

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address to B.C. Road Builders and Heavy Construction Association
Victoria
November 29, 2002

Check against delivery

Eighteen months ago, I gave Judith Reid a pretty big challenge. I told her it was time we had an integrated transportation system in this province, and to talk with communities all over British Columbia about their transportation needs and goals. I think she has done an exceptional job of meeting that task.

Our province was built around a transportation infrastructure that connected people and resources and opportunities. In fact, one of the first roads was built right here in Victoria to connect people from Port Victoria to Esquimalt Harbour.

Over the last 50 years we made significant transportation changes. But I can tell you honestly and bluntly that the majority of those changes were made 50 years ago and 40 years ago and 30 years ago.

Fifty years ago, just 10 per cent of the roads in the province of British Columbia were paved. There were no paved roads north of 100 Mile House. (There are some people in Peace River who say there are still no paved roads up north, but there are – I've seen them with my own eyes.) Today we have 42,000 kilometres of roads connecting B.C.'s communities.

Fifty years ago there were 237,000 motor vehicles in British Columbia; today there are 2.6 million.

Today we move seven billion tonnes out of Port Vancouver annually. Today we welcome 15.5 million passengers into Vancouver International Airport and 229,000 tonnes of cargo; 1.3 million trucks cross our border with the U.S. There are 30,000 kilometres of rural and northern roads in this province that support our critical resource industries.

And yet somehow we are facing a transportation deficit in 2002 – a transportation deficit that I hear about from every single one of my MLAs.

We're investing 20 million additional dollars in roads in the Northeast right now, because when we invest in roads, we drive the energy industry, which creates jobs and opportunities and brings literally hundreds of millions of dollars into the public coffers.

In 1966, when the B.C. Road Builders was formed, the capital budget for roads was \$65 million; our per capita investment in roads was \$200 in today's dollars.

In 1992 we were investing \$116 per capita. In 2002, the last complete budget from the previous government, the per capita investment in transportation was \$73 per British Columbian. That's a 63 per cent drop from 1966.

And I am here to tell you today that for our province to have the economic activity and opportunity it deserves, we are going to have to invest in transportation infrastructure across the entire province of British Columbia.

There is nothing easier than to have an elected official tell you that they're going to invest in the things that you want them to invest in. But this is not our money. It's your money. And my generation demands more of just about everything, when you think about it.

We want more roads. We want more transit. We want better airports. We want better health care. We want more money invested in training and education. We want more for day care. We want more. We want more. We want more.

Look at the people around you at your table. Go ahead; take a look at them. They look good – but how many of those people are looking a lot younger this year to you?

We're all getting older. So is our infrastructure. And we have to recognize it's time for our generation to think not just about ourselves, but about the folks who are following us – our kids. And we should think about what we are leaving to our children.

I graduated from university when I was 22 years old. When I graduated, the total public debt in British Columbia was \$2.84 billion.

My son Nicholas is about to graduate from university, and he'll be 22 years old. The total public debt that my son and his generation will be inheriting from us is \$40 billion.

That's how much we've taken out of the system without giving back, and it seems to me we have an obligation to think about how we can give back to the next generation. That obligation includes investing in our future, but it requires that we invest wisely. If we turn our backs on that, we're robbing our children of the opportunities they deserve.

Your association has come forward on a regular basis and suggested positive solutions that recognize that when our economy is thriving, we generate the resources we need to pay for public services.

We have to be willing to do things in different ways, though, if we're going to get different results. I think we all know that in our hearts. But we all would like to have an easy, simple kind of solution to these things. There are no easy solutions to these problems, which are almost generational at this point.

We're facing a \$4.4-billion deficit this year, and a \$40-billion provincial debt. Every day it costs us \$7.2 million to service our debt.

We're going to invest in infrastructure because we believe, in the long term, that a comprehensive, responsible, integrated transportation plan will allow our industries to flourish. And let's all remember that \$1 million of investment in transportation generates about 13 and a bit years of direct and indirect employment.

So what are we going to do? We have a special plan to invest in northern and rural roads to mitigate the damage that's been done by neglect over the last decade. This year we put \$100 million into northern and rural roads.

Twenty million dollars was added to the oil and gas initiative for resources roads to encourage exploration and activity in the Peace.

With the government of Canada, we've announced \$122 million to be invested in priority highway improvements over the next little while.

Two weeks ago we committed to \$30.4 million in 11 border-crossing improvements. Having trucks and other vehicles waiting at the border costs our economy a fortune. We want to change that.

Another thing we want to do is connect with the rest of our country. So we have told the federal government that our top road improvement priority is the Kicking Horse Canyon, which goes through the Rockies. It's a \$670-million project. The cost to British Columbia is going to come in at 50 per cent. We expect the federal government to commit the balance.

We are not asking any more than our share. We send \$750 million in gas taxes to the federal coffers. We get about \$37 million back.

We want to get more of those dollars back into the transportation infrastructure in British Columbia. Our gas tax in British Columbia should be focused on transportation infrastructure. Every single cent this government takes in gas tax at the pump goes to transportation improvements across this province.

It is critical that we build new private-public partnerships. We passed a new Transportation Investment Act that allows us to encourage private-sector investment. It allows us to think about how we can deliver the improvements that have been identified all over the province.

Improving safety in the Kicking Horse Canyon is one. Almost two dozen people have died in the Kicking Horse Canyon in the last five years. That's too many.

Some people say: "If people would just drive according to the law, there wouldn't be any challenges." The problem is that people don't always drive according to the law, and there are challenges. We can design in improvements and safety requirements across the province, not just in the Kicking Horse Canyon, that allows us to mitigate and reduce the

accidents that take place. We are going to do that: that's going to be one of our top transportation priorities.

I want you to think about not just our roads but our entire transportation infrastructure. We have a port in British Columbia that, too often, we have forgotten about: Prince Rupert. The port of Prince Rupert is almost 30 hours closer to our eastern markets than the port of Vancouver.

There's no reason we can't have a national port in Prince Rupert that's meeting the needs of customers in Canada by creating competition for the port of Vancouver and building the economy in the North. That's a positive thing because when this entire province is firing on all cylinders, there is no province that has more opportunity.

I've been in Ottawa this week, and I mentioned to the Prime Minister that it's critical we have a national highway system that works for all of us. When British Columbia is thriving, that helps the country – it's in Canada's interest for British Columbia to be doing well. To do well, we need investments in our transportation infrastructure.

It's not just east-west, although it is Highway 16 and Highway 1 and Highway 3 – all of those highway improvements are necessary.

It's also the huge expanse north of Prince George. Highway 97 is a critical economic artery, down through the heartland of British Columbia: through the Chilcotin, the Cariboo and the Okanagan, and into our American market.

If we want tourism, our forest industry, our mining industry and our energy industry to work, we have to have a transportation system that allows goods and services to flow freely. If you want to have a great public health-care system, you have to have a great transportation system to get patients to the care they need.

Transportation is roads and transit. It's ports. It's airports. It's providing British Columbians with choices.

Now, how do we do that? The first thing you do is talk to British Columbians about what works and what doesn't work. Judith Reid will be bringing in a comprehensive transportation strategy early next year, and she's going to have to think of all of us.

As Judith talked to people around the province, one of the issues was tolling the inland ferries. It was planned that we were going to have those tolls in place by January 1 of next year.

We will not be putting those tolls in place until the comprehensive planning is done. When it is, all British Columbians will share equally in the opportunities that an open transportation system can create.

The critical part of this is to maintain an open, honest and direct dialogue – not just between road builders and government, but between road builders, government and the citizens of British Columbia.

The transportation deficit is a priority we have to meet in a thoughtful, comprehensive and deliberate way. It has to be met with citizens and regional authorities. It has to be met with private industry. It has to be met by building new partnerships, and being bold enough to think up fresh ideas. I'm asking you to help us with that.

We're a province that was built on dreams. Think back just 35 years, and think about what the government of the day was thinking and dreaming when it decided to invest \$200 per capita in a transportation infrastructure in this province. Think of the opportunities that opened to a future generation of British Columbians.

We know we can do new things in transportation. We know the basics; we know the principles. Transportation systems that work to connect people and bring them together are a huge economic engine for all of us.

So join us in government as we move forward to a province that's connected – where people, goods and services move on great roads for everybody.

Thank you very much.