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Eighteen-year-old Paul Hillsdon has drawn up a detailed plan for improving transit using more economical technology than SkyTrain.

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Surrey North Delta Leader

Light rail, not SkyTrain, urged for

Surrey

By Jeff Nagel - Surrey North Delta Leader

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The case for using much cheaper light rail instead of elevated SkyTrain for a massive expansion of the region's rapid transit system is being championed by an 18-year-old candidate for Surrey city council.

Paul Hillsdon would plow the \$1.1 billion the province plans to spend on a six-kilometre SkyTrain extension in Surrey into three light rail lines instead, which he says could cover 43.4 kilometres for the same amount of money.

"It's getting more for less, basically," he said, noting Surrey's wide streets and long suburban blocks are an ideal fit for light rail that would run at grade, avoiding the expense of burying or raising SkyTrain lines.

"We don't need huge concrete pillars installed in the road," Hillsdon said. "It's a complete waste of money. Why wouldn't you want to take rail out to as many people as possible?"

Other groups in the region have urged Victoria to reconsider more use of SkyTrain technology and TransLink's new CEO has also recently spoken in favour of light rail.

But Hillsdon's plan, much of which he drew up before graduating from high school last spring, is the most explicit and detailed call so far.

His "Transit for Tomorrow" plan proposes three new lines:

- A 26.2-kilometre line on the old Interurban corridor from Scott Road station through Newton and Cloverdale all the way to Langley. Cost: \$697 million using diesel engines on the existing rail line.
- A 10.2-kilometre King George Line that would run electric trains north from Newton up through City Centre's SkyTrain stations and then east to Guildford. The southern end would connect to the Interurban line. Cost: \$306 million.
- A seven-kilometre 200 Street line that would run north from downtown Langley and the Interurban line to Highway 1 and Walnut Grove. Cost: \$210 million.

Rapid buses would connect the lines and link to White Rock, Abbotsford and Maple Ridge.

In contrast, the new provincial transit plan would only extend SkyTrain east to Guildford and southeast as far as 168 Street and the Fraser Highway by 2020.

Transportation minister Kevin Falcon favours a further SkyTrain extension down the Fraser Highway to Langley, but Hillsdon predicts it will never happen with SkyTrain's price tag.

He says the light rail lines could be in place within two to three years – and as little as six months in the case of the Interurban line.

While Surrey Mayor Dianne Watts has questioned whether SkyTrain technology is best for Surrey, Hillsdon charges she has been too timid and has not publicly demanded light rail, as have more vocal civic leaders to the east.

"It's all whispers and murmurs," he said. "Surrey hasn't stood up and told the province what we want. We need the political will first to get it through the minister's head that light rail is the solution and not SkyTrain."

Unlike the provincial plan, Hillsdon's spells out the per kilometre costs of each technology – \$27 million for light rail according to TransLink studies versus \$183 million per kilometre for the Surrey SkyTrain extension.

Hillsdon says his plan isn't just a pie-in-the-sky vision.

He says it can actually work and Victoria would take note if he's elected.

"If I get voted in, that's a huge message to the provincial government that Surrey wants light rail," he said.

The technology would make Surrey a leader in the region, he said, and not just improve transit, but also ease traffic congestion, revitalize neighbourhoods and improve Surrey's economy, environment and local health.

Jordan Bateman, a Langley Township councillor and transportation advocate, welcomed Hillsdon's push for light rail.

"It's as much as a tenth of the cost of SkyTrain," he said. "I think Paul's on the right track."



Many light rail lines now run in North America.



Paul Hillsdon calls for a new Interurban light rail line (in pink), a King George line (light blue) and a 200 Street line (orange) to be built at the same cost as the province's planned six-kilometre SkyTrain extension. More at www.paulin08.com.

SkyTrain to Guildford could deflate Whalley: Gordon Price

The provincial plan to extend SkyTrain east to Guildford could threaten efforts to revitalize and densify Surrey's City Centre area, one observer warns.

"There's a very good chance it will suck out the oxygen from the City Centre area," said Gordon Price, director of SFU's City Program.

New towers have been sprouting in the area and Metro Vancouver intends to declare it the region's new second metro core, alongside downtown Vancouver.

But Price said the SkyTrain extension could easily spur developers to skip past the current rapid transit terminus and shift their focus east to Guildford, which will also get

more traffic from the widened Highway 1 corridor.

"Then Whalley's just another stop along the line," Price said. "The real centre for activity could be Guildford."

jnagel@surreyleader.com

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