

**CAPITAL REGIONAL DISTRICT
Regional Planning Services Department**

Staff Report to the Regional Planning Committee
Meeting of Wednesday, October 20, 2004

SUBJECT:

Travel Choices Strategy – Moving Forward

BACKGROUND:

Oct. 18, 2000	Regional Planning Committee (RPC) directs staff to initiate discussions with prospective partners in the three strategic initiatives and report back to the Committee beginning in January 2001.
Jan. 17, 2001	BC Transit presents a status report to the Regional Planning Committee outlining the anticipated scope of work and identifying potential funding options and project management strategies.
Mar. 27, 2002	Board approves initiating the Regional Transportation Strategy (TS) project, referred to as the <i>TravelChoices Strategy</i> .
July 16, 2003	The draft regional transportation strategy, <i>TravelChoices</i> , and the associated short-term implementation and recommendation strategy are presented to the Regional Planning Committee.
February 2004	Three evening information sessions are held for municipal elected officials on the <i>TravelChoices Strategy</i> .
April 21, 2004	Regional Planning Committee reviewed a report on the municipal responses to the <i>TravelChoices Strategy</i> .

DISCUSSION

This report is submitted in response to recent public discussions regarding a new role for the Federal Government in funding transportation infrastructure. Without a regional transportation strategy, it will be difficult to compete for these funds. This region needs to act soon.

Four years have passed since the development of a regional transportation strategy was proposed. The last stage of the development process was to circulate the strategy to the municipalities for comment. To date, only some of the member municipalities responded and their comments ranged from no support to recommendations that the *TravelChoices* initiatives go further. There has not been sufficient input received from member municipalities to draw any conclusions regarding the next steps to take on this project. The only two major issues that were identified related to funding and governance. In April, RPC discussed topics related to governance, implementation, strategy structure and content and the cost of the strategy. At the April meeting of RPC, two motions were carried, these were:

- 1) that the committee defer discussion of changes to the strategy report content until the June meeting; and
- 2) that staff “transition” the *TravelChoices* document, per the discussion, for the June meeting.

This report and the accompanying investment model report are forward for consideration to ensure that if the pending opportunity for a new Federal/provincial transportation funding formula comes to pass, this region is in a position to act.

Transportation Strategy Issues

The *TravelChoices Strategy* (TCS) as an implementation component of the Regional Growth Strategy is intended to establish a long-term direction and some short term priorities to respond to the transportation demands that are regional in nature. Its mission is simple – “to increase the proportion of walking, cycling, transit, ridesharing and use of other alternatives to driving alone”. The associated vision, goals, objectives and targets are fully outlined within the TravelChoices Strategy and its eight working papers.

Municipal comments received to date focused on the cost of implementation, LRT and rail, CRD roles & responsibilities, areas of emphasis, traffic analysis, targets, governance and funding, auto-use and parking, and Highway 17. Of these comments, the major issues are its implementation, governance, funding and its targets.

The issues range from too costly, to not being aggressive enough. Excluding the governance and funding issues, all of the other issues can be addressed over time and none of the comments were in conflict with the basic mission statement.

Governance

Developing a governance model may take years, therefore to be in a position to act if Federal funds become available it is recommended that an interim administration investment model be established. The accompanying report describes the proposed “Regional Transportation Investment Commission” concept that uses the strengths of existing agencies. Its role would serve two purposes 1) to act as a conduit for new revenue sources such as a proposed gas tax rebate for the implementation of infrastructure improvements and 2) to invite applications from member municipalities to cost share with infrastructure plans.

All applications would be subject to Board approval and a review process that would target projects that advance the strategy. The process would involve developing Board approved criteria and use a public advisory committee to make recommendations to the Board.

The proposed investment model would not replace or affect the role or duties of existing agencies and its administrative support funding would be based on a percentage of its new revenue sources.

Cost of the Strategy and Cost of Inaction

The issue raised by municipalities about the cost and funding of the strategy is important but it is not clear if they considered fully why these investments are needed. The outcome of the strategy if fully implemented could limit the impact of congestion to today’s level by investing in the improvements that support transit, cyclists, and pedestrians. This investment targets our basic quality of life in the region.

Yes, the strategy has significant costs associated to it but there are significant and direct costs if the region does not act. Aside from the cost related to safety, air quality and health there is a real cost related to extra travel time related to congestion. Each driver in this region pays out of pocket about \$100 each per year due to congestion. This equates to over \$10 million today. By 2026, this direct user cost will increase to over \$120 million per year. Even though travel demand is expected to grow only by 30 to 50% the cost of congestion grows by a factor of 12.

The big loser to congestion is transit services and its customers. With most major corridors expected to be fully congested, transit services will have much greater travel times and major increases in operating costs due to scheduling problems. Many of the transit routes go through areas where “queue jumpers” can not be considered and as a result transit service will be no faster than the car. Travel times may more than double.

Only by investing in all parts of the proposed strategy to increase travel choices can the region and its member municipalities limit the impacts of congestion.

Need for Action

Since the draft transportation strategy and the RPS discussion paper were presented to RPC, new information has come forward which needs some urgent attention from the Board related to the regional transportation strategy, its governance and implementation.

The province and Federal Government are actively considering making gas tax available to municipalities and regions. Information suggests that there is the potential of receiving 3¢ per litre initially and increasing over time. This could generate an annual flow of infrastructure funding of about \$9 million that could then be leveraged to \$18 million or more. Specific funding details are not known at this time.

All indications are it will target investment in new capital infrastructure (non specific) and will include transportation.

Other regions and jurisdictions in BC are *fully prepared to act now* if this rebate becomes available. This region needs to provide some direction on the transportation strategy if it wants to take advantage of the Province or Federal government infrastructure programs if the focus includes transportation. Earlier this year this region missed out on funding when the province announced its 10-year transportation funding plan titled "Opening Up B.C." The Greater Vancouver Regional District and other areas in BC are promised about \$1000 per capita for transportation while this region may receive about \$10 per capita.

The strategy would give the region a mandate to raise its profile with provincial and federal programs.

Implementation Strategy

The implementation component of the TravelChoices strategy was requested by the Board as part of the deliverables in developing a Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS). There were significant concerns aired about the implementation recommendations made based on the need to advance local priorities over the next five years. These local priorities were consistent with the RTS. Given the feedback to date, more negotiations will be required with local agencies. However, this should not deter the Board from acting to confirm the overall mission and strategic direction of the TravelChoices Strategy.

It is proposed that except for the recommendation related to governance (8.1) all other implementation recommendations are deferred until municipalities can better define their priorities and the region fully understands its funding sources for transportation.

SUMMARY

Transportation remains the number one issue in this region no matter which part of the region you live or work in. There continues to be no common vision for managing the transportation needs that arise in tandem with urban growth.

To date, there are no identified concerns with the general intent of the strategy and its goals which strive to increase the share of walking, cycling, transit riders and carpooling. Of course, the rate at which these should be or can be achieved was identified as an issue but this can be addressed over time.

There are three major outstanding issues: *Who should make decisions? How is it to be funded? and Which projects should be a priority?*

These issues can be managed through a proposed administrative model that would receive its direction through a Regional Transportation Investment Commission (RTIC) that would act in a manner similar to the CRD Water Commission. It would use a public advisory committee to make recommendations to the Board. Its primary function would be to act as a conduit for federal or provincial funds. It would forward annual programs for Board approval that are subject to funding from the province or federal governments. All projects submitted for implementation will be based on agency priorities but are subject to Board approved criteria that focus on achieving the goals of the TravelChoices Strategy. The RTIC would seek to provide a fair distribution of funds throughout the region. The RTIC would also review of the effectiveness of the RTIC and the strategy and be subject to Board needs and direction.

Given the pending opportunities for new funding, it is important the Board consider providing early approval in principle of the TravelChoices Strategy; and provide direction on the proposed investment management model. The proposed strategy would exclude an implementation strategy. Clarity in vision and strategic direction will enable the CRD to legitimately claim that it is ready to act on transportation priorities should new federal funding become available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Regional Planning Committee recommend to the Board that:

1. the TravelChoices Strategy be approved in principle, summarized in Attachment A, subject to final editing to remove the implementation strategy component including re-drafting to improve clarity and focus of the vision and long-term strategy; and
2. the re-drafted Travelchoices Strategy be further reviewed by Regional Planning Committee prior to any final recommendations to the Board regarding the process for a broader public review and its adoption.

RGS CONSISTENCY:

The proposed *TravelChoices Strategy* is an implementation component of the RGS and responds to its land use, environmental and transportation objectives.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION:

N/A

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS:

W.M. Jordan, Executive Director
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