



Departments

- Home
- Letters
- News and Views
- Contests
- Features
- Travel
- Style
- Dining
- Arts
- Books
- Movies
- Music
- Cartoons
- Time Out Events
- Classifieds
- Golden Plate Awards

News and Views

[News and Views Archives](#)

Profs Slam City's RAV Memo

By Charlie Smith
Publish Date: 8-Jul-2004

Two UBC professors with a special interest in transit have criticized a recent Vancouver city staff memo favouring a partially tunnelled Richmond/Airport/Vancouver Rapid Transit project. In the June 22 memo to the mayor and city councillors, three senior bureaucrats stated that staff "cannot support" putting the RAV project on the streets of downtown Vancouver and along Cambie Street north of 46th Avenue.

"It's curious that they would feel that way in light of Portland's successful example of running both the Max line and the Portland streetcar through downtown," said Patrick Condon, a professor of landscape architecture.

Peter Boothroyd, a planning professor and the husband of Coun. Anne Roberts, told the *Straight* that the staff memo was "an affront to democratic governance" because it dismissed transit options before city council or the public could have any input.

"My understanding of the way democracy is supposed to work is that staff are there to help elected officials make informed decisions and to give them full information on what the options are and what the costs and benefits are of each option," Boothroyd said. "This memo didn't do that."

Eight days after staff wrote the memo, TransLink director and North Vancouver City Mayor Barbara Sharp cited Vancouver's opposition to street-level light rail as justification for reversing her two previous votes killing the RAV project. Sharp's motion, which passed 8-4, allowed two finalists to submit "best and final" offers to build the RAV project, which would include a tunnel under Cambie Street to 46th Avenue.

The three top-level bureaucrats--engineering-services general manager Dave Rudberg, director of current planning Larry Beasley, and director of CityPlans Ann McAfee--stated in the memo that imposing a surface LRT system downtown "could have irresolvable physical, urban fit and transportation impacts on the downtown commercial, retail, and residential neighbourhoods". Their memo also claimed that a predominantly at-grade system "would not be a long range, sustainable transportation solution" to achieve the city's targets, particularly downtown.

McAfee told the *Straight* that when the memo was written, the TransLink board had already voted twice to kill the RAV project. She claimed that nobody on council or in the mayor's office instructed her to write the memo, and that staff had no idea the RAV project might be

TJ UNLIMITED

ONLY IN A Jeep

Introducing the new 2004 Jeep TJ Unlimited.

The Legend GROWS

Jeep.ca

[Click Here](#)

bravura interiors

Downtown:
534 West Pender Street at Seymour
604.672.4880

STRAIGHT.COM PERSONALS

stellabella71

Fill in the blanks:
"Being kind to me is sexy; being kind to your mother is sexier."

1140 online in personals now

Meet your Match

Curious?

I am Seeking

Zip/Postal code

match.com

DEEP COVE

CAVE & KAYAK

On the Drive:
2946 Commercial Drive
at 14th Avenue
604.872.4806
www.bravura-interiors.com



resurrected.

"This wasn't a memo that was intended as a decision-making tool," McAfee said.

She claimed that the memo was written out of concern that TransLink staff might develop alternatives to the RAV project without first consulting with the city. She said proposals were already coming forward to narrow downtown sidewalks and move buses to side streets to make room for street-level rapid transit.

"Those side streets happen to be quite narrow and heavily residential," McAfee said. "So we get enough complaints from people who have buses stopping and starting in front of their homes."

Condon, the UBC James Taylor Chair in Landscape and Liveable Environments, said that about 30 percent of the land in downtown Vancouver is already occupied by "street right of way" because of the small block configuration. "Certainly it can't be the case that you couldn't find less than one percent of that space to dedicate to a surface light rail," he said.

Condon added that people sometimes lump all light rail into one category when there are different options. In Portland, he said, there is a light-rail system as well as a city streetcar, which he described as "ultralight rail".

Condon said an ultralight-streetcar system would cost about \$20 million per kilometre, compared to \$100 million per kilometre for the partially underground RAV line.

"People who've had [a] modern streetcar in their neighbourhoods have been quite delighted about that addition to their landscape," Condon said. "It doesn't necessarily require the removal of the median on Cambie."

Boothroyd said that according to extensive research by Danish planning professor Bent Flyvbjerg, costs start soaring in nine out of 10 large public construction projects after they've been approved, yet this was not mentioned in the staff memo.

Flyvbjerg examined hundreds of projects. In the June 2003 issue of *Eurobusiness* magazine, he wrote: "For rail projects, for example, half of all projects have cost overruns of 45 per cent and higher. When this is combined with patronage [ridership], which for half of all rail projects is more than 50 per cent lower than forecasted, it becomes clear why so many projects have financial problems."

 [Email this page](#)



[About Us](#) | [Production Specs](#) | [Terms And Conditions](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Online Privacy](#) |

[Contact Us](#) | ©2004 Vancouver Free Press