

# Rail For the Valley

## Questionnaire responses from the candidates



With new leadership coming to both major political parties in B.C., Rail For the Valley found out where the candidates stand on crucial transportation issues for the rapidly growing Fraser Valley.

On January 26, a Questionnaire was distributed to all leadership candidates from both political parties - From the BC Liberals: **George Abbott, Christy Clark, Kevin Falcon, Mike De Jong, Moira Stilwell and Ed Mayne.** From the BC NDP: **John Horgan, Adrian Dix, Mike Farnworth, Nicholas Simons, Dana Larsen and Harry Lali.**

Three weeks later, and the responses are in.

Encouragingly, all BC NDP Candidates responded, with the exception of Harry Lali. On the next 5 pages are their responses to the 5 questions asked.

Unfortunately, as of February 16, none of the BC Liberal candidates have responded. **With the Liberal race concluding next week, candidates are strongly encouraged to respond to the Questionnaire,** as it deals with issues of the utmost importance to citizens of the Fraser Valley.

## Some quotes from the candidates

**John Horgan:** *"I support an at-grade light rail system through Surrey and Langley, eventually reaching Abbotsford and even Chilliwack. Skytrain is a mass transit/high density option that is neither suitable nor desirable for the needs of the Fraser Valley."*

*"The Fraser Valley needs to have an integrated transit system that uses light rail to connect communities, with buses bringing commuters from their neighbourhoods to the line."*

*"We need complete communities, with jobs, services and entertainment for local residents. Light rail encourages the private sector investments that provide those options."*

**Adrian Dix:** *"Yes, [I support moving forward with planning Interurban Light Rail] with the objective of developing light rail to connect Central City to Newton then to Langley, using the existing line."*

*"There is no question in my view that the south of the Fraser region has to have a much higher priority in transit priorities due to rapid growth and the overall neglect of transit south of the Fraser."*

**Mike Farnworth:** *"Local communities should make decisions about their transit needs and solutions that fit their communities and are not imposed by Victoria."*

*"Light Rail needs to be part of a comprehensive sustainable transit strategy both here in the lower mainland and in other growing urban areas in British Columbia."*

**Nicholas Simons:** *"The province is trying to force both your communities and Lower Island communities into a Rapid Bus system that will not accomplish community aims, but may be marginally cheaper to implement in the short term than LRT."*

*"The ability of LRT to attract ridership means that it can help build density at nodes and further complete-community objectives, where Rapid Bus cannot."*

**Dana Larsen:** *"As Premier, I would immediately halt highways expansion and fund the rapid deployment and expansion of rail throughout the Fraser Valley, Metro Vancouver, Greater Victoria, and if feasible, the Okanagan."*

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**Q1: Premier Campbell has promised to extend SkyTrain to Langley City but both Mayor Watts of Surrey and Mayor Green of the Township of Langley have expressed a strong preference for developing a more affordable at-grade Light Rail system and are against extending SkyTrain to Langley City. Do you support developing an at-grade Light Rail system to serve the South of Fraser region?**

**John Horgan:** *I support an at-grade light rail system through Surrey and Langley, eventually reaching Abbotsford and even Chilliwack. Skytrain is a mass transit/high density option that is neither suitable nor desirable for the needs of the Fraser Valley. Unfortunately, the Liberal government consistently fails to listen to local government about transportation investments and then expects municipal taxpayers to pay for their poor decisions. I'm sure Mayor Watts and Mayor Green are justifiably frustrated by these highly political announcements, made without any consultation and very little thought.*

**Adrian Dix:** *Yes, I support Light Rail in principle as a component in a fully integrated Lower Mainland transit system. Appropriate action should follow expert analysis, planning and costing and be part of overall Lower Mainland planning for large-scale transit expansion. Carbon tax revenues should be directed to transit and other green infrastructure, in all regions. How is it that a stadium roof costing hundreds of millions of dollars can be ordered up by the Liberals without any discussion of priorities, while necessities such as transit are ignored?*

**Mike Farnworth:** *I support the use of carbon tax revenue to fund sustainable transit. Local communities should make decisions about their transit needs and solutions that fit their communities and are not imposed by Victoria. I look forward to working with Mayor Watts and Mayor Green to support the continued growth of economically vibrant, sustainable communities in the South Fraser.*

**Nicholas Simons:** *YES. Local governments must play the key role in shaping rapid transit networks to optimize the return on public investments. Getting resources into the hands of local and regional governments to fund rapid transit systems that create economic opportunity would be a priority under my leadership. It would lead to more compact development –and reduced environmental impacts. Where current or future density supports rapid transit we should promote a system that attracts riders best while reducing emissions. In other words, LRT which also has excellent potential for adding capacity cost-effectively as ridership grows.*

**Dana Larsen:** *I believe that whether a system is at grade or above is less important than if it has dedicated right-of-ways (ie does not interact with or be slowed down by traffic). Given that there is already rail in Langley, it would seem ideal to use that rail, however to preserve a dedicated right of way, I would support building above grade.*

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**Q2: Under Premier Campbell, the Provincial government advocated a form of Rapid Bus for the Fraser Valley Regional District, instead of integrating Light Rail into a reorganized and integrated bus and rail network. Do you have the same preference for a bus only system or do you support an additional Light Rail option for the Fraser Valley? Under what timeline?**

**John Horgan:** *Rapid Bus is often used to build up ridership for a fixed rail system. Both the Millennium line and the Canada Line had rapid bus systems before they were replaced by Skytrain and then the buses were re-deployed to other parts of the transit system. The Fraser Valley needs to have an integrated transit system that uses light rail to connect communities, with buses bringing commuters from their neighbourhoods to the line. We also have to work on pedestrian and cycling connections. My first priority would be the completion of the Evergreen Line to Coquitlam, with the Fraser Valley and the Broadway corridor to follow. Timelines would have to be set in consultation with the Mayors' Council, but I would confirm the appropriate route and begin acquiring properties during my first term as Premier.*

**Adrian Dix:** *I see a need for both more fast bus services connecting some specific town centres, but also Light Rail as a key factor for the long term. The timeline must be determined as part of the overall transit planning. There is no question in my view that the south of the Fraser region has to have a much higher priority in transit priorities due to rapid growth and the overall neglect of transit south of the Fraser.*

**Mike Farnworth:** *I believe in working with local communities to develop sustainable transit options. Decisions such as these should not be imposed by Victoria. I strongly support an integrated sustainable transit system across the lower mainland.*

**Nicholas Simons:** *NO. The province is trying to force both your communities and Lower Island communities into a Rapid Bus system that will not accomplish community aims, but may be marginally cheaper to implement in the short term than LRT. There's a strong case to be made for investing in Light Rail Transit (which I'm sure you already understand) based on regional emissions reductions and its proven ability to attract "choice-riders" (people who will choose rail-based ridership). The ability of LRT to attract ridership means that it can help build density at nodes and further complete-community objectives, where Rapid Bus cannot. Re: Timeline: Public Transportation systems are a high priority for the Party.*

**Dana Larsen:** *I do not believe rapid-bus service is an ideal solution, and as such would only deploy it where there was no option for rail. I support the full integration of rail into the transit network south of the Fraser. I believe we must deploy this system as quickly as possible, preserving the importance of a dedicated right-of-way. I would halt the expansion of highways in favour of expanding the commuter rail system.*

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**Q3:** The recent provincial study "Strategic Review of Transit in the Fraser Valley" covered the Fraser Valley Regional District but also reviewed and rejected introducing a "Commuter Rail" service using the provincially owned Interurban rail corridor. There were just 7 stops between Chilliwack and Scott Road SkyTrain in Surrey (100 kms). This type of Commuter service is not a sensible approach using the Interurban corridor. Community Rail, on the other hand, would result in a modern Light Rail system suitable for travel between communities along the 100 km line. Do you support the Community Rail concept of a rail service designed to move people around Fraser Valley communities?

**John Horgan:** *One size does not fit all in transportation choices. The Westcoast Express has been a success on the north side of the river, with the specific purpose of taking commuters to downtown Vancouver. I support light rail for south of the Fraser because it can grow communities and create a vibrant second city centre in Surrey. We need complete communities, with jobs, services and entertainment for local residents. Light rail encourages the private sector investments that provide those options. Ideally, we create ridership that is not just going "downtown".*

**Adrian Dix:** *I support in principle the Community Rail concept, subject to expert analysis, integrated planning and costing.*

**Mike Farnworth:** *Sustainable, integrated transit systems help support the growth of economically vibrant, green communities. I am committed to working with communities across the lower mainland to design a sustainable, cost-effective and efficient transit system.*

**Nicholas Simons:** *YES. The LRT can be more extensive more quickly and consequently have a faster impact on density, affordability and quality of life. I don't know enough to comment on whether a 100km long LRT is a feasible idea - intuitively it sounds a stretch; ultimately it will be frequency, as well as quality of service, that will have an impact on usage. Because all of my policies are based on meaningful consultation and evidence-based research, the best options will be those that address our emissions goals and reduce our carbon footprint.*

**Dana Larsen:** *I support community rail, but also believe we must have a high speed service throughout the Fraser Valley in line with the West-Coast Express. I believe we must give commuters both options, so that those who do work in Vancouver can get their quickly and efficiently, but with an understanding that many live and work in the Fraser Valley itself, and must also be accommodated. I also believe that a West-Coast express style train ought to make use of existing rail north of the Fraser, such that a person could travel from Chilliwack to Vancouver on the same train (as someone from Mission could now do) without having to switch to a separate system.*

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**Q4: The Interurban (Southern) Railway has long been mentioned as a potential route for a Light Rail service in the fast-growing Fraser Valley. The 2010 Leewood Projects Ltd. Study takes a detailed look at the Interurban and suggests an initial service can be built quickly and affordably. The Study recommends early implementation in order to maximize the benefits. Do you support moving forward with planning Interurban Light Rail?**

**John Horgan:** *You're not kidding about fast-growing. Surrey is apparently growing at 1000 new residents per month and the other Fraser Valley communities are experiencing as much growth as they can accommodate. Planning is long overdue, which is why local citizens and municipal governments have tried to fill the gap. We need to move quickly to identify the route and acquire the property, so local governments can plan for the future and design their communities to best use transit resources. The Liberal promise of Skytrain will never be fulfilled. It is far too expensive for this purpose. Light rail is a realistic, affordable alternative that we can begin planning right away.*

**Adrian Dix:** *Yes, with the objective of developing light rail to connect Central City to Newton then to Langley, using the existing line. This core service could be supported with expanded fast-bus and bus feeder services.*

**Mike Farnworth:** *I strongly support proceeding with planning for an integrated transit system that meets the needs of communities across the lower mainland. Light Rail needs to be part of a comprehensive sustainable transit strategy both here in the lower mainland and in other growing urban areas in British Columbia.*

**Nicholas Simons:** *YES. I agree with moving forward with planning Light Rail.*

**Dana Larsen:** *Absolutely, as Premier, I would immediately halt highways expansion and fund the rapid deployment and expansion of rail throughout the Fraser Valley, Metro Vancouver, Greater Victoria, and if feasible, the Okanagan.*

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**Q5: The South of Fraser Community Rail Task Force, with official representation from almost all South of Fraser municipalities, and all the universities, is promoting a Community Rail (Interurban) demonstration project. Under your leadership, will the Provincial government work with this Task Force to ensure that such a project is a success?**

**John Horgan:** *Yes. I would support the task force demonstration project, but I hasten to add that light rail is a tried and tested technology throughout the world. I think the main effort should be directed to route, specific types of technology and public information.*

**Adrian Dix:** *Yes. We need to get effective transit solutions south of the Fraser and do so as soon as possible. The BC Liberals have failed to address the real priorities of people and communities, such as transit, while pursuing other expensive pet projects without any regard to the broader public interest.*

**Mike Farnworth:** *A government under my leadership will support the development of sustainable transit systems funded by carbon tax revenues. I will work in partnership with local communities on transit and other critical local priorities. Local government needs a partner in Victoria, not a dictatorial adversary imposing decisions on communities.*

**Nicholas Simons:** *This would be a priority for the Party under my leadership. This is part of a larger Transportation Strategy that will address rural communities as well as urban and suburban communities, priority will be put on allowing for as much local input on design and direction, as possible. Investment of the provincial fuel tax and carbon tax revenues would hasten its establishment. I would also reverse the provincial downloading of transit costs onto the local property tax base. We can get more service more affordably by building LRT, which would in my view be both fiscally prudent effective.*

**Dana Larsen:** *Yes.*