

# Rethinking the Region

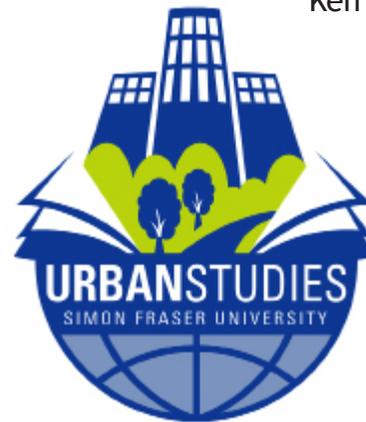
2<sup>nd</sup> Annual SFU Urban Studies workshop

Summary Report

2014

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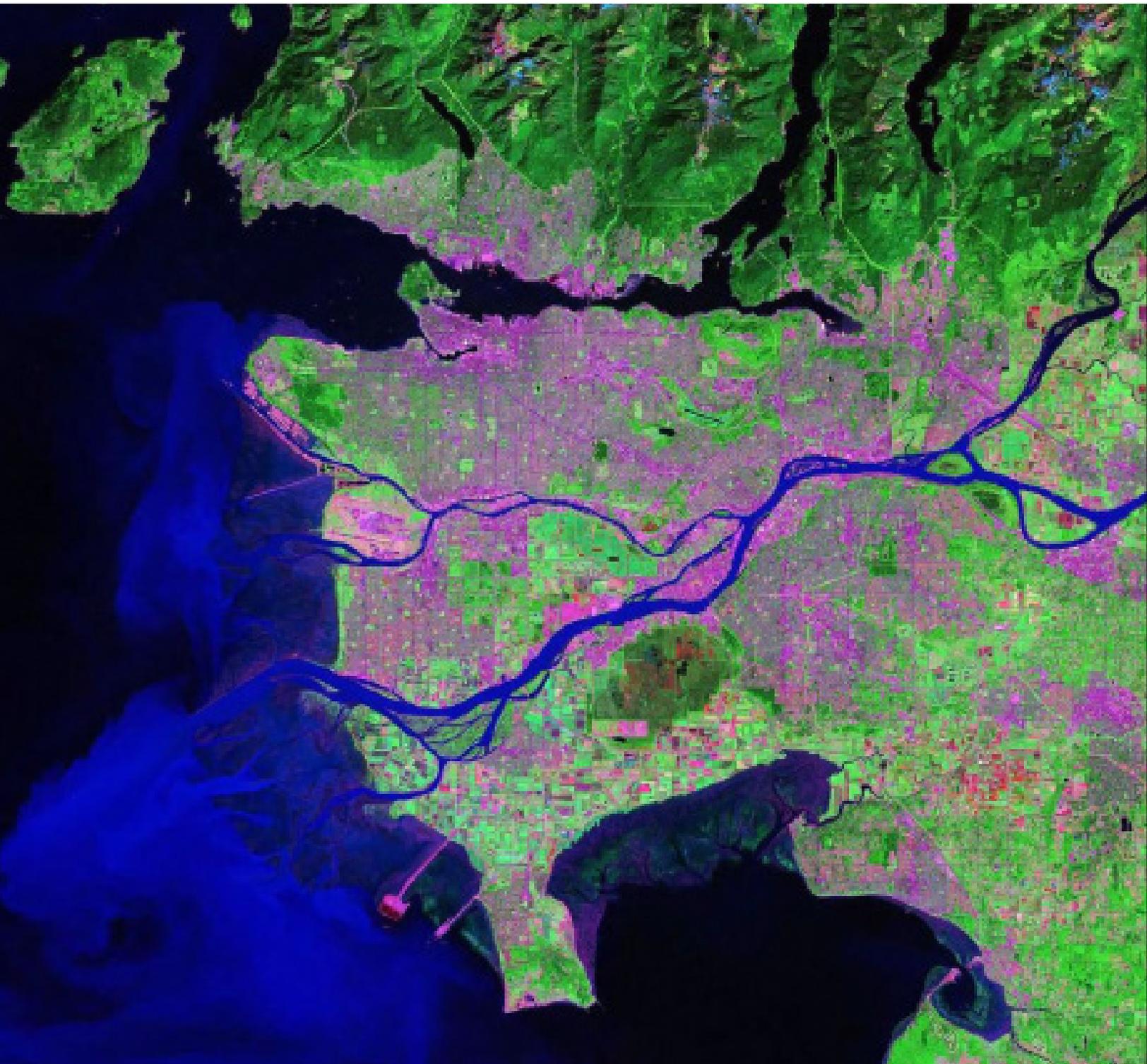
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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
URBAN STUDIES



*On March 1, 2014, a broad cross-section of SFU Urban Studies students and professors, local decision-makers past and present, urban professionals, advocates and interested members of the public from all around the region, met at SFU Surrey campus to Rethink the Region. This report is a summary of some of our best collective thinking and ideas generated.*

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## TOP IDEAS TO ADVANCE REGIONAL THINKING AND DECISION-MAKING

Create and cultivate space for **regional thinking**, with civic institutions like **universities** playing a key role of convener, host, and mediator between the world of research, new ideas, and student energy, and the world of political expediencies and compromises.

Specific interests that are close to the heart or close to the home of Metro Vancouver residents are what catch their interest in thinking about the region, but the way in which people conceive of challenges and opportunities are **cross-cutting and integrated across traditional siloes**.

Develop expectations for **regional priority-setting** by the public, recognizing many relevant, legitimate, and overlapping groups and coalitions of interests. Grow a sense of empowerment and responsibility for personal, group, local and regional decisions and their implications. Revisit these priorities on a regular basis, in public.

Consider a variety of means to **increase the ties of accountability** between regional board members, local elected politicians, and the electorate.

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## WHY ARE WE RETHINKING THE REGION?

The challenge we took up at the Rethinking the Region 2014 forum was to think about the region as an organic entity, a system of systems. We discovered that it makes a difference to consider the Vancouver area as not just a set of local political jurisdictions, but as an organic entity. By rethinking the region as an **organic entity** we can understand how our region grows and develops in response to **internal processes** and also reacts to **external stimuli**. The best example of an external stimulus that shaped the Vancouver region historically is the Canadian Pacific Railway's decision to locate its tidewater railhead at the Granville townsite rather than at Port Moody. In one stroke, Burrard Inlet replaced the Fraser

River as the region's most important economic asset.

It is a testament to the resilience of the city as humanity's most complex and beneficial invention that cities are always governed - somehow. The essential jobs get done. However, the welfare of residents depends on how well they are done. In well-governed organic cities, the activities of all the authorities in the governance matrix are working in **alignment**. To bring the point home, in a well governed organic city you wouldn't have a provincial authority building massive new roads and a regional authority promoting an automobile-restrained, transit-focused transportation system. Nor would you have one city among more than 21 jurisdictions with a quarter of

the region's population setting itself up as "the greenest city."

Notwithstanding its challenges, the Greater Vancouver region has a reputation for considerable achievement in planning for the area as a whole. Important key concepts such as livability, sustainability and resilience have permeated our thinking at many levels. This may be the result not only of some inspired leadership but also the combination of the region's visible limits and the unique and unforgettable experience of being here: water like wine, an ever-changing visual landscape and air like a caress.

While there are many equally useful ways to think of our region's key systems, we report here on our efforts in a one-day public workshop to look in

depth at four key aspects of the region from this perspective:

- Transportation;
- Human and environmental health;
- Economic development; and
- Local democracy and governance.

In each theme area, we discovered that regional thinking has great potential to help us all advance. Specifically, we noted that in our region:

- We face both a need and an inability to plan for **economic development**, locally or regionally. Compounding this problem, our economy is driven by activities that contribute to climate change, and heavy on our minds in this respect are impending actions to expand all kinds of fossil fuel exports through our region.
- Even as the overall trends push toward global forces influencing our development path, **local governance and decision-making** becomes more important. We currently face threats to legitimate civic engagement in the face of increasingly powerful and concentrated economic interests.
- We are not acting to address the challenges coming to **human and environmental health** in our region from climate change. Grappling with the theme of resilience to withstand significant likely shocks will be key.
- We have a political window at present to put the development of our **transportation** system on a course toward a low-carbon, high-safety, and high-function path. This is a key part of an effective response to climate

change adaptation *and* mitigation.

In addition, regional-scale work may be uniquely positioned to help us solve the following difficult problems:

- Reassembling planning capabilities at the scale of the region is our best hope in advancing the economic, democratic, health and transportation agendas just set out.
- Universities and other major regional institutions can and should play an important role in advancing regional thinking and action.
- We have a responsibility, as yet unaddressed, to think and act in the region, to consider the impacts of our economic decisions on future generations of residents and on others far away in the destination ports of our fossil fuel resources, toward our vested interests in the status quo and accountability up and down the decision-making hierarchy.

# Transportation

Dr. Anthony Perl, Professor of Urban Studies and Political Science at Simon Fraser University, presented a gold, silver, and bronze standard for our regional transportation system, building upon the best models from around the world. Key to success is to choose. He described Toronto in the 1980s as “Venice ... surrounded by Phoenix.” This meant that the inner city had achieved an excellent public and active transportation system, while the outer rings benefitted from an excellent road transportation system. Excellent for Toronto in the 1980s, we now know that building

and maintaining two world class transportation systems within a single region means twice the cost to taxpayers, and twice the social and environmental impact. It does not constitute a sustainable regional vision. Vancouver is headed down this path to bipolarity as well. But we still have the opportunity as a young urban region to learn from others’ mistakes and build a fully integrated and effective sustainable mobility system.

## TOP IDEAS FOR STRATEGIC ACTION

Regional Transportation: promote a transition to a low-carbon, safety-oriented transportation system, with more empowerment and ownership by users.

	Example and Key Features	Comparison with Vancouver
<p><b>THE GOLD STANDARD:</b> a fully integrated regional transportation system that enables people to move around the entire region by walking, biking, and public transport, with the automobile accounting for a minority of total travel kilometres. Fully connected to international transportation modes for people and freight.</p>	<p><b>Greater Zurich, Switz.</b>            Inner city highway plans were voted down by Zurich citizens in the 1970s. Regional rail infrastructure was voted in, in the 1990s.            Never disinvested in rail infrastructure. No home- based natural resource extraction industries pushing back against sustainability goals and programs.</p>	<p>Like Vancouver, Zurich operates with a relatively weak national government role in (sub)urban development.            Limited top down planning.            Lots of global capital flows into regional development drawn by quality of life and safe haven characteristics.</p>
<p><b>SILVER:</b> A region that followed global trends in mass motorization and expanding its infrastructure to keep ahead of the demand for driving, but then made a conscious shift and is now trying to emphasize post-carbon mobility investments going forward.</p>	<p><b>Lyon metropolitan area, France</b>            Removed street railways in the 1960s, although they kept trolleybuses.            Lyon is now putting back streetcar lines, and adding brand new ones. It also debuted the modern bike-share system that has taken the world by storm. These were bottom up initiatives.</p>	<p>Unlike Vancouver, France has had a national policy to reduce carbon- based energy dependence since the 1970s, which triggered Europe’s high-speed intercity train revolution and encouraged the construction of rapid transit infrastructure - four metro lines, and trolley buses in Lyon through the 1990s, like Vancouver. These were developed through a top-down planning model like in BC.</p>
<p><b>BRONZE:</b> A region where a bold leader has made a change in one part of the transportation system that demonstrates the benefits of breaking from past trends that favoured only the motor vehicle, setting the stage for further transitions to a sustainable transport system.</p>	<p><b>Greater London, UK</b>            Mayor put an end to road socialism by building a congestion charge into his platform, implementing it, and extending it in his second term. His successor who is more to the right politically did not repeal the congestion charge, and London now has less vehicle congestion, better bus service, and a steady stream of revenue to rebuild run-down infrastructure like the Tube and regional rail.</p>	<p>France’s Grenelle accord, a national environmental round table organized by the Conservative government, set up institutional structures that are shifting the</p>

fundamentals of the transport market to align it with sustainable development. Measures include: creating a tax system favoring the least polluting vehicles, establishing an environmental tax levied on trucks on the roads, and using these funds to build various urban transport projects including light rail.

As the table summarizes going for Gold requires a well-developed coalition that cuts across civil society, from business leaders, to real estate developers, to health and social service professionals, to labour unions, to students, to senior citizens.

We have at least part of such a coalition in this region, the Vancouver Gateway Council, and not surprisingly it has focused on part of the mobility equation - moving more freight through our port and through our region. We've invested in a lot of roads and bridges that were designed to build the Gateway throughout. Could a broader coalition of stakeholders advance a more balanced mobility agenda for the region? How would that **sustainable mobility coalition** come about?

Going for Silver could be helped by building up some support in high places. Could we imagine a Federal Government that enacted a post-carbon policy framework, or a provincial government that made better transportation in the Lower Mainland a very high priority?

Going for Bronze requires at least one successful local political leader to become a champion for change at the local level, like Mayor Livingstone did in London or Mayor Bloomberg did in New York.

Performing to award winning standards in transportation development, just like in winter Olympic sports gets harder as one gets older. Maybe the Vancouver region didn't need to work as hard to attain success in its transportation outcomes a decade or two ago, but we need to train harder for success now.

## BIG IDEAS + PRIORITIES

**Suggested policy innovation:** In partnership with a research university, we could develop a housing + transportation affordability index for Metro Vancouver. Transportation costs are often second only to the cost of housing in household budgets. Location efficient neighbourhoods are usually compact, mixed-use, with convenient access to jobs, services, transit and amenities. Mapping these dynamics for Metro would demonstrate where true unaffordability lies in our region, with additional benefits to understanding future transit expansion needs and considering implications for air quality. This index could be used as policy advice to associate low-scoring neighbourhoods with higher fees for development, mortgage rates, renovation charges, the revenues of which could be targeted to location-efficient neighbourhoods.

A nongovernment research organization based in Chicago, the Center for Neighborhood Technology, developed an innovative H+T index that works in just this way as a free, interactive map-based resource for communities throughout the US: <http://htaindex.cnt.org/applications.php>

# Health

Dr. Tim Takaro, Professor of Health Sciences at SFU, provided the group with data and warnings about the environmental and human consequences of climate change in our region. He referred to climate change as the most profound public health challenge of this century, with carbon pollution set to end the era of stable climate which we have had since the Pleistocene era. Predictions show a 1-2 degree warming trend by 2040, when the Metro Vancouver region will be home to a million more people than at present.

Potential environmental health effects of climate change in BC include:

- Earlier snow-melt and higher temperatures
  - Increase in forest and range fires
  - Reduced hydroelectric and irrigation water
- Sea-level rise
  - Salt water intrusion into freshwater supplies
  - Coastal land instability, increased slides
  - Changes in shellfish or coastal food supplies
  - Flooding in coastal areas

BC also saw a high 11% loss of total surface area of alpine glaciers between 1985 and 2005, with every region losing ice.

## TOP IDEAS FOR STRATEGIC ACTION

Regional Health: consider a "health advocate" role at a range of economic and regional planning and policy tables, responsible for keeping human and environmental health implications of decisions on the agenda.

Potential human health effects of climate change in BC include:

- Increase in heat stress events
- Increase in ground-level ozone and other air pollutants
- Increase in extreme weather events
- Shifting infectious disease patterns
  - Vector borne: e.g. Lyme, West Nile, Hanta virus
  - Water borne: e.g. Vibrio parahaemolyticus
- Migration from warmer climates (including international)

These risks are compounded by demographic and land use factors, which can increase our vulnerability to various threats. Are policy innovations destined to wait for crises? On the other hand, are there limitations to acting upon the warnings of scientists and visionaries?

At the same time as the region copes with numerous proposals to expand Port Metro Vancouver and its coal trans-shipment activities, as well as proposals to expand pipeline capacity to move oil and gas to our shores, the two long-standing partnerships to monitor and enhance the health of our waters have been eliminated. The Fraser River Environmental Management Program, established in 1985, and the Burrard Inlet Estuary Management Program, established in 1991, both worked as partnerships of federal, provincial and regional governments with the Port to protect and enhance our most important waters and wetland habitats. As of March 31, 2013, these partnerships have closed their doors.

## BIG IDEAS + PRIORITIES

Climate change poses severe threats to human and environmental health; and offers the need to build in resilience to our plans. Introducing the expectation of a health advocate as a space made available around each and every policy table in the region to ensure that human and environmental health matters are consistently brought to light is one possible way we could begin to mainstream the changes needed here.



We have remarkably inflated expectations here in British Columbia and Canada of what government can and should deliver to us, and a lot of our expectations in health and education are linked to the demand for economic development activities which may not in the end be conducive to preserving our quality of life. I think there's a collision coming with respect to climate change and those expectations and I think that in the end those expectations will see an elevated importance to the region.

Former Minister  
George Abbott

# Economic Development

## TOP IDEAS FOR STRATEGIC ACTION

Regional Economic Development: conduct research and planning for economic development strategies that are based on infrastructural foundations of integrated land use and transportation planning as well as education.

Anita Huberman, CEO of the Surrey Board of Trade, explained regional economic development as a group of cities working together to build industry clusters. More than that, it is the concept of breaking out of a protectionist attitude - knowing that key actions like sharing resources, thinking beyond entrenched relationships, and communicating openly make job growth, meeting infrastructure needs, and attracting talent possible. Equally important is linking economic development work with the important land use, transportation, housing and environmental foundations of good regional planning.

Worldwide competition is not focused on countries, but on regions that function as single economic units. Companies don't just choose between the United States and China, Mexico or Canada; they think Silicon Valley versus Mumbai, Shanghai versus Stockholm.

Clusters are concentrations of industries that export goods and services that in turn drive job creation and import wealth into the region. Industry clusters want to do business with regions, not municipalities, for the simple reason that this gives them larger markets.

In Metro Vancouver, we are falling behind other regions in this respect: the Southern Alberta Regional Partnership is a case in point, which adds to the effectiveness of the Calgary Commission of Creative Industries through sharing resources and pitching a bigger market to desirable industry sectors.

Key actions to bolster our regional economic development include:

**Education and Workforce Development:** A total commitment to education and workforce development means improving education at every level, from K-12 and beyond. It means expanding college and university programming, particularly in high-demand areas like science, technology, engineering and math.

**Business Climate:** The region will add more jobs by being supportive of business growth, conducive to start-ups, and in touch with environmental regulation. Regionally-scaled marketing and business development activities can go a long way in supporting local business diversity.

**Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Growing jobs in the region means continuing to successfully nurture entrepreneurship and innovation through to commercialization and taking better advantage of federal funding opportunities.

**Infrastructure:** The region needs a transportation system that provides for the efficient movement of people, freight and goods, an information technology network that can meet the demands of a growing innovation economy, and other essential regional planning infrastructure.

**Quality of life:** Our natural beauty, cultural amenities, recreational opportunities, and cultural diversity are essential economic assets the region can sustain and improve through regional planning and respect for the environment.

In all of this, there is, however, an equally daunting challenge – the growing and deepening divide between skilled and unskilled workers. It is necessary to close this divide, both to ensure access to opportunities and for the region to compete for the jobs and economy of the future.

For many, Metro Vancouver is synonymous with innovative companies set in dramatic scenery. Such images, however, only scratch the surface of the region's profound capacity toward invention, reinvention, a vibrant arts community, natural diversity, and cultural richness. A regional economic strategy should not be seen as an exercise in picking winners for a future economy. It needs to be, instead, a table where all the region's business, labour, education, government and non-profit leaders come together to create a unified economic agenda.

## BIG IDEAS + PRIORITIES

We need to face the fact that our economy is driven by activities that contribute to dangerous climate change. Beyond this, global economic actors and forces also limit what we can do locally to bring more accountability into how we develop.



A role that universities like SFU could play would be to have some students, some professors, think through what a better model [for regional governance] might be. I fear we're going to snatch defeat from the jaws of potential victory here by reverting to old or traditional models. This is a great opportunity for people to really think through national and international models of how these things could work and to get to something that is really effective ... I hope that many people, including people at the universities, will put their heads together on this.

Former Minister  
George Abbott

# Governance

## TOP IDEAS FOR STRATEGIC ACTION

Regional Governance: implement a means of declaring candidacy for Metro Vancouver board as part of local electoral process, as a first step to increasing sense of direct accountability of the Metro board.

Governance of an organic city cannot be seen as the functioning of one or even all of the local governments in the area. It must be seen as a **complex matrix of decisions and decision-makers**, including not only local governments and school boards but also provincial ministries responsible for highways, health, social services, etc. and federal authorities such as port and airport authorities.

Alignment of the authorities in the urban governance matrix should be a central and continuing priority of regional leadership. The development and continuation of such alignment is

greatly strengthened by the development and maintenance of **widely-accepted regional plans**, not only for growth management and transportation but for environmental management, housing, public security, emergency management, etc.

Considering the freedoms that we are now afforded in the Metro Vancouver region in historical perspective, independent MLA from Delta South Vicki Huntington reminded us that in Western society, we are witness to a thousand years of blood, sweat and tears to obtain the level of freedom that we currently enjoy. Foremost on our minds should be protecting these hard-won rights to be heard to the fullest extent we can.

**The present time finds us in a major struggle for these very rights to be heard.** The emerging struggle will be to preserve democratic institutions from plutocracy. We must do this in the face of the slow growth of influence on decision makers from concentrated economic interests. This is happening in such a way that decision makers don't necessarily realize the extent to which they are

being swayed. Modern corporations have no accountability beyond their shareholders, but their impact on our environment, our governance systems, our communities is huge. Corporations in our region understand the need for “consultation” with the public, and for a social license to operate. At the same time, consultation has been swapped in the place of responsiveness to citizen concerns; corporations have finessed the consultative process to an extent that they see neither the need nor the means to respond to citizens. A whole new vocabulary has emerged in the corporate world to justify the new and streamlined means to constitute consultation and the claims that they can make as a result. Even governments are now starting to assimilate the new approach, which eliminates any opportunity to learn via more effective consultation and a loss of democratic richness.

**The further the distance between the people and the elected representatives, the greater the loss for the people and for accountability.**

**Listening and seeking compromise is an extremely annoying and mentally and emotionally**

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**challenging process. But the outcome at least supports the public interest.**

**If the objective is to reinforce our common interests, then we need to build ways to cooperate.**

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To take the example of one oceanside community, Delta is in danger of losing the largest wildlife migration on the BC coast through expansion of Port activities, yet we are also losing the ability to understand and address the impacts of expansion activities on the land and waters.

# BIG IDEAS + PRIORITIES

Suggested policy innovation:

At municipal elections, local candidates would be asked to indicate whether or not they would like to run for the position of representative to the regional board. Voters would choose candidates for both local council and Metro Vancouver. So, only those who are elected to city council could be elected at the regional level. Voters simultaneously vote for city council members and indicate which councillors they would like to represent their locality at the regional level. This would achieve a degree of direct accountability between voters and the regional board, and would

raise the profile of regional issues during local elections. Further, it retains the current structure of the Metro Vancouver board, whereby the board is comprised of local elected officials.

- a. If voters were to vote for regional candidates, they may become interested in regional issues
- b. Sub-committees could be established for sub-regions to: engage citizens and deal with sub-regional issues
- c. The goal of more direct public accountability at the regional scale would be to achieve more openly acknowledged trade-offs
- d. The focus should be on functional decision-making, given the reality of multiple governments

In the Region of Peel, Ontario, the 3 member municipalities of Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga take an approach to electing regional councillors during municipal elections that is worth consideration here. The Peel Regional Council includes a chair, mayors of each municipality, and additional council members weighted by the population of each municipality. In this model, residents vote directly for council members to represent their municipality at the regional level.

# Final Thoughts:

## Seeking balance and moving forward

Achieving **balance** between the need for local voice and decision-making, and the need to address issues on a regional scale, is key to moving forward. Democratic engagement is easier to achieve at the local level, but local actions may impact much larger areas. Although we may not have public awareness on regional issues and efforts, many local issues will be better addressed at the regional scale. There is an efficiency trade-off in adequately collecting and representing regional public interests. In terms of democratic accountability, current appointment of regional representatives by municipal councils is not directly accountable to the public, and does not raise discussion of regional issues into the public realm.

It became clear that complicating our challenges in setting priorities and taking effective regional action

within our fragmented regional geography are two additional challenges: 1) multiple actors and institutions with decision-making power and 2) multiple territorial political units or levels of government.

For example, while waste can be managed at the scale of Metro Vancouver boundaries, air quality may necessitate solutions at a larger scale that extends as far as Squamish and Hope. **Fragmentation** of responsibilities and actions between levels of government, e.g. solving transportation challenges involves federal (port), provincial (highways, bridges), regional (public transit, some roads and bridges), local (local roads), and special (airport) jurisdictions.

Another area fragmentation occurs is between the **different municipalities** in the region. So many things in each municipality

are dependent upon other municipalities, and decisions by municipalities have spillovers, externalities etc. that are not understood or discussed publicly. For more people to engage in considering the region, it is important that citizens develop an identity which includes Metro Vancouver and not just their local municipality.

Finally, fragmentation exists **between departments** in single organizations. The term silo was invoked to mean that parks and recreation and social services operate separately, even though their actions impact the other. Not only do the multiple levels of government need to be engaged with each other, but citizens and governing bodies in the region need to expand their scope and recognize that regional planning is both a collaborative and cooperative effort.

The primary concern remained one of **accountability**; for government to represent the people. We discussed use of independent audits, adjusting language to be more accessible and use of tools from public consultation to referenda, as well as a better dispute resolution process and using new interactive technologies in tandem where possible.



Can regional districts and municipalities learn to love one another? In the case of Metro Vancouver, we see people who are certainly thinking in terms of their municipality and not thinking in terms of the broader region. There's enough love to go around here for everyone and we just need to think this through.

Former Minister  
George Abbott

# About the Speakers



George Abbott, Former Minister, multiple portfolios, Government of B.C. One of the most effective ministers of the last three decades, George Abbott served as BC's Minister of Education (2010-12), Health (2005-09), Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (2009-10), Sustainable Resource Management (2004-05) and Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services (2001-04). Prior to his election to the Legislature, he served for 17 years in local government.



Ken Cameron, FCIP, is Adjunct Professor of Urban Studies at SFU. Ken worked for 26 years in local government in the Vancouver region, most recently as Manager of Policy and Planning with the GVRD (now Metro Vancouver). Ken also led the BC Homeowner Protection Office. In 2007, Ken coauthored *City Making in Paradise: Nine decisions that saved Vancouver*, with Mike Harcourt and Sean Rossiter.



Anita Huberman is the Chief Executive Officer of the Surrey Board of Trade, the second largest such Board in the province. She began work at what was then the Chamber of Commerce at the age of 19, as an intern while she studied at SFU. In addition, Anita is a recent appointee to the National Film Board.



Dr. Anthony Perl, Professor, SFU Urban Studies and Political Science, is the author or coauthor of four books, most recently *Transport Revolutions: Moving people and freight without oil* (2008). Anthony's research crosses disciplinary and national boundaries to explore the policy decisions that affect transportation, cities and the environment. Active regionally, Anthony serves on the External Advisory Panel, Sustainable Gateway strategy, for Port Metro Vancouver.



Dr. Tim Takaro, Professor, SFU Health Sciences, is a physician-scientist trained in occupational and environmental medicine, public health and toxicology. His research is primarily directed toward the links between human exposures and disease, and determining public health based preventive solutions to such risks. His current research on human health and climate change includes a focus on water quality in BC communities.



Vicki Huntington was elected as an independent MLA for Delta South in 2009 and in 2013 made history as the first BC independent ever to be re-elected. Formerly, she served 5 terms as an elected councilor in Delta, where she has earned a reputation for her commitment to farmland preservation and environmental issues.