

To: GVTA Board of Directors

From: Robert Paddon, Vice President, Corporate and Public Affairs
Fred J. Cummings, Project Director – New Fraser River Crossing

Date: July 7, 2004

Subject: **New Fraser River Crossing – Tolling Consultation Plan**

Staff Recommendation:

That the Board of Directors endorse the consultation plan on the toll rate regulatory framework for the New Fraser River Crossing (“FRC”) project.

PURPOSE

To obtain approval to implement a consultation program for Fraser River Crossing project toll charges as required under the *Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Act*. This report summarizes the tolling consultations that have taken place since December 2001, and outlines the next stage of proposed consultations on the toll rate regulatory framework.

BACKGROUND

In September 2000, the TransLink Board endorsed in principle the development of a tolled high-capacity crossing of the Fraser River in the 200th Street corridor. The direction provided by the Board set the stage for a detailed planning and consultation process, which has been completed over the past four years.

Throughout this process, the New Fraser River Crossing has always been described as a tolled facility. The importance of tolls to finance the project has been presented in public forums, presentations, information materials, workshops and meetings with stakeholder groups. The public response continues to show strong support for a new tolled crossing of the Fraser River.

Phase 1 – Project Definition: Consultation Program

Public consultation on the New Fraser River Crossing began in December 2001, when the public was asked about their support for a new crossing in the 200th Street corridor and their willingness to pay tolls to finance the project. Of the 1,000 or more people who

attended four public events, over 80% supported the new crossing and the use of tolls to finance the project.

During all Phase 1 consultation, there was strong but qualified support for tolling. Concerns expressed included the amount of the toll, collection methods, duration of the toll, how the toll revenue would be used, and enforcement.

Phase 2 – Project Development: Consultation Program

Public consultation for Phase 2 was implemented between April 2002 and March 2004. Phase 2 consultations were intended to support the comparative assessment process of alignment options for the New Fraser River Crossing and subsequent refinement of the selected option. A key goal of Phase 2 consultations was to communicate proactively with the public on planning and policy issues, one of which was tolling.

Consultation during Phase 2 included 13 public forums and workshops, 25 meetings with residents and stakeholder groups, and numerous meetings and presentations to municipal staff and Councils. In addition, a project website and information line provided up to date information to stakeholders. Information on tolling was included in all consultation activities undertaken during Phase 2. The majority of participants did not express concerns about tolling. The most commonly asked question pertained to the amount of the toll. Other issues raised around tolling related to the length of time the toll would be in place, tolling technology, and peak hour rates.

Public Opinion Research

In addition to the tolling consultation that has been done as part of the New Fraser River Crossing project, numerous public opinion surveys and focus groups have been conducted on funding new major transportation projects in the region. In surveys conducted by TransLink in 2003 for funding major transportation projects in the region, the public identified support for tolls to improve transportation and ease congestion. This support is also identified in recent British Columbia Automobile Association (BCAA) member surveys, where 72% and 66% of BCAA members supported the use of tolls for new bridges and roads in surveys conducted in 2002 and 2003 respectively.

DISCUSSION

Consultations in project Phases 1 and 2 and additional public opinion surveys and focus groups have identified general public support for using tolls to pay for the New Fraser River Crossing. The majority of comments have focused on how tolls will be implemented, which is the focus of the tolling regulatory framework.

The next stage of the consultation program will obtain input from specific user groups and organizations on the proposed toll rate regulatory framework for the New Fraser

River Crossing. In particular, consultations will focus on users of small and large trucks and motorcycles, in addition to the general public.

Specifically, the next stage of consultation will achieve the following objectives:

- Provide information to organizations representing small and large trucks, and motorcycles, as well as the general public, on the toll rate regulatory framework.
- Obtain input from organizations representing ‘small’ and ‘large’ trucks and motorcycles on the proposed toll rates, including the framework for escalating the initial toll rate and additional charges (e.g., differential rates).
- Obtain input on the feasibility of the toll collection system.

Target Audiences

Key target audiences that will be the focus of consultation on the regulatory framework include:

- Municipalities in the project area
- Regional Districts (GVRD/FVRD)
- Provincial Government
- ICBC
- Business organizations (e.g., Chambers of Commerce)
- Transportation Groups and organizations
- Business and Tourism Groups

Consultation Activities

Consultation activities build on the extensive consultations that have already been completed, and will focus on representative stakeholder groups and government organizations. The general public will have the opportunity to receive information and to provide comment through the website, correspondence and direct contact with the New Fraser River Crossing project.

Consultation activities are summarized in the following table.

Activities	Description	Time frame
Develop Information Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop fact sheet and presentation on tolling for public and stakeholder distribution.• Develop feedback questionnaire to post on website and for meetings.	August

Stakeholder Meetings and Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate a list of target audiences and organizations for presentation and discussion of the tolling regulatory framework. • Distribute information on the toll regulatory framework to stakeholders, and make information available to the public through the project website. • Conduct approximately 15 – 20 work sessions with groups and organizations to obtain input and comments on the regulatory framework. 	September and October
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop web-page providing public with information on tolling and opportunity to provide feedback. • Post feedback form on website. 	September
Public Notice and Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop advertisement for project area media. • Place advertisements inviting public to provide feedback via the website in community newspapers in Maple Ridge, Langley, Pitt Meadows, Surrey, and Coquitlam/Port Coquitlam. • Consult directly with members of the public who express a direct interest through contact with TransLink and response to the ads and website. • Evaluate the need for additional steps in the public consultation program based on level of general public response. 	September
Obtain Municipal Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the regulatory framework with MRTAC and obtain input. • Provide information to municipalities to share with public. • Meet with municipalities as required based on their level of interest in the regulatory framework. • Provide a web page link to municipalities to post on their website to facilitate public review. 	August/September
Provincial Government Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive consultations have already occurred with the provincial government on the tolling regulatory framework. Further consultation will focus on obtaining input from the Ministry of Transportation. 	August/September
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correlate input received from presentations and from public submissions to website. • Prepare public consultation report. 	October

CONCLUSION

An extensive amount of consultation with the general public and user groups on the use of tolls to finance the New Fraser River Crossing has taken place since December 2001. The final stage of consultations on tolls will provide an opportunity for specific user groups and organizations to provide input on regulatory framework. Authorization to implement the tolling consultation plan for the New Fraser River Crossing is required to move ahead with the toll rate regulatory framework and meet requirements under the *Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Act*.