

2 The Transportation Challenge

The transportation challenge facing the downtown is to accommodate more people travelling into the downtown in the future without adding traffic lanes to the bridges and roads leading to the downtown. At the same time, there is an expectation to minimize congestion. At first glance the challenge appears enormous. This plan presents a strategy that meets the challenge.

The *Vancouver Transportation Plan*, 1997, recognized that road capacity is finite and that even if more roads were to be built they would soon be congested with more cars. That solution is to reduce the demand for auto trips by providing further transportation choices, particularly transit.

Downtown's economic health is closely tied to its transportation network. Transportation is as much about economy and liveability as it is about travelling and commuting. Business downtown depend upon the transportation system to allow employees and customers to travel easily to their place of business. As well, many of these businesses rely on the road network to deliver and receive goods and services. If roads become congested, the cost of business would increase and the downtown economy could suffer. Businesses might then relocate to more accessible locations where they can be more competitive.

Congested roads also affect the liveability or the desirability of being downtown. This is especially important because of the residential neighbourhoods in the downtown peninsula. Reducing traffic congestion and resulting air and noise pollution, creating more pedestrian friendly streets, providing more sustainable choices like transit and bicycling will help keep downtown an attractive place for businesses and residents alike.

The downtown transportation system must also address it's role as an entertainment and recreation destination. Downtown is home to the region's largest sports venues (BC Place stadium and GM Place arena). It is also the region's primary tourist destination with major convention facilities and over 55 percent of the region's hotel rooms. The tourist industry is anticipated to grow 6 percent annually to 2021 (Colliers International). The cruise ship industry currently attracts over one million passengers annually.

The *Vancouver Transportation Plan* acknowledged the complexities of the downtown transportation system by recommending the preparation of the Downtown Transportation Plan. Specifically, it recommended the preparation of a "...*transportation and circulation plan for the Downtown, including a complete review of the Downtown transit system to improve service and choice, improve regional connections and airport links, evaluate alternative transit vehicles (such as mini-buses), establish priorities for 'Great Streets', improve route and destination signage, create pedestrian priority areas and implement bike lanes and street improvements.*"

To the benefit of Vancouverites, downtown Vancouver is economically successful and already very liveable. Vancouver has been ranked as the most liveable city in the world. To maintain this status in the future, efforts must be taken now to avoid the transportation problems facing many other major North American cities. The Downtown Transportation Plan is the means to this end and will help guide transportation decisions to 2021.

The importance of future transportation planning is demonstrated by the current success of the existing downtown transportation system. For more than half a century, Vancouver has nurtured an economically healthy and liveable downtown. In the 1940s and 1950s, the focus was on adjusting to increased auto use. It was apparent then that, while road access is important for commerce, attempting to satisfy all demands for road space would require unacceptable trade-offs with the objective of a liveable downtown. Plans for downtown expressways were formulated in the 1960s but were later suspended because of the disruption they would have created, both in terms of land occupied and neighbourhoods affected.

Building public transit links (particularly rapid transit) to the downtown peninsula then became paramount to maintaining suitable access. A passenger ferry from Lonsdale Quay in North Vancouver to Waterfront Station began operating in 1974. The region's first rapid transit line, SkyTrain, was opened from downtown to New Westminster in 1985, with an extension to Surrey a few years later. In 1992, the region's first commuter rail line was opened from Mission to Waterfront Station.

The result of the past efforts is a highly accessible downtown. This success is reflected by its large concentration of residents, employment and trips within the city. With 560 hectares, downtown comprises about five percent of the city's total land area. However, it is home to 13 percent of the city's residents, accommodates 39 percent of the city's jobs, and receives 21 percent of the city's trip destinations. In the future, more residents, more employment and more trips destined to the downtown are anticipated. The Downtown Transportation Plan builds upon the success of the past to meet the needs of the future.

This section provides the context for the development of the Downtown Transportation Plan.

Section 2.1 provides the city and regional context for downtown transportation planning.

Section 2.2 sets forth a vision for downtown and for a downtown transportation system.

2.1 The City and Regional Context

Plans for the City of Vancouver and for the Greater Vancouver region provide the context for the development of the Downtown Transportation Plan. Recommendations of the Downtown Transportation Plan support plans for the city and region.

2.1.1 City of Vancouver

In 1991 Council adopted the Central Area Plan Goals and Land Use Policy. The plan expressed the policies of the City of Vancouver related to office zoning, displacement of support activities from downtown, lively retail, central area housing, providing density bonuses, liveability and high density living. The main land use direction was to create more housing capacity by consolidating a compact downtown core central business district (CBD) and an uptown (Broadway corridor) office district. The reduction of zoned capacity for offices outside the CBD and uptown areas was another objective. This has since become widely known as Vancouver's "living-first strategy" for its Central Area. Other policies included protecting support service opportunities, creating complete neighbourhoods on the downtown peninsula with all necessary amenities, creating areas for "choice of use" (offices and housing), targeting retail to desired pedestrian shopping streets and adjusting land use policies to allow uses and scale that preserve heritage character.

Transportation objectives were an explicit aspect of the new land use policies. Orienting new office development to transit was one objective of office land use consolidations and deletions. They included consolidating zoned office capacity around rapid transit stations, bringing overall office and transportation capacity closer together and increasing housing on the downtown peninsula to reduce commuting times and congestion, and reducing the need for inner city neighbourhoods to accommodate through commuters to downtown. By calling for streets to be the "focal point of public life," the Central Area Plan calls for public realm improvements to foster movement on foot.

The Central Area Plan was followed in 1995 by CityPlan, the City of Vancouver's overall guide to future planning, development and civic decisions. It acknowledges that the public wanted to emphasize transit, walking and biking to slow traffic growth in neighbourhoods and improve the environment. CityPlan reinforced the vision for downtown. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for this report, it recommended the undertaking of a City of Vancouver Transportation Plan.

Also in 1995, a Vancouver Greenways Plan that identified conceptual multi-use and richly landscaped corridors providing greater priority to pedestrians and cyclists throughout the city, including downtown, was approved. The purpose of Greenways is to expand the opportunities for urban recreation and to enhance the experience of nature and city life.

The City of Vancouver Transportation Plan (1997) set forth transportation policies for both the City as a whole and downtown for the period to 2021. It specified that growth in trip demand would be met by the existing road network. It recommended greater transportation choice and a more balanced downtown transportation system. It nonetheless acknowledged that the car would continue to be the major form of transport for trips by people travelling outside neighbourhoods, especially for trips for which transit does not offer a good alternative. It stressed the importance of good truck access to the city and of improving delivery access to the Port of Vancouver and the International Airport. This Downtown Transportation Plan is viewed as fulfilling the overall policy guidelines set forth in the Transportation Plan for downtown trips and transportation facilities.

2.1.2 The Greater Vancouver Region

The GVRD's 1993 regional transportation plan, *Transport 2021*, provides transportation policies and programs for the region. It identifies the need for regional land use policies that cluster population and jobs so that people can have an opportunity to live close to work. It recommends changing the look and feel of neighbourhoods and "streetscapes" such that walking and bicycling is given an opportunity to take hold. It proposes Transport Demand Management (TDM) as a tool to influence travel behaviour. This includes "carrots", such as encouraging telecommuting, encouraging employers to discourage car commuting, installing high-occupancy vehicle highway lanes and giving buses priority over cars. "Sticks" including higher and more generally applicable parking charges, higher fuel and other driving costs and bridge tolls, are also proposed. It also includes transit supply measures, including new rapid transit lines, bus priority measures and express buses. Transport 2021 also proposes using the "choke points" of the bridges and tunnels across the Fraser River and Burrard Inlet to limit access to geographical sub-areas within Greater Vancouver by single-occupant vehicles. The plan projected that the proportion of commuters using transit to travel downtown would increase from 37 to 48 percent from 1991 to 2021.

The 1995 *Livable Region Strategic Plan* (LRSP), which was formulated jointly with *Transport 2021*, guides decision-making for the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). The LRSP supports complete communities focused around town centres, a better balance in the distribution of jobs and housing and more effective transportation services. It envisages a compact metropolitan region in which a larger share of population is accommodated in the municipalities on the Burrard Peninsula and northern areas of Delta and Surrey. The plan calls for greater transportation choice as a way of minimizing congestion and dependence on private automobiles. The GVRD is commencing a review of the LRSP in 2002.

2.2 The Downtown Vision

Downtown Vancouver is the region's pre-eminent economic generator, as well as its international face to the Pacific Rim. It is the principal locale for Greater Vancouver's head office, business services and tourist functions. Downtown Vancouver is also the region's most prominent entertainment centre, the locale of the region's largest sports venues and the region's largest retail hub. Downtown Vancouver is also a special place with unique character areas, livable residential neighbourhoods, heritage resources, a unique skyline and active public spaces.

The key to maintaining an alive downtown is that it is both a place of commerce and of residence. The integration of residential neighbourhoods with the commercial core assures the presence of people on downtown streets outside of normal business hours. Residential neighbourhoods also complement the commercial objectives for downtown by providing a reservoir of workers and shoppers and entertainment venue visitors.

The objective of this Downtown Transportation Plan is to support and facilitate these important downtown functions. The vision for Vancouver is to be the most liveable city in the world. One of the most important aspects of a liveable city is its transportation system, especially in its downtown.

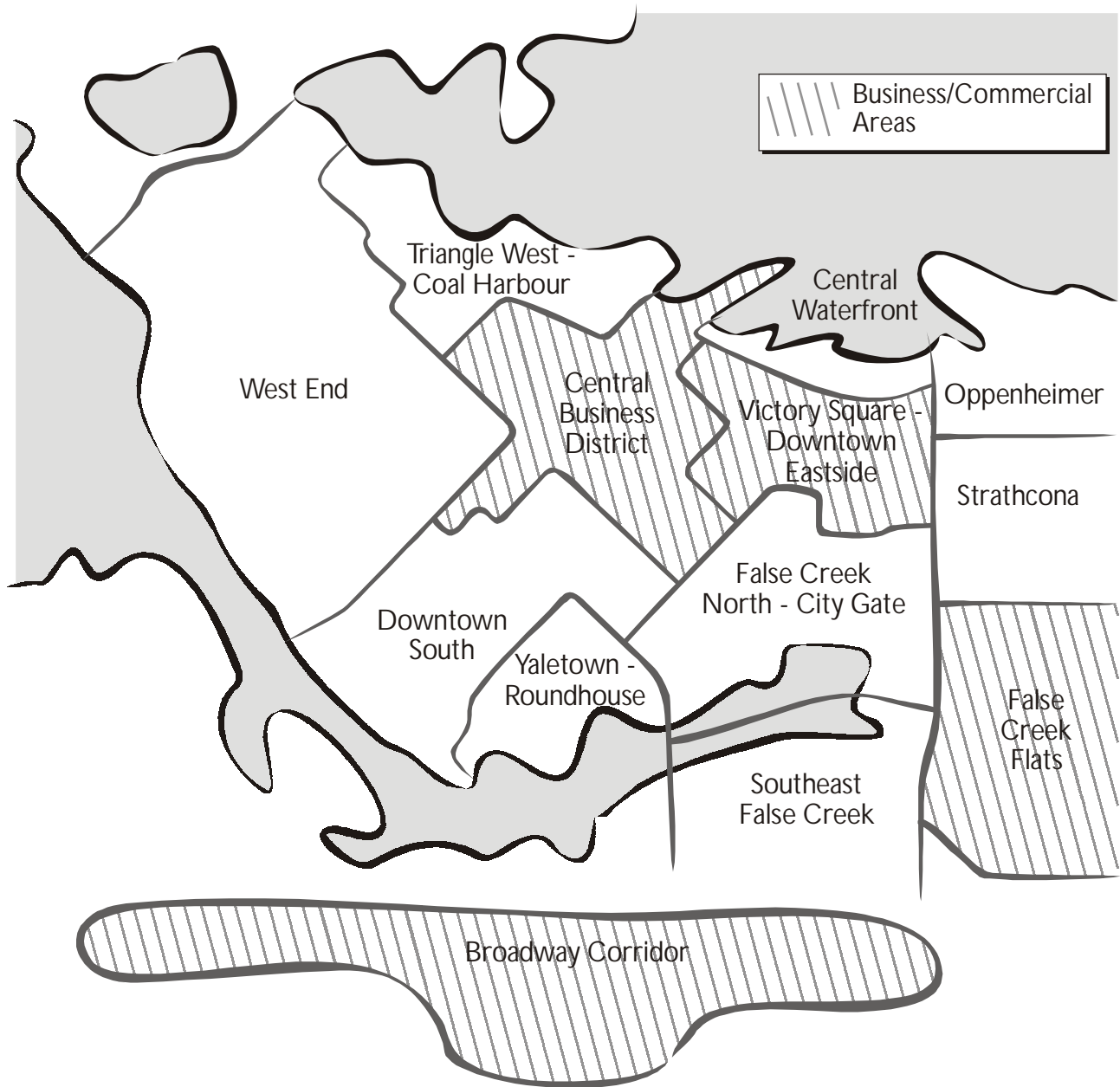
The Downtown Commercial Core in a Larger Central Area

While the most prominent component, downtown is one of three related nodes in a central area or 'metropolitan core' providing a wide range of employment and commercial services. Figure 2-A shows the three nodes. The three nodes function as an integrated metropolitan core accounting for more than one in five regional workers. A vision of the Downtown Transportation Plan is to reinforce the integrated nature of the metropolitan core, improving the economic functioning of the entire complex.

Downtown Transportation Vision

For downtown Vancouver, the transportation vision is to be the most accessible place in the region. Achieving this vision will contribute to a thriving and prosperous business community and create a downtown where people want to work, live and play. For all trip purposes by all modes, the experience of travelling around the downtown will be pleasant. Motorists will not be unduly delayed by congestion, transit users would be provided with a reliable and efficient transit system, pedestrians and cyclists of all ages and abilities will find downtown inviting and barrier-free. Downtown is a place where the transportation network offer choices that are extensive and exciting, such that getting to and around downtown is an attraction in itself.

Figure 2-A
Vancouver's Metropolitan Core



2.3 Sustainability and Transportation

Achieving sustainability is key to the health and economy of the city and region. Sustainable transportation will help Vancouver meet the needs of its present community without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Recognising that transportation and land-use are fundamental components to achieving a sustainable city, the Downtown Transportation Plan seeks to address problems of pollution, noise, congestion, safety, energy consumption, and costs that are incurred in moving people and goods throughout the downtown. The challenge is how to increase access to goods, services, activities and destinations while reducing energy use, noise, pollution, congestion and, at the same time, increasing safety, security and liveability.

Vancouver has made significant progress toward sustainability and has been consistently rated as a leading city in terms of liveability. City Council has adopted plans that place high priority on creating a downtown where people have access to affordable transportation to move them between home, work, and places of leisure.

The Downtown Transportation Plan will make progress towards achieving sustainability by providing recommendations that:

- Help promote more efficient systems for moving goods and people;
- Encourage more sustainable transportation modes such as walking, transit, and cycling;
- Reduce vehicle kilometres travelled by providing jobs, entertainment venues and commercial and retail services in close proximity to where people live;
- Encourage alternative approaches to car travel including carpools, vanpools and car sharing networks;
- Increase safety by reducing the potential for conflicts between modes;
- Enhance access to information that increases the efficiency of goods and people movement through ITS; and
- Reduce average commuting times for downtown trips.

In short, the movement towards becoming a sustainable city requires policies and plans to provide guidance and incentives for people to modify their behaviour and pattern of travel. The Downtown Transportation Plan provides the mechanism for that change to happen.

"Sustainability is a direction rather than a destination. A sustainable city is one that protects and enhances the immediate and long-term well being of a city and its citizens, while providing the highest quality of life possible. Sustainability requires integrated decision-making that takes into account economic, ecological and social impacts as a whole". (From Creating a Sustainable City, Report to City Council, April 1, 2002)