

Traffic volumes well under limit

Early results of civic-funded transportation study find Tsawwassen intersections could handle more vehicles

BY SANDOR GYARMATI, THE DELTA OPTIMIST APRIL 24, 2010



A traffic study found the intersection of 56th Street and 12th Avenue is at 59 per cent capacity.

Photograph by: file photo, submitted

Tsawwassen's major intersections are still seeing traffic volumes well under capacity during peak hours, but that doesn't automatically mean more residents can be added.

That was the message for the Tsawwassen Area Plan Committee from a consultant hired by Delta to conduct a transportation study.

At the committee's meeting last week at municipal hall, Dave Turner of Halcrow Engineering provided an update on the study that will be completed by the end of next month.

Noting it will examine impacts of potential development scenarios, including the Tsawwassen First Nation and Southlands, as well as traffic pattern changes that will result from the South Fraser Perimeter Road, Turner said the objective is to better understand current and future problems and to have recommendations on how to deal with them.

Looking at current and projected travel movements in and out of Tsawwassen, the study found there's a significant imbalance in that a large percentage of residents are employed outside the community. The population is also aging and many of those motorists will be retired, Turner said, noting 40 per cent of the population will be over 65 by 2031.

As far as the current traffic patterns at the major junctions, most are under capacity by 20 to 30 per cent during the peak morning and afternoon rush hours.

"The junctions are operating properly at the moment and as we follow through on the study we'll come to the conclusions what level of development can be accepted," he told the Optimist following the meeting.

The busiest junction, according to the findings, is the intersection of Highway 17 and 56th Street at 72 per cent capacity. Among the other busier junctions are 56th Street at 16th Avenue (69 per cent) and 56th Street at 12th Avenue (59 per cent).

Turner said it's not recommended to allow intersections to reach 90 per cent capacity or higher.

He said only seven per cent of Tsawwassen residents use transit while 93 per cent use their cars during peak periods.

He added Tsawwassen is ideally suited for promoting walking and cycling, partly due to most amenities being within a couple of kilometres of most residents. However, connective networks are currently only partially developed, he said.

In a recent interview with the Optimist, Harold Steves, a Richmond councillor and chair of Metro Vancouver's agriculture committee, had a strong warning against allowing substantial housing development in South Delta.

"I think the quandary Delta is going to be in, particularly in the Tsawwassen area, is that the Tsawwassen town centre will be up for redevelopment. If you put a couple of thousand homes on the Spetifore (Southlands) lands and add two or three thousand cars going to the tunnel everyday, and you add the same thing to your downtown core, it's going to be pandemonium," he said.

"And now we've heard from the highways department to expect 3,100 more trucks a day coming through the tunnel ... Instead of taking the South Fraser (Perimeter Road) going east, they'll go on to Highway 17 to go through the tunnel."