would be answered.

The member for Surrey-Tynehead is trying to help us, and good for him. He says that if you build this project — and in particular, he is speaking of the part of the project which is the twinning of the bridge and the widening of the highway — cars will stop being stuck in traffic jams, which is an assertion, not a proven fact. But let's go there with him for the sake of the discussion. The cars will stop being stuck in the traffic jams. They'll be moving, so there will be less pollution.

Actually, not true. Everybody who has done work on these problems tells us that if highways are widened and bridges are built, there is an increase in traffic, and that increase in traffic will more than beat out the stalled traffic when it comes to emissions, greenhouse gases and air quality — that we go backwards rather than forward.

I'm open, and we on this side are open, to the member for Surrey-Tynehead. We know he takes this issue seriously. I don't question the sincerity of the member. We are open to be convinced by science that bringing more cars will, in fact, reduce emissions, increase air quality — the second-worst air quality in the country in the Fraser Valley — and decrease greenhouse gas emissions. We haven't seen that kind of evidence yet.

Madam Speaker, there is a discussion to be had about this project. There are elements of it which make a lot of sense. We are very interested in the discussion of the south and north perimeter roads. We want to look carefully at the impact of those and other reforms.

I have many, many more questions, but we'll get a chance with the minister in estimates. We have many, many more questions, but it's got to be a real discussion. It can't be politics dressed up as transportation strategy. It has to be a real discussion about real solutions to the legitimate frustrations and problems that people in this region have.

[1130]

We look forward to that discussion. We will participate in the consultation, and so will hundreds and thousands of others. We hope that the government will be ready to listen — at least more ready to listen to the difficult questions than some have been in this House this morning.

I. Black: You know, Madam Speaker, I must acknowledge that I had to keep my thesaurus handy for many of the previous remarks. There were some big words in there that I wasn't quite familiar with. Regardless, the time is upon us, so I'll keep my comments *de minimus* and won't focus on the terminological inexactitudes of the previous speaker.

I have to admit that I, too, have a series of questions, but my questions have actually been more acutely focused, because they're coming from my constituents — not just from those who live in my own riding but from those that I bump into throughout the tri-city area, part of which I so proudly represent. The questions come in various forms, but they all seem to come back to one common theme or question, which can best be summarized as follows: when will this thing finally be done, and when are the shovels going to be in the ground?

Now, other speakers before me, and I'm sure some after, will dwell on the compelling numbers around this, but let me just make an opening comment by suggesting that this is one of the most comprehensive plans in transportation to hit this area and this province for the last 30 years. This plan has got vision. It's got foresight. Most importantly, it's not only playing catch-up for ten or 15 years of doing nothing, but it actually is looking on a go-forward basis as well, which will take us where we need to be and actually plan going forward instead of just playing catch-up for a change.

This plan is crucial for my riding and my constituents, because they not only are users of the current gridlocked system but are also feeling the effects of the existing one as other commuters from other areas make their way through our communities of Coquitlam and Port Moody. This plan reflects the context of an understanding of the flow of goods and people in terms of how their numbers have changed and also in terms of how their direction has changed, more north-south versus just strictly from the valley into the city of Vancouver — not just goods moving from Kamloops to Richmond but goods that are coming to us via Toronto en route to Hong Kong.

This plan also reflects the understanding of the need for public transportation now and in the future. We currently can't ride a bus on the bridges that we have, which has been pointed out by the member for Vancouver-Kensington. He himself talked about how the Pattullo Bridge is a joke and the Port Mann Bridge is a joke. That's precisely why we need this plan. We don't have public transportation alternatives on those bridges as it stands today. I'm also very proud of the fact that this plan includes the largest investment in bicycle lanes in the history of this province and in this country.

There were wonderful comments made about the lack of consultation perceived by the member. Well, I'm pleased to bring to his attention the notion that there is more consultation over this project than probably any other project in the history of this province. Over the next three years there have been specific con-

sultation sessions identified — 2006, 2007, 2008 — and I'd be pleased to refer the information to the member, as he appears not aware of it. There are dozens of open houses already scheduled as part of the first phase alone.

This reflects a plan and political will to get something done in this province, neither of which existed in the ten years of NDP rule. Let me just point out that the opposition views on this matter — as we've seen again today — are inconsistent, contradictory and unclear. There is concern about the use of P3s that I've heard mentioned. Yet in one four-month period alone, back in the NDP rule, there were five different NDP ministers that were espousing the benefits of P3s.

Then we heard earlier that apparently this is not a \$3-billion plan but a \$4.5-billion plan. I'm pleased to also bring to the member's attention — and I can again provide the documentation so that the reading and homework can be done — that the \$3 billion number includes allowances for inflation and cost-of-materials and labour increases over that period of time. We're not exactly certain where the \$4.5-billion price tag came from, nor the process by which that number came up, but I do hope that the \$4.5-billion price tag which has been bantered around this morning has involved a better process than that used for the fast ferries, which were budgeted at \$250 million and came in at over \$600 million.

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Order, members.

[1135]

I. Black: We all know what a gem they were once it was done. Perhaps if that's too much of an Achilles' heel, let me then focus on transportation and one close to my neck of the woods.

I think there was a project called the Millennium Line, which was budgeted at about \$1 billion. It came in at around \$1.9 billion. It was years overdue — not the months and months which allegedly had to be waited to get a report of some kind on this project. I might point out that the scope of that project, because of the mismanagement and ineptitude, was reduced such that my constituents — who were promised rapid transit to Port Moody, to Coquitlam and the north section in particular — spent on average, per household, \$3,000 in taxes for this project that has not put one yard of rail anywhere near their homes.

I'll also point out the consistency pertaining to the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge. This was a pre-election promise of 1996 by former Premier Glen Clark. It seemed to be good enough for him. Well, it was either a broken promise or the reality of the bankrupt province that they created that caused them to scale this back from the twinning of the bridge to one HOV lane.

K. Krueger: Right down to the toilet paper.

Deputy Speaker: Order.

I. Black: Including toilet paper, yes. The then Minister of Transportation, who is now the member for Yale-Lillooet, lamented more than once: "Gee, it's too bad we can't twin the bridge."

Let me close with a simple comment. There's lots to be said about not moving forward because we don't have perfect information. Well, if we didn't have perfect information, the many things that we enjoy in this country, never mind this province, would not have moved forward. The inventions never would have seen any of their inventions come to light, and many of the great things that we take for granted in this province today would not exist. Leaders deal with imperfect and evolving information every day. We can derive confidence and boldly go forward, because there is a comprehensive plan in place upon which we will base our adjustments as the future circumstances reveal themselves. This is a good plan, and I resoundingly support it.

S. Simpson: I find it interesting that the previous member, in discussing this, seemed to be enthusiastic about living in the past and talking about what's gone on in the past. I suspect that's because of this government being totally vacant about how to deal with issues of the future, which is clear by most of their policies.

The problem is that the Gateway isn't a plan. What the Gateway is, is a hodgepodge of a number of projects, and there's no sense here that a plan actually exists. That's part of the real problem here.

As I was thinking about this the other day, I happened to be watching television. I was watching Vaughn Palmer's program, *Voice of the Province* or *Voice of B.C.* Norman Spector, whom you would all know and who is not somebody who is a friend of ours, in his comments continually said: "The problem with this government is the dearth of management competency." They are not competent managers, and in ministry after ministry they have demonstrated that. Clearly, the Ministry of Transportation has incompetent leadership in management, and it's reflected in here.

You know, there does have to be vision, clearly. The vision that the member for Surrey-Tynehead talked about needs to be there. I accept that there's vision. The problem with this is the only vision seems to be tunnel vision.

What we see here is an absolute lack of a sense of what we're facing in terms of a community like the lower mainland. We need to begin to deal with plans in a much more sustainable way. We need to look at the future of these communities in a more planned, thoughtful and sustainable way.

When we talk about sustainability, we're talking about sustainability which talks about balancing social, economic and environmental interest. We're not talking about the sustainability that was embraced by the Minister of Health and the Premier the other day on their new plans, which are talking about the commercialization of health care. What we're talking about here is real sustainability.

What I want to do is spend a little bit of my time talking about some of those things and what some of

that sustainability might look like. Questions that I have.... My friend for Vancouver-Kensington raised some questions, and I want to raise some questions as well.

[1140]

Where are the efforts in these plans around transportation demand management? What have we actually seen in the area of transportation demand management? Where are the smaller-scale initiatives that will help to alter the practices of people in their travel plans — that will help to ensure the movement of people and goods in an effective and efficient way?

This could involve tolls, which the minister has talked about, and that might make sense. It could involve priority lanes for goods movement. That might make perfect sense. It could involve congestion pricing, something now that the government's talking about. It could involve incentives for people to drive at different times of the day than they do today and offer up opportunities, incentives and initiatives for that to occur, but we don't see any of that.

The research we were promised that the member for Vancouver-Kensington spoke about — that research, to date, doesn't exist. Maybe the minister will bring it forward at some time in the future. Today it doesn't exist.

Where are the plans for transit that is effective and efficient? Where are the discussions around the old interurban line, and can it in fact be re-invigorated? We don't hear those discussions.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Where are the discussions around better bus service? Legitimately, people south of the river are very frustrated about congestion issues. Where are those discussions around improved bus service, improved park-and-rides? Where is the long-range plan for creating real opportunities for those who live south of the Fraser to get across the bridge without having to get into their car? There is no discussion about those plans, and that's probably because they don't exist — at least, not to date they don't exist.

There are issues around how these decisions get made. How is this government working with the Greater Vancouver regional district to enhance land use planning and to implement the liveable-region strategic plan and to encourage the sustainable region initiative? These are well-considered plans that, unlike the Gateway, are comprehensive in their nature. Unfortunately, this government is much more ready to give the GVRD the back of their hand than to move forward with them to find sustainable solutions.

We had the Ministry of Transportation dismiss the leadership of the GVRD and dismiss their concerns and say: "We'll have a consultation. We have a plan, and we're going ahead — regardless of what anybody thinks — but we'll have a consultation. We'll have some open houses, but it will not affect what we're going to do." The Ministry of Transportation has dismissed the GVRD, and they've dismissed many of the

experts who are saying that they have serious concerns with these plans and whether they will accomplish the objectives that have been put out by the government. They've dismissed the local councils north of the Fraser who have expressed concerns about these plans.

What we know about the Minister of Transportation is that the Minister of Transportation has little, if any, understanding of the issue of sustainability and sees things only in black and white. He sees things in pave it or don't. That raises a very critical question. I understand that's the Minister of Transportation's job. That raises a critical question for me, which is: where is the Minister of Environment?

The Minister of Environment, under his portfolio, has responsibility for sustainable communities, and he has responsibility for sustainable transportation. The Minister of Environment has been silent on these issues. It appears that he has had no role in these issues. When we discussed these in estimates last year, the Minister of Environment said: "I don't know; it's not my job." We've seen no reports on key sustainability questions from the Gateway project, even though they've been promised. We've seen no meaningful discussion on these issues, even though they've been promised.

The Minister of Environment does have critical responsibility to ensure the sustainability of these projects and to bring that voice to the table. Where is the Minister of Environment demanding that issues around greenhouse gases and climate change are analyzed? Where is the Minister of Environment saying: "What criteria around sustainability are being used to ensure that this project or projects are, in fact, sustainable"? Where is the Minister of Environment saying: "Where are the answers to the questions around congestion"? There is not one study or report that this government can point to in North America where building more lanes has solved the congestion issue. They can't point to one, because one doesn't exist — not one credible study.

[1145]

Where is the Minister of Environment saying to the Minister of Transportation and to cabinet: "Hang on a minute. We have real environmental questions and sustainability questions to deal with, and they're not being addressed." The Minister of Environment is nowhere, and that's very disconcerting. That's very concerning to people in my community and to people throughout the region who all understand that sustainability is essential to all the plans we make in the lower mainland.

There are a lot of people who live on a very small piece of land. Everything that we do there has to be thought about with a sustainability lens, particularly massive projects like the Gateway that will fundamentally change much of the way our community works. It will change transportation patterns. It will affect land use patterns. It will make determinations about where people reside. All of those are critical and essential questions.

There's nothing in the Gateway project that suggests they have been discussed in any way, shape or

form. Until we get to talking about those things, we don't actually get the opportunity to start to solve these problems. It is the Minister of Environment, because we know these are not important issues for the Minister of Transportation. He has a different set of important issues, and he's driving those hard in the cabinet, clearly. But the Minister of Environment is there. He is the trustee for the environment; he is the trustee for sustainability. He has the responsibility to bring those issues forward, and to date the minister is silent.

I think that what we need to do here is have a real discussion about these issues, and the people who really have to be part of that discussion have to come to the table. Clearly, the Minister of Transportation has to be there, but so does the Environment Minister. We will be there on our side of the table, and we will raise the questions that the member for Vancouver-Kensington has raised.

We will raise the questions that are being raised by the Greater Vancouver regional district. We will raise the questions that are being raised by the leading thinkers on these issues at UBC and elsewhere. But we'll only be able to do that if we have a real discussion.

One of the real things about sustainability, you know, is that it's not just about setting out the criteria for the three areas of sustainability around environment, around economy, around social issues, but it's about engagement. If you really want sustainability, what you need to do is engage people in the process so they take ownership of the issues that are in front of them.

The process that's been laid out by the minister of open houses does nothing to engage that discussion in a meaningful way. It's time to sit down with those communities which have serious concerns, whether those concerns are, "How do I get across that bridge? The congestion is intolerable," or people on the other side who say: "If you do this, it's going to impact my community in a very serious way."

Both those sets of concerns are absolutely legitimate concerns. They need to be spoken to, and they need to be spoken to by the people who are leading this. That is the Minister of Transportation, and it should be the Minister of Environment, but it's not. Instead, we have this exercise of open houses going on — a sell job for a project that nobody believes will solve the problem long term. Nobody believes it.

The minister is the first one to say: "We can't build our way out of congestion." The Premier has said: "We can't build our way out of congestion." But they offer absolutely nothing to tell us what, then, will be done here, other than to say \$4½ billion — whatever the final price tag is on this — for a couple of years of easing the problem, and then we're going to be back in a bigger box than we were in, in the first place

In closing, I would ask that the government here actually advance a sustainable notion on this and a sustainable approach and engage that discussion and answer these legitimate questions being raised on this side of the House, being raised in the regional district,

being raised among thinkers on transportation and urban planning. Answer those questions, and when those questions are answered, then come back with a plan that meets the challenges of those questions. Until you do that, you're not going to fix the problem that we all agree exists.

[1150]

Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be the agenda of this government. Unfortunately, we will all pay the price in the long term if the government charges forward on this narrow-minded approach to solving the problem when they haven't found the answers on how to solve the problem.

J. Rustad: Some may wonder why a member for Prince George-Omineca is standing to talk about the Gateway project. That has been questioned by some of the opposition members in terms of their support for this project or lack thereof.

I just wanted to stand today to talk about the fact that as a province the congestion that we currently have in the lower mainland is costing our economy \$1.5 billion. That's money that we should not be giving away in terms of the overall infrastructure that we have there. More importantly, there's \$500 million of that that is directly related to transportation of goods. Up in the north and up in the interior we have a vast amount of goods that needs to make it to market in a timely manner.

We need to make sure that we have the infrastructure. We need to make sure that we have the ability to be competitive and that we don't add additional costs. As the lower mainland grows, as our economy grows, the demand on the facilities in the lower mainland is becoming incredible. We need to be able to have that kind of infrastructure. You need that kind of vision. You need that kind of long-term planning to be able to make sure that we can be competitive and that we can continue our advantages that we have in our province.

I want to point out that the opposition seemed to stand up, and they asked lots of questions: "Why are we doing this?" and "You haven't done that properly." I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that their record is somewhat difficult to defend — on their side of the equation, you might say. I want to say — for example, to show you the lack of vision that can sometimes come from the opposition — that back in the '90s, when Skeena Cellulose got into trouble in Prince Rupert, they had no problem putting \$400 million into that, instead of looking at the root issues in that area and perhaps considering forwarding the project of Prince Rupert or others, such as we have done in our government.

When you look at what is needed in the province in a broader scope, rather than in the short- and narrow-mindedness that comes from the opposition and the critics.... When you look at the other projects that our government has done in this province — for example, the Port of Prince Rupert and the investments we've made there, the Cariboo connector and the ability that will bring to help get our goods to market faster, the William R. Bennett bridge, the Kicking Horse Canyon,

various airport expansions — in fact, 80 percent of the investments we have made in this province have been outside the lower mainland to date. In our \$2.3-billion three-year plan, more than \$1.3 billion is for capital projects outside of the lower mainland.

We recognize and thank the efforts of the Transportation Minister and our government for those investments, because we need to have that access, and we need to have that infrastructure. Along with that, we also recognize that it's not just about the north. We also need to be able to have things moving in the lower mainland, because it directly affects us.

One of the other things that I also wanted to mention briefly was the fact that we have some real needs in the north around the mountain pine beetle and around the infrastructure and the challenges that we're facing there. I'm proud that our government is spending between five and 15 times more than the NDP administration did on road infrastructure, on maintenance and....

We recognize that we need to be able to meet the demands in our future. We know, and we sit down and look at vision. We're not shortsighted. We don't stand up and say: "This is wrong." Certainly, we don't look at trying to find solutions like fast ferries to meet our long-term needs. We don't want anything quick and fast about this at all. We want a nice, methodical plan.

One of the other issues I'd like to bring up around that is that they're questioning our costing on this. This project has had contingencies built into every phase of it, as well as an overall contingency budget. It has also been

laid out in such a time frame that it won't interfere with other projects. It comes on stream so that we won't have a challenge in terms of work flow.

[1155]

Our government has had true vision in setting this project up. Our vision has set up exactly the process that it should be. We have firm numbers. We have a good budgeting process, unlike the previous government, for example, on the Island Highway and the budgeting that they came out with. Not only was the project over budget, they had to continually go through steps of phasing back the project just so that they could try to make it look like it was close to being on budget.

The greatest part of this project, quite frankly, is that it is the right thing to do. It is good for all of British Columbia, and I am very proud to be standing here supporting this here today.

J. Rustad moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until 2 p.m. this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 11:56 a.m.

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Published by British Columbia Hansard Services, and printed under the authority of the Speaker by the Queen's Printer, Victoria. Rates: single issue, \$2.85; per calendar year, mailed daily, \$298. GST extra. Agent: Crown Publications Inc., 521 Fort St., Victoria, B.C. V8W 1E7. Telephone: (250) 386-4636. Fax: 386-0221.

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