

B.C. on the Move: Engagement Meeting Notes

NOVEMBER 14, 2014

8:30 AM

BELLA COOLA

ATTENDEES/AFFILIATION	Darla Blake, Central Coast Regional District
MOTI REPRESENTATIVES	Paula Cousins, District Manager, Transportation, Thompson Nicola District, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) Leanna Ilnicki, Area Manager, Roads, Bella Coola Area, MoTI
NOTE TAKER	Carrie Peacock, Kirk & Co. Consulting Ltd.
KEY THEMES:	
1)	Ferries: Participants expressed concerns on behalf of the community regarding the severe impacts due to the loss of ferry service.
2)	Highways: Participants stressed the critical importance of continuing to maintain and invest in Highway 20, as it is the community's only reliable means of access in and out of the community.
3)	Airports: Participants noted that while rural airport funding was needed, the community did not have the tax base to contribute its portion to airport runway improvements. The participant stressed the need for a granting program that would allow rural communities with no tax base to access support.
4)	Transit: Participants expressed the community's appreciation for BC Transit's service in the Bella Coola community and surrounding area.
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Coast Regional District noted a need for funding to support rural infrastructure improvements Central Coast Regional District indicated that impacts from changes to the BC Ferry service were a challenge.
MOVING FORWARD – STRATEGIES	
1)	Moving People and Goods Safely and Reliably <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant from Central Coast Regional District noted that they know where the areas of concern are with the roads, and try to work with the roads contractors on this to identify areas that need attention. It is critical that the dykes be maintained. The participant noted that the Central Coast Regional District experienced some major flooding in the past, which may happen again. There is a particular concern about autumn torrential rainfall. The participant noted that small communities with small tax bases are unable to contribute the resources required. The Central Coast Regional District tries to encourage people to keep their drains clear. The participant noted that food, fuel, and visitors rely on Highway 20, so it must be maintained for year round accessibility. The participant indicated that Highway 20 needs to be maintained to a good standard, as it is the area's main transportation link. In one stretch of the slide area, there is only one lane, which is not even wide enough to install a guardrail. The participant from Central Coast Regional District noted the importance that the roads be maintained (i.e. potholes fixed). The CCRD stays in contact with the Ministry and shares information on issues as they occur. The Central Coast Regional District noted that there are only three links from the ocean on the coast: Vancouver, Prince Rupert and Highway 20 (in Bella Coola). During the summer people come from around the province to Bella Coola to access the ocean to go fishing. The participant pointed out that the map on Page 3 of the Discussion Guide is missing some important access information.
2)	Growing the Economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant noted that many people feel that their complaints about the ferries have fallen on deaf ears. The Central Coast Regional District has met with coastal community Regional District Chairs, Minister Stone and the Premier but there has been no give at all. The Central Coast Regional District pointed out that the Minister floated the idea of eliminating the Nanaimo ferry route, but as soon as there were complaints about potential impacts to economy, the idea was cancelled. The participant noted that there are not the same options here as there are in Nanaimo and Vancouver. The participant indicated that one cannot compare the Nimpkish and the Queen of Chilliwack – they simply are not the same. The participant from the Central Coast Regional District noted that recent changes to the BC Ferry service have been devastating for communities from the coast to Williams Lake. The Central Coast Regional District indicated that changes to the ferry system are significant. The participant noted that the ferry now takes only 16 cars – it previously accommodated 115 vehicles, which will have major impacts. The participant indicated that the Minister is basing the ferry changes on facts that are incorrect. The participant noted that the Route 40 direct link was breaking even, and, with the right marketing, could have improved. Although it was one of the most expensive ferry rides, people were still using it. Central Coast Regional District noted that incorporating Route 40 with the "milk run" may not have been sustainable, as the "milk run" travels all the way to Ocean Falls. Tourists are interested in the route from Port Hardy to Bella Coola then across the Chilcotin. The participant noted that the decision to drastically change the ferry service, was done too hastily and without sufficient research, and that consequences of the changes should have been considered first. The Central Coast Regional District noted a need for a feasibility study of the ferry. The one-way trip from Port Hardy to Bella Coola previously cost over \$600 for a car and one person, and an additional \$200 per passenger. The participant noted that

people were still willing to pay.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Coast Regional District noted that, during the past 3 weeks there have been 12 funerals in the community. People are waiting for ferry sailings. The participant indicated that some recent deaths in Bella Coola have been due to a general sense of hopelessness in the community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant noted that, although the majority of ferry use was during the summer, things could have been done differently. Government may need to give in one area to prosper in another. The participant expressed a concern with the sustainability of BC Ferries, noting that it is a service and it is a monopoly. The participant noted that a rethink is needed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Coast Regional District noted that the Province needs to bring back a bigger ferry. There is no need for a ferry with “bells and whistles” but it does need to be comfortable for a 9 to 12 hour trip. A direct route will pay for itself. An 80-vehicle vessel could suffice. The participant noted that, with the current ferry, one cannot get to Denny Island it is not possible to get the grader on the Nimpkish (as it takes up 2 or 3 ferry spaces).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Coast Regional District indicated that small businesses that rely on tourism are closing down, as there has been a loss of up to 90% of their business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant from Central Coast Regional District noted that, after the loss of forestry in the area a few years ago, the Province encouraged communities on the coast to give up on major forestry as the future was in tourism. The participant noted that the community committed to tourism, and now feels as though the mat has been pulled out from under them.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Coast Regional District pointed out that this is a low social economic region. While the region had some fishing and forestry, it relies greatly on tourism, and on government offices, hospitals and schools as major employers. The participant questioned how the region is supposed to effectively build the economy and attract people, when it's a 6-hour drive to get here down “The Hill”. The participant indicated concerns with tourists who were left behind in Bella Bella, where there are no restaurants or accommodations. That left significant impacts.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant noted that Bella Bella experienced a major blow out in their water system the other day, and they are waiting for new pipes and equipment to be brought in. Meanwhile, people have to boil water. The participant expressed that many people live here because their families have been here hundreds or thousands of years, and that these are not people just coming for the lifestyle – their roots are in this area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Coast Regional District noted that it is important to re-establish the philosophy that the ferries are marine highways, and transportation links that communities rely on.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Coast Regional District indicated that the only other supply route is through Highway 20, and the community feels like it has been cut off.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant from the Central Coast Regional District pointed out that it is critical to get food (and other supplies) to the outer coast communities. BC Ferries goes up to Klemtu, and food gets brought back and can sit on docks well beyond the expiry dates. The participant noted that while infrastructure upgrades are needed in Bella Bella, they can wait 2 or 3 weeks for supplies to be dropped off.
3) Connecting and Strengthening Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant indicated that Pacific Coastal had an issue with the tree heights at the end of the runway, which has now been addressed to meet NavCanada's standards.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant from Central Coast Regional District noted that Pacific Coastal has selected the aircraft used at the airport, and could use different aircraft with higher capacity. The airport is vital to medical accessibility, as a critical piece of infrastructure. The participant noted a need for Pacific Coastal to be involved in discussions on this.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Coast Regional District noted that the Bella Coola runway needs to be resurfaced, and that strategic planning process has identified work needed during the next five years. The participant noted that, while resurfacing the runway is on the priority list, there is still a need to determine how to fund it. The Central Coast Regional District noted that it would not be able to contribute one-third, so the Province and the federal government would need to contribute more.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant noted that the BC Transit contract is an amazing and well-managed service. It is well used by the community. The participant added that Firdale is a long way away for residents without a car or a driver's license.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Coast Regional District pointed out that the region has a very young and a very old population, which makes the bus service very important. A lot of the First Nations' residents do not have cars and rely on transit to access the grocery store in Bella Coola.
4) Maximizing Collaboration and Investment with Partners and Stakeholders
Provincial/Federal Funding Contributions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant noted that grant money to expand rural airports is needed. Some grant funding has been made available through Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT). For example, NDIT helped Anahim Lake build a new airport facility. However, the Central Coast Regional District noted that it would be challenging to find its one-third contribution to a project. The participant noted that currently, 1% of taxes in the region equates to \$6,500. The participant added that it would be great to access grant funding available; however, the region lacks the tax base to come to the table with a one-third contribution.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Coast Regional District noted that it will put aside funding to contribute to maintaining aging infrastructure, and to access provincial and federal grant opportunities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Coast Regional District currently has a small amount of funds available to put towards partnership work with the Province to clear some drains, and/or other remedial work. The participant noted that this may help in preventing the potential impacts of flooding, and shows the community that something proactive is being done.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Coast Regional District noted that Bella Coola is a small, remote community with a small tax base. Approximately 60% of the residents are First Nations citizens who do not contribute the same as non-First Nations citizens to the tax base, and look to the Central Coast Regional District to lobby Provincial government.
TOP THREE PRIORITIES FOR TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

IMPROVEMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="201 201 808 226">• Airport runway improvements are a priority in the region. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="201 245 896 270">• The participant noted a need for BC Ferry Service improvements. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="201 291 834 317">• Maintenance of Highway 20 is also a priority for the region. 	
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/DISCUSSION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="162 401 1461 546">• The participant expressed concern that the BC Ferry consultation process felt like a sham, and like it was not real consultation. The participant noted that the decision had clearly already been made before the community was asked for feedback. Central Coast Regional District noted that the community was informed , not consulted with. They were merely delivered news about the ferry system. The participant indicated that when government is using "consultation" it should be mindful of the intent. Central Coast Regional District mentioned that there are a lot of frustrated and angry people in this community, and that the Central Coast Regional District is still lobbying and trying to have conversations on this, towards a more palatable solution. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="162 558 1448 598">• The participant noted that the new Central Coast Regional District board will meet on December 11. As such, the current board members will be sent a link (by Ms. Blake) to the online BC On the Move Survey 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="162 611 1325 636">• Central Coast Regional District noted that Highway 20 is missing from the map on Page 3 of the Discussion Guide. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="162 653 1273 678">• The participant noted that contractors do a good job of maintaining Highway 20, given their limited resources. 	