

Joint Submission to the *Fraser Valley Highway 1 Corridor Improvement Project* by the Fraser Valley Chambers

Introduction

The Highway 1 corridor, as it extends through the Fraser Valley, is the lifeblood of commerce and connectivity, accommodating more than 80,000 vehicles daily. These vehicles include the employees who power our businesses, the tourists who fuel the visitor economy, and the dedicated service providers and truckers who facilitate the transportation of goods, build our homes and businesses, and maintain our infrastructure. It's also the route along which express buses traverse, serving as a key connection point between public transportation networks.

The critical importance of this corridor is why the chambers of commerce representing Langley Township, Langley City, Abbotsford, Mission, and Chilliwack have collaborated to make this joint submission.

The Fraser Valley Chambers are advocating for the completion of the Highway 1 expansion as soon as possible and are encouraging the Province and the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to prioritise and accelerate wherever possible the preloading, design, planning, procurement and other timelines and schedules to get this valuable project started – and finished – sooner.

Today, congestion grinds the corridor to a halt regularly, stopping trade, slowing business, and making it too difficult for people to get around the region. With the population in the Fraser Valley expected to increase by 47% by 2050, this expansion is urgently needed, and needed now.

While we appreciate, and are participating in, the consultation process, we caution against the potential for excessive delays caused by such processes, and our hope is to strike a balance between input gathering and planning and the imperative of swift implementation. Our region's businesses cannot afford extended disruptions caused by years of delays.

This joint submission includes our shared and urgent request that this project be given the attention and priority it needs and our communities deserves. Further, this submission includes questions, recommendations, cautions, and suggestions for each of the project phases, which are outlined in sections below.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input into this vital project.

Sincerely,

Cory Redekop, CEO, Greater Langley Chamber of Commerce

Alex Mitchell, CEO, Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce

Leanna Kemp, Executive Director, Chilliwack Chamber of Commerce

Miriam Bozman, Executive Director, Mission Regional Chamber of Commerce

Submission

Overall, the Fraser Valley Highway 1 Improvement Program must address the various concerns and needs in our communities which have been expressed for many years, and it must do so in a timely fashion.

The people and businesses of the Fraser Valley deserve clear, unambiguous timelines for this project, and particularly for Phase 3A which has been calved from the rest of the project for the express purpose of expediting its completion whilst other sections face potential delay.

Already during this very consultation process there has been confusion around the expected timelines and possible completion dates for the project. We urge the Ministry to commit to a clear, public timeline for this phase, and work with the contractor partners to push for an accelerated completion date.

Our below submission follows the proposed phases of the Highway 1 Expansion Project, with specific references to each community and related comments, recommendations and suggestions.

Phase 3A - Langley: 264th underpass and Highway 1

Langley is now the fastest-growing community in Metro Vancouver, with more individuals and businesses locating to the Langley area. Langley serves as the gateway between Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, and as such is a growing hub of activity for the region.

However, infrastructure has long struggled to simply keep up with this growth, not to mention leading and supporting it, with Highway 1 as a signature example.

The 264th underpass on Highway 1 is the gateway to the Gloucester industrial district, home to hundreds of businesses, 11,000 workers and critical industrial and trade-enabling lands. But highway traffic slows access to and from this manufacturing and logistics hub, snaring supply chains and exacerbating costs and challenges related to shipping. The persistent traffic adds significant time and cost to businesses operating in the area, particularly those working in our trucking industry for which additional hours spent in traffic directly limits the amount of hours drivers can spend actually moving goods.

Overall, the proposed expansion will add vital capacity to the corridor and help to alleviate some of the critical challenges impeding business in Langley, but there are some areas worthy of further consideration:

- **Lack of Net New Travel Lanes**

The proposed Phase 3A expansion will add an HOV lane, and a bus-on-shoulder lane throughout, but will *not* add a net new travel lane. We worry this is shortsighted.

While the HOV and transit lanes are important to service (and encourage) more sustainable modes, we remain unconvinced that remaining with only two normal travel lanes will provide the capacity needed to serve the long-term needs of this part of the region with the growth in population and truck traffic we know is coming.

Given the scope of the Fraser Valley Highway 1 Improvement Program, we question the wisdom of not building the additional capacity needed for the future now, while the highway is being redesigned and constructed.

An additional through lane of traffic should be included as part of Phase 3A.

- **264th Underpass**

The 264th underpass is an aged piece of infrastructure, and we support the full replacement of it to provide better, safer access into the Gloucester industrial district for both passenger vehicles and trucks, as well as pedestrians and cyclists.

Gloucester's strategic location on the Highway and with straight-line access to the USA border means it will continue to attract shipping, warehousing, and logistics businesses, and the related trucking activity, and the 264th underpass must be designed with the necessary lane widths other capacities to meet the needs of truck traffic.

As the current underpass remains the main access point in and out of this district, however, we urge the project team to carefully develop the plans for its replacement. We expect full use of the underpass in both directions to be maintained during the construction of the replacement, as alternating lanes or other such closures, particularly during business hours, would be a significant disruption to local businesses.

One of the most exciting elements of this part of the project is the addition of a mobility hub at the 264th underpass, including a bus loop, which will finally bring transit services to this area of Langley which has long been underserved.

Given the unique position of this area at the border of the service areas for both Translink and BC Transit, we recommend that the plans for the mobility hub be developed with deep consultation with these two bodies to ensure it will meet their needs and allow them to actually run service to this area and finally solve the years-long challenge of no transit service in Gloucester.

- **Viability of Bus-on-Shoulder Lane**

'Bus-on-shoulder' lanes are typically used to allow temporary queue-jumping by transit vehicles in areas of high congestion. As shoulders, they are decidedly not transit lanes. In other jurisdictions which make use of such lanes, they typically remain open for use as a shoulder for break-downs and other emergency needs, displacing transit vehicles in such instances. Also, they are typically used only when traffic flows drop to below a set speed, and are not used in other situations.

We question whether a proper transit-only lane would not be a better, more appropriate option, instead of using a bus-on-shoulder lane. Given a 2.5m shoulder will remain for vehicles on the inside of the highway along this stretch, we recommend this bus-on-shoulder lane be properly made a bus-only transit lane, and built to suit such use to encourage and service transit users.

Phase 3A - Abbotsford: Mt. Lehman Underpass and Highway 1

Abbotsford continues to see rapid population growth alongside a robust agricultural and advanced manufacturing sector. The backlog on Highway 1 reduces economic competitiveness for businesses bringing products to market, delays the movement of in-demand workers, and ultimately adds on costs to consumers.

With tens of thousands of vehicles traversing the Highway 1 corridor daily, the lack of highway capacity is on clear display. Traffic on the highway routinely slows to a crawl through much of Abbotsford and across the Fraser Valley. The movement of goods, services and people is severely and negatively impacted, adding significant time to the commute of those trying to pass through this section of the highway.

This section of the highway needs core capacity improvements to better meet the needs of residents, business and industry. We are pleased to see the addition of an HOV lane and bus-on-shoulder lane in each direction, as well as the multi-use-pathway to allow cyclists and others to travel safely through this corridor. We also approve of the use of truck climbing lanes to allow our vital trucking sector to move safely alongside other traffic elements.

Phase 3B - Mission: Highway 1 and Connection to Highway 11

Phase 3B of the Fraser Valley Highway 11 Expansion plan is a significant undertaking that requires careful planning, collaboration, and a commitment to sustainability and safety. While we appreciate there are many impacts and benefits to consumers involved in this project, as a Chamber of Commerce, we are a champion of local business first, primarily concerned with the impacts on local businesses during and after the expansion construction phase and have directed our comments as such.

We are particularly pleased to see project objectives include a focus on facilitating efficient goods movement, improving transit travel times, and generally “moving people faster”, prioritizing a streamlined supply chain, encouraging active transportation, and reducing employment barriers to the Fraser Valley’s workforce.

With that, we have several questions and recommendations to make regarding this portion of the expansion project.

- **Peardonville Road Underpass**

As this underpass provides an important link between the residential and commercial/industrial areas on either side of the highway, maintaining access during construction is critical. We recommend full consideration be given to maintaining effective

access points for consumers and staff to reach the businesses during construction, as well as mitigating increased congestion and disruptions to traffic flow.

To reduce negative impacts of the construction on local businesses, we recommend:

- Maintaining open lines of communication with businesses throughout the project, providing regular updates on construction timelines and potential disruptions.
- Developing and promoting alternative access routes to affected businesses during construction to ensure customers can still reach them.
- Collaborating with local chambers of commerce to promote affected businesses and encourage residents to continue supporting them.
- Implementing measures to control noise and pollution to affected businesses during construction, such as sound barriers and dust control.
- Considering financial support or other incentives to businesses impacted by construction

- **Highway 11 Interchange**

The Highway 11 Interchange is a vital infrastructure link for the Mission business community. This interchange provides access for Mission businesses to Highway 1 and connections to Metro Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, and out to the rest of the province. In addition, it is a critical corridor that provides a direct connection for trucking and shipments to the USA border at the Huntingdon-Sumas crossing.

Due to this importance, we fully support the construction of a new, expanded interchange to increase capacity, efficiency and safety. As such a critical junction, the Highway 11 interchange needs to be built to handle various transportation modes and directions of travel. We are encouraged that the proposed use of the “diverging diamond” design model suggests the Ministry and project team recognize the need for significant improvements and changes.

That said, the “diverging diamond” interchange model is novel, and involves traffic patterns and directions that may not be intuitive for drivers. There is a risk, therefore, that driver inexperience with this pattern may undermine the expected reduction in crashes. We recommend an education and communication campaign, including visual renderings to ensure drivers understand how to navigate the new interchange, and recommend enhanced line markings, lane paintings, and signage to make the interchange patterns clear.

- **Transparency and Communication**

We believe it is vital to maintain transparency throughout the project by providing regular updates and progress reports to the public, stakeholders, and local authorities. We recommend robust public education campaigns be conducted to inform commuters and residents about the project's timeline, budget, and alternate routes during construction to minimize congestion and encourage support for businesses in affected areas.

By proactively addressing these potential impacts and implementing mitigation strategies, local businesses can better weather the challenges posed by this highway expansion project while also benefiting from the long-term improvements in accessibility and economic growth.

Phase 4 - Chilliwack: Further Expansion

Chilliwack is a growing part of the Fraser Valley, and increasingly integrated into the broader Metro Vancouver region. As such, and given expected growth over the coming decades, the expansion work on Highway 1 should be extended through to Chilliwack as soon as possible.

We understand the catastrophic weather events of 2021 have given rise to greater complications for this portion, including at the intersection of highway infrastructure needs, climate adaptiveness, and regional flood mitigation strategies. That said, the flooding of 2021 clearly demonstrated the importance of this corridor and its critical role in supply chains and economic activity for not just the region, but the entire province and beyond.

The challenges of the 2021 flooding, however, also gave rise to a potential new way of conducting infrastructure projects in this province, and provides a model which could be applied to this project to accelerate its completion. The employment of a progressive alliance contract model for the rehabilitation of Highway 5 following the 2021 flood provided an example of how government and industry working together can dramatically accelerate critical infrastructure projects.

In order to provide maximum value to taxpayers, we implore the Ministry to utilise this same progressive contract model for Phase 4 works and beyond. The collaboration between the government and industry holds immense potential for maximising value to taxpayers. By working together, these two entities can pool their expertise, resources, and knowledge to deliver a project that maximises efficiency, minimises costs, offers the greatest benefits to the public, and allows us to overcome the challenges of this specific stretch.

The government's oversight and policy direction, combined with industry's technical prowess and construction experience, can ensure that the applicable Highway 1 widening project phases are executed in a manner that optimises value for taxpayers. Together, they can drive innovation, implement cost-effective solutions, and effectively manage risks. This collaboration will not only expedite project completion but also demonstrate a commitment to delivering high-quality infrastructure while efficiently utilising taxpayer funds, and finally bring highway 1 expansion through to Chilliwack.