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## Rethinking Transportation in Metro Vancouver

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CANADA LINE

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BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (@jckr/TransBC)

The elevated guideway column stands near the south tunnel portal at the corner of Como Lake Avenue and Clarke Road in Coquitlam.

# Coquitlam's Evergreen Line

After lobbying and political efforts stretching back 25 years, Coquitlam is finally getting rapid transit. The long-awaited Evergreen Line will stretch 11 kilometres from the existing Lougheed Mall station in Burnaby (on the Millennium Line) to Coquitlam City Hall and Douglas College campus. Scheduled for completion by the summer of 2016, the line will finally connect Coquitlam's regional town centre with other centres in the region.

## THE LINE

The beginning of the Evergreen Line's route (or the ending, depending on your perspective) is on the shores of Lafarge Lake in Coquitlam's Town Centre Park. This former gravel pit has been transformed into a magnificent multi-use park, including world-class field-sport tournament facilities. Across the street is the David Lam campus of Douglas College and Coquitlam Centre Aquatic Complex, with City Hall, a police station, Evergreen Cultural Centre, and Glen Pine Seniors' Centre nearby.

*Richard Stewart*  
Mayor of Coquitlam

Richard Stewart was elected Coquitlam City Councillor in 2005, and Mayor in 2008. Prior to 2005, Richard served as MLA for Coquitlam-Maillardville, holding the Francophone Affairs portfolio, and chaired the Select Standing Committee on Education. Richard has also chaired the National Housing Economic Research Council in Ottawa, and has served as President of Canadian Home Builders' Association of BC, as President of School District 43 Parent Advisory Council, and as a member of the committee that writes the National Building Code of Canada in Ottawa. Richard's career has included a decade as publisher/editor of a housing trade magazine, and many years as a consultant in building technology and building codes, consumer housing issues, land use, government relations, and communications. Richard has lived all his life in Coquitlam and is bilingual (English and French). Richard and his wife Anna Rosa have been married for 30 years and have four children.



# CITY OF COQUITLAM - EVERGREEN LINE - Segments and Station Locations



Map provided by City of Coquitlam.

From the Lafarge Lake-Douglas Station, SkyTrain will head south on Pinetree to a new station on the northeast corner of Coquitlam Centre’s property, between Lincoln and Northern. This station actually wasn’t in the original plans for the line, though provision had been made for it as a potential future station. The line continues south to the Coquitlam Central Station, adjacent to the West Coast Express (WCE) Station and the large bus loop and Park-n-Ride at the corner of Barnet-Lougheed and Pinetree.

Heading west along the rail right-of-way from Coquitlam Central, the line has two stations in Port Moody, at Ioco Road and at the Port Moody WCE station. Then the line turns southwest to begin the climb up the steepest stretch of SkyTrain in the region. Because of the steep grades, the line will use a bored tunnel to make it from the Port Moody waterfront to the top of Clarke Hill.

The last station is at the Burquitlam Shopping Centre before the line travels down the middle of North Road to a new platform adjacent to the existing Lougheed Station. From there, Evergreen Line trains will continue along the Millennium Line to Vancouver.

This new line will be safe and reliable, and will be the last major building block of Coquitlam’s new City Centre. As the first SkyTrain stations designed around Faregates, the new stations will benefit from CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) strategies. I’m even hoping that we will end up with a retail or service component in the stations—a coffee shop, for example—that would add eyes and staffing during the evenings, further increasing the feeling of security.

## TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

One of the criticisms often leveled at the Millennium Line’s route through Burnaby and Vancouver is that in the 13 years since the line was completed, there is still little development around many of its stations. Canada Line rapid transit down Cambie to Richmond has also been criticized for the same reality. From a transportation planning point of view, an investment of about \$25 million for a SkyTrain station is considered wasted unless residential and/or commercial density is put around the station. That’s how the rest of the world does it—high-density nodes surrounding rapid transit stations.



BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (lickr/TransBC)

Lincoln Station, looking north.

We're doing that today all along the Evergreen Line. Both Coquitlam and Port Moody are determined to take full advantage of this \$1.4 billion project, and are making sure that our official community plans and other planning policies will help foster transit-oriented neighbourhoods that reduce dependence on the automobile.

In the next couple of decades, the population of Metro Vancouver will grow by a million people, largely through interprovincial and international migration. While constructing the housing needed to accommodate these new residents, we also need to limit urban sprawl and find a way to minimize any negative impact on livability by ensuring that public transit gets a higher mode share in the morning and afternoon commute. One of the key ways this is done in most other urban centres is to build high-density housing and jobs around transit stations, with lower parking requirements, to meet the goal of having more households use public transit instead of a second car. In Coquitlam we're already seeing this happen. Young families may not even own one car; they've bought a home near a transit station, and perhaps use car-share programs when they occasionally need an automobile.

That's the idea behind Coquitlam's new *Transit-Oriented Development Strategy*, aimed at achieving the City's neighbourhood development goals around SkyTrain stations and on other frequent transit corridors. Studies have shown that a household that lives within 400–800 metres (a 5- to 10-minute walk) of a SkyTrain station is significantly more likely to use transit daily, and even to forego the approximate \$5,000-a-year cost of the second family car.

Under transportation-oriented development, Coquitlam encourages the highest densities right near the stations, along with office and commercial development to support the neighbourhood. As well, new amenity charges (based on density) help fund a range of community amenities (recreation centres, parks) to ensure that these new transit-oriented neighbourhoods are complete communities.

Even though construction on the Evergreen Line has only just begun, much of the development around the stations is well underway. By opening day in 2016, there will be thousands of new housing and commercial units to ensure that the new line has passengers.

Serve or shape... That is the choice behind much of the transit debate in Metro Vancouver. The two approaches are distinctly different, and would result in very different regions a generation from now. We can design rapid transit to serve existing populations wherever they pop up, or we can let investments in rapid transit help shape our land use plans.

## LINCOLN STATION

The Lincoln Station has a unique history. When the commitment was made for SkyTrain to reach Coquitlam, the proposed line had six stations, with three additional “potential” stations on the plans. Though these stations weren’t scheduled to be built for opening day, the line would be designed with three straight and flat sections of track, in strategic locations, so that it would be feasible to add stations later, if justified.

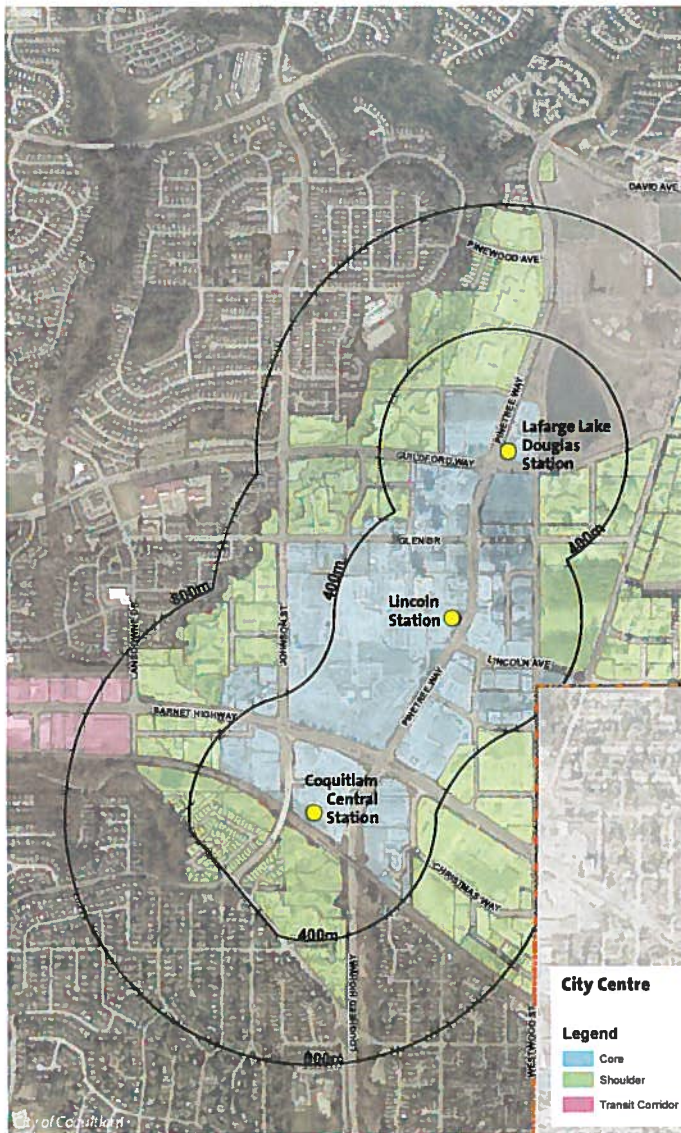
One of these “potential” stations was at Lincoln and Pinetree, right in the middle of Coquitlam’s City Centre. The City of Coquitlam wanted this station built, but we were told that because of the tight project budget we would have to “earn” the extra station (a euphemism for “pay for” the station). We knew that if we were successful in achieving a station at this location, it would result in millions of dollars in windfall profits for neighbouring landowners. So, working with local landowners, Coquitlam developed a program of community amenity charges (based on bonus density) that allows those landowners higher densities (since they would now be next to a station) and lower parking requirements, allowing them to contribute toward the station. In the end, the proposal was win-win for everyone; a federal P3 grant of \$7 million topped up our resources, and a new station was born.

## SERVE OR SHAPE

That is the choice behind much of the transit debate in Metro Vancouver. The two approaches are distinctly different, and would result in very different regions a generation from now. We can design rapid transit to serve existing populations wherever they pop up, or we can let investments in rapid transit help shape our land use plans.

When the original SkyTrain Expo Line opened in 1986, the route was somewhat logical. It connected existing centres of population and commercial cores. Similarly, subsequent investments in rapid transit typically served the existing population centres across the region, with stations located where people already lived and worked. Of course, if we design such massive infrastructure investments based on where people live now, we can end up with a transit system that crisscrosses the region trying to connect often illogically located population and job centres.

While a new transit system in an existing city should certainly serve the existing urban centres, there is a growing interest in having the region’s transportation system help shape growth in the region, particularly in the suburbs. Rather than having



Map of City Centre from the City of Coquitlam’s Transit-Oriented Development Strategy.

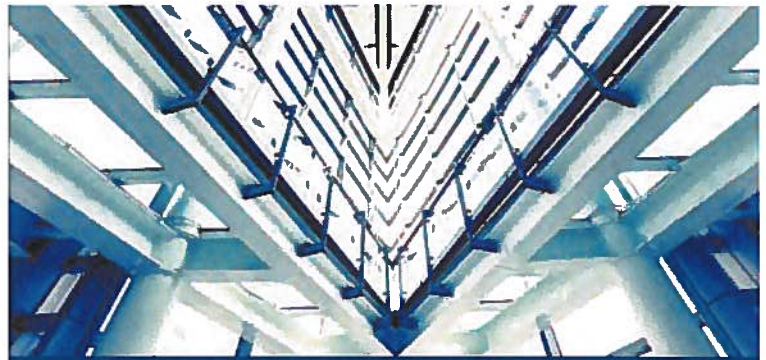


City of Coquitlam  
Tunnel being constructed under the Barnet Highway.

the rapid transit system react to land use planning decisions, let's make our land use plans and transit plans cooperatively.

When the original concept was developed for a rapid transit line to Coquitlam, it was based on the City's long-term plan to construct a high-density regional town centre. The planning and development of Coquitlam's City Centre has been underway for the past two decades, always in anticipation that SkyTrain would eventually be built.

So today we're building a new rapid transit line, an investment that will help shape our community—and our region—for generations to come. Coquitlam is right in the centre of Metro Vancouver, a real hub, with more transportation and goods movement corridors than any other city in the province. The long-awaited Evergreen Line leads to an even brighter future.



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