[](https://www.facebook.com/patrick.condon.370?fref=nf&__tn__=%2Cdm-R-R&eid=ARCN4Mq4EQWenoCQdwchSMbN4Nwhl7G4eHDQIOB42Z9DPEjBDYfEKaltERM3NqMttuIes3oT8fwMoivr" \o "Patrick Condon" \t ")

[**Patrick Condon**](https://www.facebook.com/patrick.condon.370?__tn__=%2CdC-R-R&eid=ARA_hWRa86HvSQrpoD6anlWxLxm_FYgLkKNGxSk0pCSxK3SOJMkl9pulIvfaOBdkic0gHowd-NrPB-hU&hc_ref=ARQ5X6w44zTK5M2sAIPy-QTCe-JnxSNK9wxYdP8vg5rin7-QE5qW7dXdLStIbWaYnM4&fref=nf)

Community Rail response to TransLink report on reviving interurban line full text below.

TransLink has released a report dated June 6 to the Joint Regional Transportation Planning Committee later shared with the Mayors Council on Regional Transportation.

[https://www.translink.ca/…/Regional-Transportation-Planning…](https://www.translink.ca/-/media/Documents/about_translink/governance_and_board/council_minutes_and_reports/2019/june/Regional-Transportation-PlanningCmt-Report--Interurban-Passenger-Rail.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1ovlzG1XgR9BfKAcWfT3cNvzskyWlRSYv8oWrfkbuivGnj0Xh2cHUAlSc)

It contains several misunderstandings and factual errors, some of which are addressed below.

Preamble: The overarching misunderstanding is this: the concept of the Community Rail proposal is not driven by a desire or a need to connect the larger valley to the center of the Vancouver region as the TransLink response seems to imply, but to serve what is an increasingly self-contained urban region where more than 70 percent of all trips originating south of the Fraser now end south of the Fraser, a dramatic reversal from only 15 years ago. For example, in that time the South of Fraser Region has seen population and employment growth that is fifty percent higher per year than Vancouver's. Air traffic out of Abbotsford International airport is increasing by almost 50% per year. Employment (such as at the new Molsons Brewery, which left Vancouver for Chilliwack) is rapidly moving to the valley in search of more affordable land, a stable labor force, and broader transportation access than that possible in Vancouver. Any assessment that does not elevate these facts to the status of first principles for analysis will be fatally flawed. Any assessment that is more than ten years old will be of little relevance. Any assessment that does not accept that rubber-based transportation systems in the valley are already in a state of gridlock and crisis and destined to remain so indefinitely absent a government response, is negligent. Detailed point by point responses are below.

1. Under the heading of "Purpose," TransLink falsely claims that the Community Rail proposal is suggested as an alternative to SkyTrain to Langley this is not the case. While the Community Rail serves many of the same ends as a SkyTrain to Langley proposal, at far less than one tenth of the cost, the Community Rail proposal has a far broader ambition: to serve the entire valley with affordable rail, not just the Surrey to Langley leg of the narrowly defined Vancouver Metro area.

2 Under "Background," first paragraph. TransLink mistakenly says that the line is owned by Canadian Pacific and Southern Railway. It is not. It is owned by the Province. Only freight rights were sold. Passenger rights were retained.

3. Under "Background" paragraph two. TransLink mistakenly suggests that freight conflicts with freight movement would be a hindrance. It would not. The master agreement between the Province and the rail users stipulates that freight must give way to passenger use and that if double tracking is needed due to use conflicts, the cost will be borne by CP.

In the same paragraph TransLink suggests that the alignment of the interurban line has "limited alignment with regional land use plans" which is hard to credit while TransLink is proceeding with a plan for very expensive Skytrain through the lengthy unoccupied Green Timbers reserve, the lightly populated Fleetwood, and the agricultural lands of the Serpentine Valley before arriving at the same Langley Centre area also served by the interurban line.

4. Under "Background" paragraph three.
TransLink suggests that the line "may be part of a longer-term future, and opportunities should be retained for future services." which is a positive statement. However, valley citizens have long held the opinion that this future is now. Furthermore, TransLink overstates its mandate, which to date ends at the Langley border. The community rail proposal serves a region that extends at least 70 km east of that line.

5.Under "Background" paragraph four.
TransLink states that the line "does not directly connect relevant regional destinations (i.e. Surrey Central and Langley City)," while failing to acknowledge that the line does serve regional destinations such as North Delta, South Newton, and Cloverdale that their current plans fail to serve at all.
TransLink states that "resulted in less attractive travel times between key destinations" while failing to acknowledge that travel times are a function of the number of stops per unit distance and that the number of stops can be balanced against travel time objectives. Also, that the interurban line is already in its own ROW and would not be slowed by traffic conflicts.

TransLink goes on to assert that the line "would require significant capital investments to meet safety requirements," apparently ignorant of the fact that the Alstom hydrogen powered vehicles proposed can run immediately on the existing line without significant alteration and already meet Canadian safety standards.

Furthermore, in the same paragraph TransLink states that these misunderstood cost factors would end up "resulting in costs similar or higher than those along Fraser Highway or King George, but without commensurate benefits." An independent assessment would prove this assertion to be dramatically misstated.

5. Under "Background" paragraph five. TransLink helpfully suggests that "A new element of the Interurban proposal includes the potential use of hydrogen fuel cell trains, as being used in Germany for passenger service. This idea has not been evaluated." We suggest that this evaluation be fast tracked as this technology removes many impediments. Self-contained power eliminates the need to restore electrification of the line, which would be the major cost if new catenary and electrical power systems were required. With hydrogen they are not - nor does hydrogen pollute valley air.

6. Under "Discussion" first paragraph. TransLink states, that "the Interurban alignment is indirect and through lower density and diverse areas. Both directness and density are critical factors in the performance of a successful rapid transit corridor" while their own maps shown clearly indicate that the interurban line connects key jobs centers including Scot Road, Delta/Surrey, South Newton, Cloverdale, and more of Langley than the proposed Skytrain line, while again failing to place this comment in the context of the much larger ambitions of the interurban proposal.

7. Under topic: "Freight volumes are expected to increase along the Interurban corridor." TransLink makes much of the volume of freight traffic flowing through the so called "shared section" of the line, shared by Southern Rail and CP largely to the north of the City of Langley. As mentioned above TransLink seems unaware that CP is contractually obligated to pay the costs of double tracking this section should passenger use be impacted.

8. Under the topic: "Interurban requires substantial infrastructure investments comparable to building rapid transit along urban arterials." Much of what TransLink asserts must stem from confusion about the legal status of the line. The line is owned by the Province and available for use, for free, for passenger use immediately. Furthermore, apart from the "shared section" discussed above, the line is very lightly used and largely during off hours. Thus, any discussion of double tracking the line is wildly premature.

Conclusion: The detailed responses above are provided to clarify what appears to be a deep misunderstanding on the part of TransLink staff regarding the interurban proposal. However, this discussion may obscure the main point. The main public benefit of the proposal is not in how fast a few commuters might get from Langley center to downtown Vancouver, but rather in how we might lay the spine for a more sustainable South of Fraser region. This region is experiencing explosive job and population growth, partly or largely driven by the exorbitant cost of housing closer to Vancouver. This growth, now almost entirely car dependent in form, has led to region wide grid lock. This gridlock is particularly severe on Route 1, where travel times during rush hours have slowed to a crawl, and where idling cars foul the air of the entire valley floor. We are suggesting that, at very very low cost, essentially the cost of just a few vehicles, interurban service could be resumed and could restore the walkable transit-oriented structure that gave birth to the valley economy in the first place.