

POWELL RIVER OPINIONS REGARDING THE THIRD CROSSING'S PROPOSED ROAD MAY 2016

At the time of this writing several polls, surveys and petitions have been conducted by ourselves and others. The road has the strong support of 80 – 85% of the people according to those polls. That leaves 15 – 20% who do not support the road. This article is addressed primarily to them.

A few years ago when the Third Crossing was first stepping up its campaign, the negative outcry was louder, largely because people did not understand the facts. The critics said the road would be too steep, too high, too snow bound and so on. As the physical facts were explained, these criticisms died down.

Today there is an undercurrent of belief that the road simply will not be built and there remains several negative view points. WE shall deal with the issues as we understand them.

Some people hold the view that the proposed road would be too costly and that the volume of traffic would be too low to justify the cost. These positions are simply wrong. Most likely this group sees the proposed road as “a way out of Powell River” and, if that were the fact, those folks would be correct. While the road would connect Powell River to Vancouver, it would also connect central Vancouver Island (via the Comox ferry) and the coastal communities with the interior. Traffic originating on the Island and the interior would dwarf traffic originating in Powell River. Our traffic volume studies support this conclusion. As to cost, our studies find that much of the cost of the road would be paid for from savings and new economies at B C Ferries. These studies can be found on our website, www.thirdcrossingsociety.com/reference-library/.

Another view is that our infrastructure would not support an increased population. Again this is simply wrong. We have discussed, and continue to discuss these issues with City and Regional District planning officers. The first observation is that we have an abundant water supply. Second, future subdivisions and zoning changes would require the payment by developers of “development cost charges”. But, before we get too far into this analysis, we should address just what amount of population growth that we might experience. It is reasonable to see our population doubling or even tripling, but remember we would still be three hours from Vancouver. It is safe to say that our growth will be gradual and we will easily cope with its challenges.

Also, people are concerned that we could lose our idyllic way of life... that we might become over-crowded and that we might overrun our pristine wilderness. All of us share this concern to some degree. But when one looks at the facts, it is easy to see that even if our population grew to 100,000, we have so much land that even that growth would barely make a dent in the wilderness. Also, we would remain three hours from Vancouver so whatever growth we experience will take place over many years.

Changes are inevitable if this road is built. There will be some dislocation among ferry workers and others. Cuts in employment with the retirement of the Langedale route will be offset with increases on the Comox route. These and other adjustments can be managed properly by exercising proper management practices. The over-riding fact is that the economic gains will far outstrip any difficulties.

There is a view that our isolation diminishes our crime rate. We have spoken with local police officers who hasten to point out that we are not crime free here. Also, we will be more easily accessed with a road, but we will remain quite isolated by the ferries and a fairly long road: these are our protections. And, there is an offset: as our economy improves there should be a reduction in our crime rate.

Our relations with our aboriginal people are good. We have the support of the Tla'amin First Nation and we are continuing with discussions elsewhere.

We recognize and respect the negatives. Indeed we share them. However, the positives cannot be denied. The population of Powell River and service area has barely increased in decades. Some would even say that it is stagnant, although that might be a harsh opinion. The demographics of the population has changed however. There are fewer young people here. They are forced to relocate to areas where more work is available. Right now there is a rise in housing sales in the Powell River area, due to lower mainland housing and rental prices. This is inevitably changing the area. Positive change that might be anticipated is an increase in employment opportunities - in construction, retail, service industry and health care.

The estimated costs established by the Third Crossing Society may be lower than what the highway will actually cost. However, these estimates are based on sound numbers researched thoroughly and backed up by professional opinions. Other highway projects in BC have generally cost more than the estimates. Reasons for this are difficult to know, but are probably based on unforeseen circumstances in construction, time frame between estimation and actuality or just poor estimations. As with the Coquihalla Highway, toll booths could be used for a period of time to offset some of the cost.