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Surrey North Delta Leader

## Halt perimeter road to save money: NDP



The \$1.1-billion South Fraser Perimeter Road is to be built by 2012.

Gateway Program

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By [Jeff Nagel - Surrey North Delta Leader](#)

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With the province slashing grants to charities and grappling with a multi-billion-dollar deficit, Delta North NDP MLA Guy Gentner has a solution to save big bucks.

Shelve the South Fraser Perimeter Road.

The \$1.1-billion truck freeway being punched through residential areas and along the edge of Burns Bog should be a prime target for the government's budget axe, he said, noting Victoria did scrap its plan to build a costly retractable roof at BC Place.

"It's time for a re-think," Gentner said, adding all government priorities must be examined in hard times. "We would rather see money spent on libraries and health care."

He said the road is expensive and wasteful because at least \$400 million of the costs are going to acquire land along the riverfront.

"It's the largest purchase of land in the history of the province for any project," Gentner said. "Beautiful properties on prime waterfront land are being wiped out for a freeway that's really going to create more congestion."

Preload work on the new 40-kilometre route has been underway in some areas for at least a year.

Construction so far has been directly financed by the province, although it still intends to build much of the route as a public-private partnership.

Procurement was delayed by the global financial crisis this year. A request for proposals went out in the spring, but a final contract isn't to be awarded until sometime in 2010.

The perimeter road and the broader Gateway Program are based on projections container port traffic through Vancouver will triple in the years ahead.

Gentner said those estimates are now suspect, particularly with port expansion in B.C. at Prince Rupert taking pressure off Metro Vancouver.

He argues more can be done to transport containers up the Fraser River from Deltaport by barge instead of road.

The provincial budget commits major spending for both the perimeter road and the Port Mann bridge/Highway 1 project over the next couple of years.

Construction on the Highway 1 project is also underway.

The province gave up on a struggling private financing partner early this year at the height of the credit crisis.

Instead, Victoria is borrowing all the money for the \$3.3-billion project, which is to be recouped through bridge tolls.

Transportation minister Shirley Bond said the Gateway projects need to proceed.

"Projects like the SFPR create much-needed jobs in hard times, support future economic growth and provide service for decades to come," she said.

"It is precisely in periods like these that governments should build vital infrastructure."

The perimeter road will take truck and regional traffic off local streets in Surrey, reducing congestion and air pollution, she added.

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