

CITY OF RICHMOND PROPOSED INTERCHANGE WITH HIGHWAY 99 AT BLUNDELL ROAD

ISSUES AND CONCERNS RELATED TO SAFETY, AGRICULTURE, THE ENVIRONMENT AND LIVABILITY IN THE SOUTHEAST SECTOR OF RICHMOND

PREPARED BY THE BLUNDELL INTERCHANGE GROUP (BIG), A GROUP OF RESIDENTS, PROPERTY AND BUSINESS OWNERS IN THE SOUTHEAST SECTOR OF RICHMOND

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

1989 Freedom to Move (frequently referred to in City documents)

Because the “Blundell Interchange” has been referred to for almost eighteen years (Freedom to Move 1989) in City meetings and documents, it has become a reality for Council and City staff. It has been written about and discussed as being a simple matter of connecting a few roads together in southeast Richmond. When first thought of, it was envisioned as an additional access point to Highway 99. Now, it is being proposed as a major highway interchange for countless numbers of container trucks from Fraser Port. In the intervening eighteen years a lot has changed in this area of Richmond.

The Blundell Interchange Group, and other stakeholders and agencies involved, would like the City to conduct more detailed studies of this project than it has previously done in order to determine if a highway interchange at Blundell Road is as good an idea today as it was eighteen years ago.

Stakeholders who are not part of Richmond City culture and staff – The Ministry of Transportation, TransLink, Fraser Port and the Province, have not internalized the Blundell Interchange idea.

Since the idea became part of the Richmond Official Community Plan (OCP) in 1989, the southeast corner of Richmond has changed dramatically.

Why is the City of Richmond referring to an eighteen-year-old idea without studying the current circumstances in southeast Richmond?

Other stakeholders have raised numerous doubts about the project, but the City and its staff seem determined to proceed.

Detailed here are just some of the issues and related questions that City plans and reports have failed to consider with regard to the viability of an interchange at Blundell Road.

PROPOSED HIGHWAY 99 INTERCHANGE AT BLUNDELL ROAD ISSUES AND CONCERNS

SAFETY

Temples, Churches and Schools

The City has designated No 5 Road as an appropriate area for places of worship. Along with the various religious groups, many schools have also been established in this area. There are approximately 700 children attending schools in the immediate vicinity of the proposed interchange.

Have City planners considered the proximity of churches and schools to the proposed interchange site? Have City planners considered the impact of heavy truck traffic on worshippers of various faiths who do not all hold Sunday as a holy day?

Residences, Farms, Properties and Small Businesses

Slow moving farm traffic from the local blueberry industry may be impeded by the huge increase in truck traffic in this area. Long lines of trucks from Fraser Port waiting to access Highway 99 may result in residents and businesses having reduced access to properties along Blundell Road.

Please see Attachment #1.

Will the City ensure sufficient access for local residents and businesses along Blundell Road during peak volume times?

As a result of increased traffic in the area, will the City fill the ditches on No 6 road and Sidaway Road and widen both roads?

Will the City install the necessary intersections at No 6 Road and Sidaway Road to make them safe for this volume of traffic?

Is the City ready to remove the S bend from No 6 road?

How will slow moving farm vehicles be redirected?

Traffic Congestion and Rapid Transit

Between the proposed interchange and Westminster highway is a one kilometer stretch of Highway 99 with HOV lanes. These HOV lanes are also used by public transit.

If the interchange goes ahead, how will slow moving north and south bound traffic merge onto the highway with fast moving traffic changing lanes to exit the highway – all within one kilometer?

What happens to the HOV lanes and transit vehicles of Highway 99 in this scenario? Will HOV lanes be scrapped to make way for truck traffic from a Blundell Interchange?

IMPACT ON THE SOUTHEAST SECTOR OF RICHMOND

Massey Tunnel

The present limitations on Highway 99 and the Massey Tunnel guarantee that the proposed Blundell Road Interchange will be a bottleneck from the day it opens. The City has acknowledged this in its reports yet wants the interchange anyway. Mitigating measures such as feeder traffic signals have been mentioned as solutions to this very complex and costly problem.

Tertiary Roads

The impact on the southeast corner of Richmond will be dramatic as traffic of all kinds is squeezed down tertiary roads like No 6 and Sidaway. Just as drivers now use No 5 Road, No 6 Road and Sidaway Road to avoid the line up on the 99, even more will do the same to avoid the line up at Blundell and Highway 99. All the roads in the area will need major upgrades as they change from rural to urban routes. This is likely to open these roads to yet more traffic. The point is, that there will be a ripple effect from creating a corridor through this area.

The City will create more congestion if it builds a corridor that leads directly into an existing bottleneck – Highway 99.

In most municipalities the greatest efforts are made to route truck traffic around the city. As this south-east corner of Richmond grows, it will indeed be like any other part of the Richmond. It is already mixed use.

Why is the City of Richmond directing truck traffic from Fraser Port into the city instead of around it?

AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Viability Assessment

City staff have already highlighted the difficulties of putting a truck corridor through Blundell Road. The recommendation below are taken directly from **City of Richmond Agricultural Viability Strategy, May 26, 2003**

This report prepared by City of Richmond staff is intended as a guide to City planners when dealing with development in the ALR, which includes all of the sector for the proposed corridor and interchange.

Specifically, the City's own report recommends the following:

“Recommendation 4.

Introduce an Agricultural Impact Assessment process (AIA):

- a) Use the AIA for all proposed projects involving land use changes or development:
 - i) Within the ALR;
 - ii) Adjacent to the ALR;
 - iii) Outside the ALR for projects which may have an impact on agriculture, such as transportation corridors, recreational trails, new residential developments, and others.

b) Develop criteria, (e.g. Drainage/irrigation implications, **air quality, noise, transportation and traffic** and others), for the AIA in conjunction with BCMAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fish), the ALC, the proposed AAC (City Agricultural Advisory Committee), and others as appropriate.”

Given the Blundell Road is in the ALR, will the City abide by its own recommendations and introduce an AIA before making decisions about the possible route of a truck corridor?

Is the City willing to add a criterion “livability of existing residents” to this AIA?

Agriculturally Viable Alternatives

“Recommendation 51.

Blundell Road is the identified access to Fraser Port Industrial Lands:

a) Require a proposed AIA (see Recommendation 4) be completed and that appropriate steps be taken to mitigate potential conflicts;

b) Whenever potential negative impacts for agriculture may occur, ensure that viable alternatives are available and fully explored and that there is *either*:

- No negative impacts on farming;
- A net benefit to farming; *or*
- Adequate compensation.”

Is the City willing to abide by its own recommendations and look for alternatives?

ENVIRONMENT

In addition to the above report, A “**City-Wide Management Plan (CWMP) for Viable Agriculture**” states that, “The strategy for Agriculture with respect to the Environment and Environmentally Sensitive Areas’ encourages environmental management on, and adjacent to, agricultural land that does not impact negatively on normal farm practices.”

Given that the proposed corridor cuts right through the ALR and identified ESA’s, how will a Blundell Interchange and Blundell Road extension acknowledge the above policy recommendation?

The above issues are but a few of those already identified in City reports. However, to date no acknowledgement of any of these issues has been stated publicly or in City plans.

Clearly, the City of Richmond is obliged to conduct much more study of the proposed corridor to determine if such a route is really the most cost effective and least damaging to agriculture and the environment. It is lamentable that city taxpayers, residents and property owners have to raise these issues while the City is planning and lobbying for funding without regard for potentially costly and damaging problems.

LIVABILITY ISSUES

Corridor through Agricultural and Mixed Use Lands

Surely, with eighteen years having passed and all of the changes noted above, it is time for the City to take a much more up-to-date and careful look at the implications of a corridor cutting right through this area of Richmond when there are viable alternatives – most of which are being put forward not by residents but by the Ministry and Translink.

If the Massey Tunnel is ever upgraded, how will traffic flows improve if another interchange – Blundell – has been added to highway 99?

How will the City of Richmond prevent drivers of all vehicles from using No 6 Road or Sidaway Road as major routes north and south when those drivers know that highway 99 is congested?

In City reports and surveys there is no mention of the number of trucks, the number of residences, businesses, farms etc. All the reports so far are conceptual in nature and lack any detail whatsoever, nor do they mention the possible impacts on Southeast Richmond.

Will the City provide statistical data to stakeholders concerning traffic activity in this area now and projected with an interchange?

If the City and its staff were able to answer these questions and conduct the kind of detailed study this project requires, it would quickly find the eighteen year old idea of a Blundell interchange to be fraught with problems and costs unacceptable to the taxpayers of Richmond. It would also find that Fraser Port can easily be linked to the highway system in much less expensive and more efficient ways.

This is an area of blueberry farms. During the summer season many slow moving farm vehicles transport fruit from farms to the new winery and to other processing areas.

Residential Development

This part of Richmond has been evolving from solely agricultural use to mixed use with large homes currently being built in the area.

Does the City have plans for rezoning from Ag 1 in this area?

Recreation

There are now three golf courses in this area, a large aquatic and recreation center – Watermania – as well as Silver City, a bowling alley, an ice skating complex, a huge Cineplex and restaurants - more recently condos have been built at the end of No 6 Road. These facilities attract day and evening traffic up and down No. 6 Road.

Will City planners consider the evolving mixed uses in this area of Richmond and think again about whether or not they want major truck traffic coming into the City or going around it?

Traffic Flow

None of the City reports referring to the Blundell Interchange have addressed the impact such a huge civil engineering project would have on the tertiary roads in the area. Indeed, the City has so far approached the project as only a concept while at the same time drawing up plans and lobbying for the interchange with the other two agencies involved.

Any truck “corridor” in this area will affect future development, both promoting some and preventing others. What kind of vision does the City have for this south-east sector of Richmond?

FRASER PORT

This did not exist when the Blundell Interchange was first thought of. It has now become the driving force behind a Blundell Interchange nullifying all other issues.

Will the City conduct a study of the long-term needs of Fraser Port and the impact that growth in this large industrial area will have on the surrounding agricultural and residential neighborhoods?

HIGHWAY 91

This highway was only just completed in 1989. It is now a vital link in the road network and gets busier every day. The congestion on southbound Highway 99 is so predictable at certain times of the day that traffic is now exiting Highway 91 at No 6 road and weaving through Sidaway Road and No 6 Road to take a faster route to the Massey Tunnel entrance - especially from the Corporate offices on No 6 Road.

Has the City considered the impact that an additional access point to the 99 would have on nearby industrial and service areas?

Why hasn't the City considered a connection between Highway 91 and Nelson road? (see attachment #2a)

1999 CITY OF RICHMOND OCP

The City promotes the idea of a Nelson Road - Blundell Road corridor to link 91 and 99 and accommodate huge numbers of container trucks from Fraser Port. No impact studies have been carried out on the tertiary roads in the area which are likely to see greatly increased traffic flows due to the obvious bottlenecks at the Massey Tunnel and the very expensive bottleneck the City wants to create at Blundell and Highway 99. All the roads in this area have large ditches and would likely need major engineering – if not when the interchange were built, then very soon afterwards.

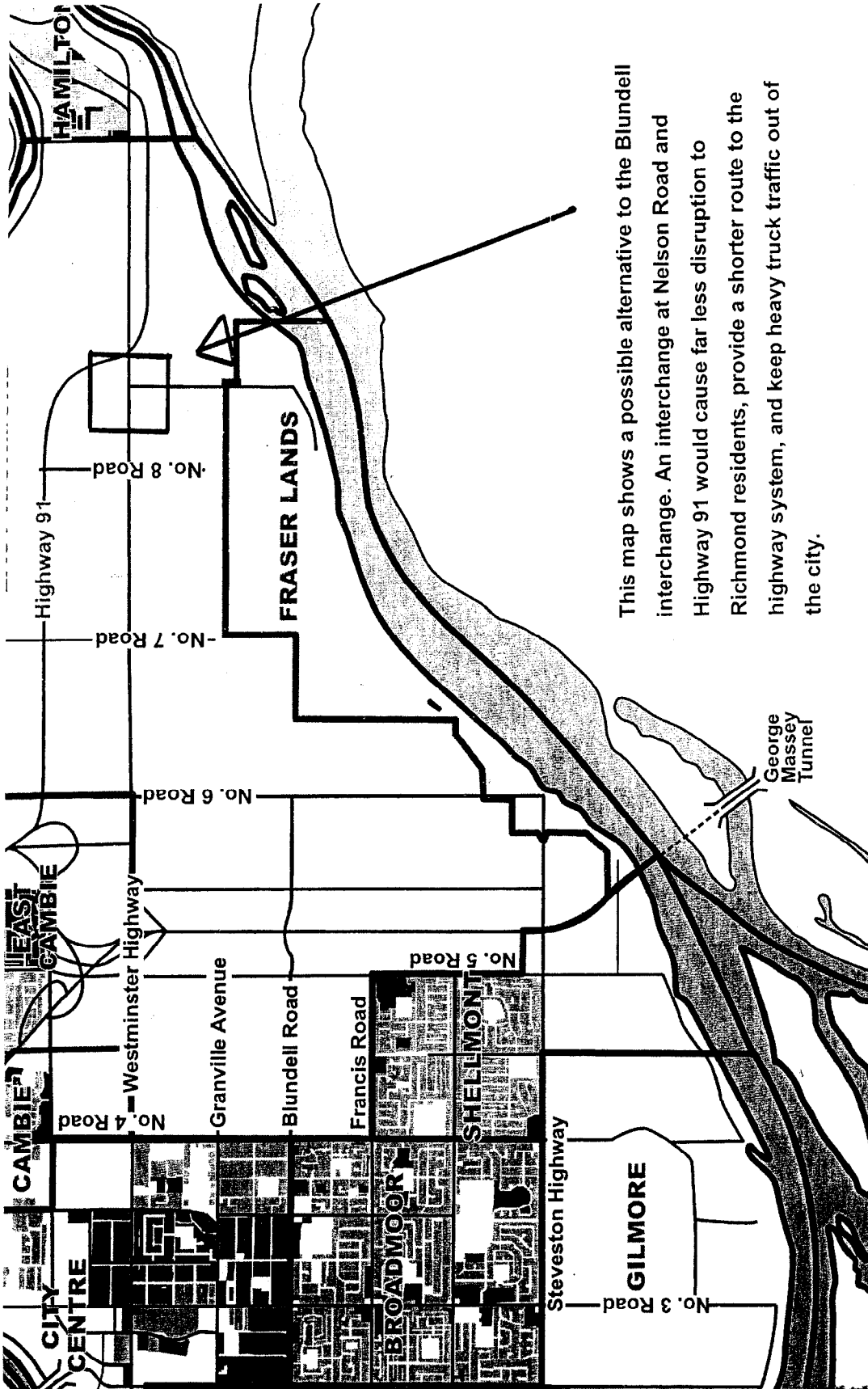
Has the City included the tertiary road improvements in a budget for the proposed Blundell interchange? City reports cite a cost of \$34 - \$37m for the interchange – how much would the upgrading of tertiary roads and services cost?

2006 GATEWAY PROGRAM

The George Massey tunnel additional tube is a long range plan of the provincial government and not part of the Gateway initiative. A Blundell interchange is not a specific recommendation in Gateway, nor is a corridor linking 91 and 99.

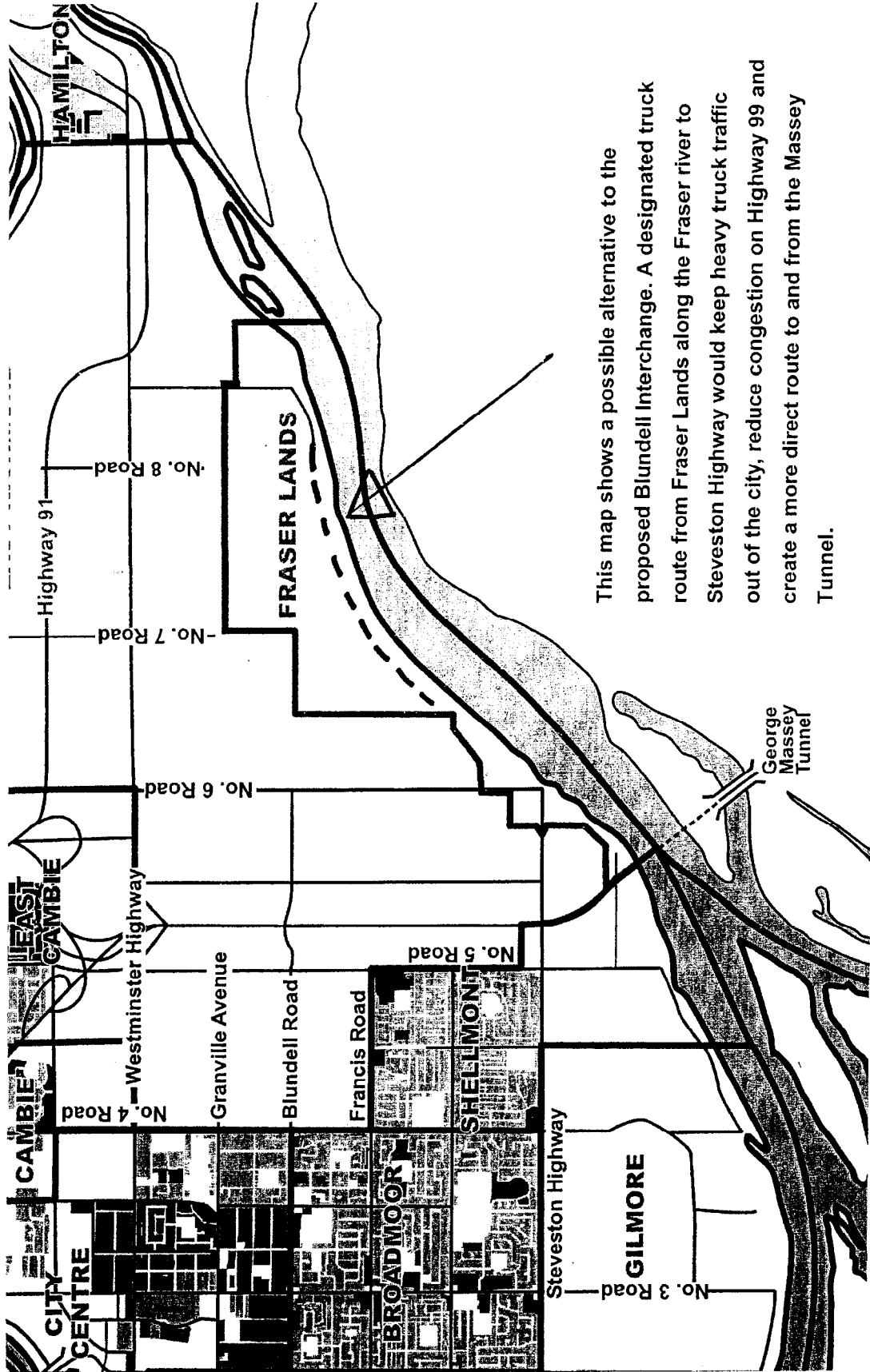
If the Blundell interchange does not happen, is the City prepared to meet the needs of Fraser Port by proposing alternative routes for Fraser Port traffic such as along the river to the Steveston interchange, north to the 91 or barge transportation using the river? (see attachment #2b).

Attachment 2a.



This map shows a possible alternative to the Blundell interchange. An interchange at Nelson Road and Highway 91 would cause far less disruption to Richmond residents, provide a shorter route to the highway system, and keep heavy truck traffic out of the city.

Attachment 26.



This map shows a possible alternative to the proposed Blundell Interchange. A designated truck route from Fraser Lands along the Fraser river to Steveston Highway would keep heavy truck traffic out of the city, reduce congestion on Highway 99 and create a more direct route to and from the Massey Tunnel.

References

- Agricultural Viability Strategy, City of Richmond & Richmond Farmers Institute, Council Approved May 26, 2003
- City of Richmond State of the Environment, 2005 Update Report, Indicator Highlights Summary, Adopted by Council May 23, 2006
- City of Richmond, 2005 Annual Report for the year ended December 31, 2005
- Fraser River Port Authority, Annual Review 2003/2004 and Land Use Plan April 2001, www.fraserportauthority.com

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