

City Council News February 21, 2018

Political realities: the art of compromise

I truly empathize with the homeowners in North Quesnel who are unhappy with the proposed North-South Interconnector. While the majority of the directly impacted landowners (those whose property the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) will have to purchase in all or in part) were supportive of the proposal, some of the landowners who may end up with a highway running below their property are upset. The fact that the City and MOTI will do everything possible to mitigate the impact of the proposed Interconnector, if it gets built, is little comfort to these landowners.

However, the public benefits of this proposed alternate route are significant, and the opportunity to actually see this project realized is at risk if the opposition voices get organized and supporters do not, making the Province think our community is opposed to this project.

During the past week, a number of people have continued to argue that alternate routes exist that must still be explored – despite 47 years of debating those alternatives. One opponent of the Interconnector is now promoting a new alternate route that will “save” his neighbourhood, a route that: 1. was not studied by the considerable technical expertise involved in the two-and-half year assessment of all viable options; 2. goes through Cariboo Pulp and Paper and West Fraser’s operations; 3. requires an additional bridge over the Quesnel River and an additional bridge over the railway tracks; and, 4. would not take all of the commercial truck traffic off Front and Carson. In short, a made-up route that might appeal to landowners trying to protect their property and land values, but one that would never, ever, be built.

The argument this well-meaning community activist is making to advance his suggested route is that Quesnel is entitled to an optimal route and that the Province should be shamed into spending whatever money is necessary to get us a route that does not compromise his neighbourhood.

This entitlement argument is used by many communities to lobby for every provincial investment they feel they deserve: ‘we’ve sent our tax money and our resource extraction revenue down to Victoria for decades and now we want it back to fund X project.’ Unfortunately, that’s simply not how politics works or how Victoria makes decisions.

Politics is the art of compromise, and real political leadership at the community level requires finding compromises that work for the community, fit within the Province’s priorities, and are fiscally prudent. The North-South Interconnector route meets these tests: it does not require a very expensive third crossing over the Quesnel River (giving us room to go after a second crossing over the Fraser River ASAP once the Interconnector is built), it incorporates the Province’s need to replace the Quesnel River bridge and the railway bridge, and it meets the needs of our community to get all the commercial truck traffic off Front and Carson.

Without question, the North-South Interconnector is a compromise, but a necessary and effective one. With a potential price tag of \$275 million (half of which is the bridge replacements) it is in direct competition with transportation investments being demanded all over the province and especially in the more populated urban areas where the majority of the provincial voters live. We’re in a very tough competition for very limited transportation dollars.

We have a choice: keep debating alternate routes for another 50 years or get behind this Interconnector proposal so we can actually get a new route built that will take all commercial truck traffic off Front Street and Carson Avenue. If you support this proposal, please drop in to City Hall at 410 Kinchant Street and sign a postcard supporting this project that I will hand deliver to the Minister in Victoria.

Mayor Bob Simpson

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