

Staff Report Application # O – 38498

Applicants: Gateway Program, TransLink, Township of Langley

DATE RECEIVED: September 19, 2008

DATE PREPARED: November 7, 2008

TO: Chair and Commissioners – South Coast Panel

FROM: Tony Pellett, Regional Planner

PROPOSAL: To construct a major thoroughfare across the ALR.

This application is made pursuant to part 4 of the ALR Use, Subdivision and

Procedure Regulation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In September, the Commission considered a "test fill location" without prejudice to consideration of the major thoroughfare under application. The next step is a meeting with the proponents and their consultants, to establish what if any information the Commission still needs from them.

All parcels through which the thoroughfare would pass are within the former Hudson's Bay Company farm, established in the early 1800s to provide fresh food to Fort Langley (for consumption by the residents, and for wider distribution to local First Nations and up the coast as far as the Alaska panhandle). Later the Hudson's Bay Company ceased to operate the Langley farm and in 1877 subdivided it into 20 farm parcels, 10 on either side of what is now called Glover Road. In the southwest half of the farm, parcel sizes were ± 40 ha. Some of those parcels are still intact except for relatively minor right of way dedications for roads and a rail line. In 1910, the British Columbia Electric Railway Company acquired the right to build a passenger rail line on a right of way adjoining the west side of Glover Road, complete with farm crossings of the rail line. Passenger service ceased in 1950 and the line operated local freight service. Around 1970, the rail line was upgraded and provided with new connections to national railways and a coal export terminal on Roberts Bank. In the late 1990s, the local freight and international coal operations were joined by container trains to and from two container berths at Deltaport, with plans for eventual expansion to as many as four more container berths.

Because the original farm followed the alignment of the northwest side of the Milner Valley (rather than the cardinal directions used in all later surveys of the Langley area), roads built to serve the farm area were diverted on the alignment of the 1877 farm boundaries, joining Glover Road more or less at a right angle. The only exception was a road (first called Johnston Town Line Road, now 216 Street) built directly north along a township boundary, crossing several farms on the east side of Glover Road and forming a spine for the hamlet of Milner. The intersection at Milner is the only location where through routes cross Glover within the original farm; everywhere else there is a T intersection where vehicles turn onto Glover in order to exit at a T intersection elsewhere on the opposite side of Glover. Now that most of the old road names have been changed to numbers, an artificial desire is created for drivers to continue onto the other part of a road with the same number (216 St. or 64 Ave.). In the case of 64 Avenue, the leg west of Glover is an arterial street, starting in Delta and changing name at the west corner of the 1877 subdivision, after which traffic continues to Glover along Mufford Crescent (which forms the southwest boundary of the 1877 subdivision). The eastern leg of 64 Avenue is a local road, which diverts to an 1877 farm boundary meeting Glover at a right angle, 1.2 km northeast of Mufford Crescent. To get from one to the other, a driver must make a left turn onto Glover Road, originally a simple task but now time-consuming with increasingly heavy traffic on Glover.

A number of transportation overviews have identified a key rôle for 64 / Mufford in distributing traffic effectively in the Lower Mainland:

- In 1991, the Langley/Surrey Road/Rail Separation Study proposed replacement of Mufford Crescent by a new route extending 64 Avenue eastward through the ALR across Glover Road and linking to 216 Street with the intent of accommodating traffic bound for Murrayville.
- In 1995, the Commission was asked to participate in review of specific options for the Mufford Crescent replacement, based on the 1991 concept but with detailed work by the Ministry of Agriculture (Dave Melnychuk) on minimizing agricultural concerns. The work bogged down because of unresolved Fisheries concerns.
- In 2001, the Ministry of Transportation & Highways conducted a broad study of transportation options (including passenger rail) south of the Fraser River between Highway 91 and Hope. That study pointed to a conclusion that traffic flows would be smoother with arterial standards on 64 / Mufford subject to intersection improvements at Glover Road. In response to that study, the Commission advised that it had previously considered and accepted the need for upgrading of 64 Avenue and Mufford Crescent, recognizing that there could be major agricultural impacts if the Mufford/Glover intersection must be relocated. It was strongly suggested that the next phase of the study (a phase which is understood to have been ultimately abandoned) include detailed functional analysis of five conflicting transportation elements with and without railway grade separation. The members of the Commission viewed those conflicts and expressed a strong preference for Mufford Crescent to remain on its present alignment or to fly over Glover Road and the rail line near the existing alignment then route to 216 Street along the non-ALR edge. Alternatively, if Mufford Crescent must be relocated to provide better intersection spacing, the Commission's preference was for it to remain on its present alignment as far east as possible, with an S-bend then diverting the route to meet Glover Road ± 400 m northeast of the present intersection – immediately adjoining the south side of the natural gas transmission line [for intersection spacing purposes]. The Commission's view was that if it is ever decided that the arterial route really must be extended to 216 Street from a level crossing of Glover Road, the alignment should be far enough from the present ALR boundary to allow practical agriculture to continue on the south side of that new route.
- In 2004, the Township of Langley presented an engineering report on alternatives for a more northerly Mufford / Glover intersection. It concluded that it would be possible to narrow the distance from the Langley Bypass to the next level crossing from 400 m to somewhere between 330 m and 350 m. For the leg from 64 Avenue to the new intersection, it examined two alternative alignments, the more southerly of which is part of the current application. It also explored two alternative alignments east of Glover in the event there was to be a grade-separated crossing and a connection to 216 Street. The more northerly of those alignments is part of the current application. A sketch of these options is attached as drawing 1.
- In 2004 and 2005, area farmers contacted the Commission to express concern over severe agricultural impacts on farm operations. Some proposed alternative routing, including conversion of the existing Mufford / Glover intersection to a grade-separated crossing, with various options for where Mufford would connect. One version had Mufford ending at a diamond interchange (attached drawing 2). In 2005, the Township of Langley submitted an application to construct the more southerly road diverting Mufford Crescent to Glover Road (in the same location as for the current application). The Commission had just responded to an Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) request for comment on the Deltaport Third Berth (DP3) project, stating in part, "The Commission anticipates that continued growth of port facilities in the Roberts Bank area will seriously exacerbate existing transportation difficulties affecting agriculture farther east (in Surrey and more particularly in the Milner Valley of Langley). The Commission requests involvement in any EAO work involved in resolving those issues, whether that work be an adjunct to the DP3 project, as part of the proposed T2 project or as a separate issue." The Commission refused Langley's application on the grounds of impact on prime agricultural land without sufficient evidence of long-term community need but advised the Township of Langley, the Ministry of Transportation and EAO that the Commission would be prepared to reconsider this decision if a comprehensive transportation plan (including the future of the 7 railway crossings at Langley) shows the Mufford Crescent realignment is necessary and desirable.

- In 2005 and early 2006, a Langley Rail Corridor Task Force was established, but the Commission was not invited to participate and its findings were not made public. From a reference in the Transport Canada study discussed below, it is known that it recommended connecting the two ends of 64 Avenue with at-grade crossing of the rail line and a signalized intersection where the overpass is now proposed.
- In 2006, the Township of Langley engaged the Ward Consulting Group to draft a "Master Transportation Plan". Its options for Mufford Crescent were
 - to realign Mufford to a new at-grade signalized intersection far enough north to improve traffic operations on this segment of Glover,
 - to realign Mufford to an overpass with a loop back to connect to Glover at grade (again, far enough north to improve traffic operations on this segment of Glover), or
 - to realign Mufford with a grade-separation over Glover, connecting not to Glover but to 216 St. at 61 Ave. (with the potential for non-216 traffic to continue along 61 Ave. to 224 St.). Agriculture was not given full consideration; a route to 61 Avenue would eliminate a very intensively farmed parcel on the west side of the 61 Ave./216 St. intersection.
- In 2006, Transport Canada undertook the requested review of railway crossings, not limiting the scope to the Milner Valley but reviewing needs throughout the Roberts Bank Rail Corridor (RBRC) from Mission to Deltaport. When the 180-page study was completed in 2007, it identified several locations where grade separations are necessary for road or rail operational efficiency. It also identified areas where grade separation has been rendered impossible by the pattern of urban development immediately adjoining the rail line, the worst case being in the City of Langley, where in 1966 the B.C. Department of Highways dedicated a new highway bypass and rail corridor without any effective provision to plan for long term mobility on either road or rail. As a result, while grade separation is possible at the existing TransLink overpass at 204 St., it is not possible at 200 St. nor at the Langley Bypass. Transport Canada has therefore identified 196 St. and Mufford Crescent as candidates for federal cost-sharing of grade separation for road operational purposes. In the Milner Valley, the study also called for realignment of Smith Crescent and alternative access to two farms west of Glover Road, allowing closure of two private crossings of the rail line. The study used a Multiple Account Evaluation process that included
 - · conceptual design and preliminary cost estimation,
 - · user benefit estimation and traffic analysis including safety benefits,
 - financial and economic analysis.
 - local economic account.
 - social account such as whistling, etc. and
 - environmental account such as land requirements and Agricultural Land Reserve.

For Mufford Crescent it considered two variations on the Langley Rail Corridor Task Force model: both use an overpass and a connection east to 64 Avenue; one has an at-grade connection to Glover Road as proposed in the current application; the other does not. The study illustrates these locations schematically and does not advocate any specific alignment, as this option package would have limited benefit to rail operations. The study emphasizes, "It should be understood that the national economic benefits related to delivery of improvements on the RBRC have not been – even in part – attributed to this specific option package and is not part of the...financial analysis".

- In August 2007, Commission staff met with Langley transportation engineering staff to discuss the Township's *Master Transportation Plan* (MTP), which was based on the 2006 Ward Consulting Group study and finalized following completion of the RBRC study.
- In October 2007, Paul Cordeiro, the Township's Manager, Transportation Engineering, wrote
 to advise of progress toward agricultural benefits from many of routes in the MTP. He also
 advised that the Township had reached an agreement in principle with senior levels of government for the 64 / Mufford extension.
- On 29 January 2008, Commission staff met with Mr. Cordeiro and advised that if it is proposed
 to make application to construct a new road system through the ALR in accordance with the
 MTP, it would be essential to conduct a comprehensive analysis of agricultural impacts and
 possible benefits not only of the proposed route but of all other routes which have been put
 forward seriously by any party. To date, the current application contains no such analysis.

Local Government:

Township of Langley

Legal Descriptions to be listed separately

Agricultural Capability:

Data Source: Agricultural Capability Maps # 92G/2a & b
All properties are identified as having Prime ratings except for Class 4 along two creek beds.

Official Community Plan and Designation:

Agriculture/Countryside

Zoning Bylaw and Designation:

Rural Zone RU-3 [the principal agricultural zone]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATIONS/COMMENTS:

The Township of Langley has supported this alignment and hopes to construct it on the basis of senior government funding participation.

STAFF COMMENTS:

The federal RBRC document makes it clear that the proposed route is not of great significance in relation to rail operations. For that reason,

- the Commission may weigh the evidence strictly on the basis of agricultural impacts *versus* road network benefits to the wider community, and
- the Commission may consider whether to defer a decision pending further review of alternatives, recognizing that a lengthy delay could jeopardize senior government funding potential.

The principal reasons for having the east end of the realignment divulge onto 64 Avenue rather than stop at 216 Street where there is no eastbound leg appear to be

- that diverting Mufford traffic onto 216 St. where there is no eastbound leg could increase 216 St. traffic at the Milner intersection and worsen the congestion there, and
- that there is potential to ease congestion on Glover Road (notably at the 216 St. / Crush Cr. intersection) through diversion of freeway-bound traffic along 64 Avenue, 232 Street and that part of Highway 10 lying north of Springbrook Road. The application does not address potential four-laning of Glover Road between the Langley Bypass and Springbrook Road, nor does it address the implications to agriculture of increased traffic flows on 64 Avenue, on 232 Street where it crosses the Salmon River or in the 232 Street / Highway 10 intersection.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Context and capability maps (4), showing the alignment under application.
- 2. RBRC option packages (2)
- 3. "Drawing 1", showing the alternatives studied in 2004
- 4. "Drawing 2", showing one of the farmer alternatives presented in 2004/5
- 5. Drawing showing alternatives in the Commission's 2001 comments
- 6. Drawing and letters submitted by the public in relation to this application.

END OF REPORT		
Signature	Date	