

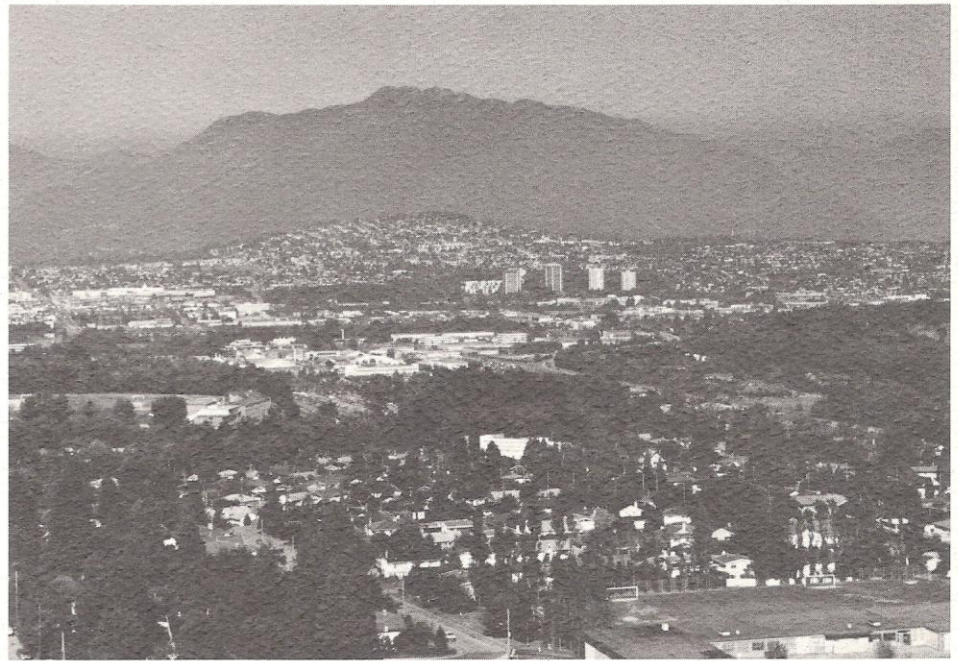
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Survey of Critical Public Issues

The Urban Futures Opinion Survey was designed to determine long-term trends in the relative importance of a number of community and regional issues. It was conducted in 1990 through personal interviews with 1300 randomly selected residents of Greater Vancouver. Respondents were asked to provide a rating on 54 different public issues based on a scale ranging from unimportant to critically important. The survey helps to identify areas of public concern where greater attention is required, as well as those areas where the public feels issues are being adequately handled. It also helps to identify what kinds of actions the public would support to address critical issues.

The survey was conducted by Tantalus Research under the direction of Dr. Walter Hardwick. Partially funded by the Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia, it replicates a similar 1973 study. Copies of "Greater Vancouver Urban Futures Opinion Survey 1990: Technical Report" may be purchased from GVRD Information Services, 432-6339.



Survey Reveals Support for More Action to Protect Greater Vancouver's Environment

Not only do Greater Vancouver residents feel that cleaning up pollution in the region is of major importance, almost 80% would be willing to pay more in taxes in order to ensure that the necessary changes take place — and soon.

That's one of the findings of the Greater Vancouver Regional District's Urban Futures Opinion Survey. The study was conducted to examine longer-term trends in public attitudes and to help inform the GVRD's "Creating Our Future" public consultation program. This process resulted in the GVRD Board adopting 54 actions to help create a more livable and healthier region.

Environmental issues are by far the most prominent in the survey. Of all the many concerns that residents expressed, the most important were in regard to the safe disposal of hazardous waste, cleaning up water and air pollution, recycling of our waste materials and preserving the natural environment. Significantly, these same issues ranked equally high in the last GVRD survey completed in 1973.

Other major issues include provision of health care services, crime, housing and future development, and regional transportation.

Respondents had mixed reactions about what Greater Vancouver's future holds and our ability to address issues. Twenty-eight percent of survey respondents felt that problems related to managing growth will only get worse in the next ten years. At the same time, 43% felt that on the whole the region's future will be better, with another 29% expressing no opinion on the question.

Overall, the recurring theme was the quality of life in the region — with concern about whether or not we can maintain that quality in the future. This Bulletin looks at some of the survey results.



Concern for a Healthy Environment Tops the List

Pollution control and preservation of open spaces and natural areas are the primary concerns of Greater Vancouver residents according to the Urban Futures Survey.

At the top of the list are the public health aspects of environmental protection — disposal of hazardous wastes, industrial air and water pollution. Protection of the environment in general as well as concern for the region's open spaces (preserving the natural environment, protecting the Fraser River estuary, and protecting agricultural land) are ranked next. Farther down the list are park lands and recreation (developing more public parks, improving regional recreation facilities). The responses indicate that residents are very concerned with the health aspects of environmental protection but are relatively happy with the progress being made on developing parks and recreational areas.

Environmental protection is an area where survey respondents would be

willing to pay more taxes or other charges in order to achieve results. This includes cleaning up water pollution (80% of respondents expressed a willingness) and air pollution (78%), conserving existing open spaces (67%), and protecting agricultural land (61%).

Overall the responses show that residents feel the natural environment is much of what makes Greater Vancouver special, contributing substantially to the region's livability and identity. A high quality, healthy natural environment is part of our heritage — residents value this and want it protected. The strength of this feeling is shown by the consistency of support for environmental protection expressed in both 1973 and 1990 surveys.

Survey Shows Long-term Change in Public Opinion

When the 1990 Urban Futures Opinion Survey is compared with results from the GVRD's last survey in 1973, some changes in public opinion stand out.

Comparison of results shows that individuals are much less trusting of government, public officials and experts today than they were in 1973. Apparently there is less trust in "the system's" ability to make the "right" decision.

A significant increase in concerns over health care may reflect an aging population and the strains from increasing demands upon the health care system as the region grows.

Lower Mainland residents still rank as primary concerns the issues of air and water pollution and preservation of the environment — just as they did in 1973. Transportation issues, crime and housing also remain important concerns.

Ranking of Issues

Based on Mean Scores

2.0 2.5 3.0 3.5 4.0 4.5



High Quality Social Environment a Clear Objective

Social issues ranked high among the concerns expressed in the Urban Futures Survey, with the provision of health care 6th, crime 9th and affordable housing 10th. The survey results show that next to a healthy and protected natural environment people are concerned about maintaining a high quality social environment.

The high ranking for health care reflects ongoing public concern about the ability of our present system to meet increasing demands. Fully 82% of the respondents felt that people were waiting too long for surgery. Concern about health care has increased significantly since the previous GVRD opinion survey in 1973, rising from 9th to 6th place.

Concern about crime was also in the top ten. The issue was particularly important to older survey respondents and residents of the developing communities south of the Fraser River.

Housing concerns are clustered just below the environment in the survey, including affordable housing, the difficulties that first time buyers experience, assistance to the homeless, increasing the housing supply and housing for the elderly. Eighty percent rated affordable housing very or critically important. Particular emphasis was placed on this issue by older respondents and those living in multiple family housing.

The impact of cultural diversity received little attention from the survey respondents, with overseas immigration ranking 39th in the list of concerns and minority groups 42nd. With nearly 30% of Greater Vancouver's population being foreign-born, the survey results suggest that relations between diverse cultures and races is not perceived as a problem.



Survey Reflects Land Supply Dilemma

The Urban Future Survey results highlight one of the clear dilemmas for the region's physical development – how to balance a growing population with a limited land supply and a public desire for low density living.

Greater Vancouver's land supply for new development is severely limited not only by physical features such as the mountains but also by a public desire to protect important agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas. Fully 72% of survey respondents ranked protecting agricultural land very or critically important; 60% gave a similar ranking to preserving undeveloped open space and open space between neighbourhoods.

At the same time, Greater Vancouver's population is growing and the region's future land supply is being rapidly consumed. Higher housing densities are one means of slowing the consumption rate. Only 31% of survey respondents, however, ranked higher housing densi-

ties important, and only 38% felt that future housing should be built at higher densities on existing developed land rather than open land. While people want to preserve existing open space, they appear to be very cautious about accepting higher densities in order to accomplish it.

Survey respondents were more certain about how commercial and office growth should be distributed within the region. Half considered channeling growth away from downtown Vancouver very or critically important. This issue was of particular concern to those living in the eastern suburban communities where more jobs closer to their homes would be an advantage.

Growth, Yes, But Not at Risk to Livability

Greater Vancouver's residents have long been ambivalent about growth. While few would turn back the clock, many are cautious about whether the benefits of a larger metropolitan area outweigh the costs.

About 58% of the survey respondents felt that stimulating the region's economy was very or critically important and that ways should simply be found to accommodate additional population, while about 30% disagreed and the remainder were neutral. When asked whether the size of Greater Vancouver's population should be limited even if it meant lower economic growth, views were more divided – 45% disagreed, 38% agreed and the remainder were neutral. Nearly 30% were in favour of a population limit for the Lower Mainland.

The survey responses reflect strong reservations about growth. They suggest that while the region's economic strength is important, residents are not willing to forego a livable region for plentiful jobs. Overall, they will accept growth, yes, but not at the risk of Greater Vancouver's quality of life.



Priorities Place Transit Before Roads

Greater Vancouver's growth in recent years has strained the region's transportation systems, and response to the Urban Futures Opinion Survey indicates that the public is keenly aware of the problems and issues involved. In general, mobility issues ranked lower than environmental, health and housing concerns. However, in areas where congestion is particularly severe such as the North East Sector communities of Coquitlam and Maple Ridge, they ranked second to environmental concerns. Overall, 43% said it took them longer to get to work than a year previous.

Improvement to the bus system was by far the most attractive transportation option to the survey respondents (65% thought this action was very or critically important). More than half the survey respondents gave a similar weighting to extensions of SkyTrain to Coquitlam (57%) and Richmond (51%) and to more special lanes for express buses (52%).

Improvements for automobile commuting ranked lower than transit. About 40% of respondents considered

improved road access to downtown Vancouver very or critically important. A higher percentage (50%), however, felt there should be action to improve highways between suburbs, possibly reflecting the recent growth in cross-regional commuting and the limited facilities. Not surprisingly, residents of developing suburbs were much more concerned about highway improvements than central city residents.

The preference for transit over roads is reflected in survey respondent's will-

ingness to pay for improvements. About 70% would pay more for bus improvements and 64% for SkyTrain, but only 48% for highway facilities. However, virtually all suggested methods of taxation were rejected. General taxation methods such as property or income taxes were strongly rejected with more favour given to methods that are targeted and based upon user-pay such as gasoline taxes, auto licensing fees and transit fares.

Pricing policies for roadway space and parking are increasingly being used in metropolitan areas to manage automobile commuting. Only 26% of the survey respondents, however, agreed that rush hour commuters should pay more for highway use at peak times. At the same time, 42% felt the cost of using an automobile in downtown Vancouver should be increased and fully 80% think that individuals who arrange for multiple-occupant automobile commuting (i.e., carpooling) are entitled to some sort of reward for their rush hour efforts.

A concern relating both to the environment and mobility is air pollution from automobiles — about 80% of the Lower Mainland's air pollution can be traced to vehicles. While survey respondents strongly expressed a willingness to pay more to clean up air pollution, they were divided on whether to pay higher fees, tolls or taxes in order to reduce pollution from cars. This suggests that reducing automobile air pollution may have to be accomplished largely through methods other than economic penalties. Encouraging greater use of public transportation facilities, supporting carpooling and providing more opportunities for people to live and work closer together are options.

"Creating Our Future" — Responding to the Concerns

The Urban Futures Study was undertaken to help guide the GVRD's "Creating Our Future" process undertaken in 1990. The 54 actions adopted by the GVRD Board as a result of this process directly reflect the concerns expressed in the survey, as well those stated in public meetings and in briefs submitted by interest groups and individuals.

Some of the actions are:

Maintaining a healthy environment

- Continue to develop and implement the Drinking Water Quality Improvement Program.
- Expedite and fast-track the Liquid Waste Management Plan's capital projects.
- Continue to implement the Solid Waste Management Plan which gives priority to waste reduction and recycling to reduce the need for disposal by incineration and landfill.
- Continue to develop and implement the Greater Vancouver Air Management Plan with the objective of reducing by 50 percent total emissions of sulphur and nitrogen oxides, particulates, carbon monoxide and volatile organic compounds by the year 2000.
- Develop a regional air quality and transportation strategy that reverses transportation priorities so decisions are made to favour walking, cycling, public transit, goods movement and then the automobile.
- Increase the number of bicycle commuters by 1995 through promoting a regional cycling network.

Conserving our land resource

- Establish with municipalities an Urban Containment Policy that identifies Greater Vancouver's "Green Line" beyond which urban development will not be allowed and that defines the region's "Green Zone".
- Support the preservation of farming as a regional objective.
- Develop and implement a Regional Open Space Planning and Nature Conservancy Program including wildlife sanctuaries in conjunction with municipalities and the Province.
- Establish with municipalities a renewed concept of regional town centres and regional cities.
- Pursue an improved jobs and labour force balance throughout the region through encouraging the City of Vancouver to further heighten emphasis on residential develop-

ment and reduce commercial development and through marketing appropriate employment locations such as regional town centres.

- Sustain and develop a cooperative transportation planning process with the provincial government and its agencies based upon the GVRD Board's approved policies to:
 - Make the best use of existing transportation investment.
 - Support improvements to the public transit system and programs.
 - Improve the capacity of the roadway system giving appropriate weight to the following factors: use by transit, goods movement, continuity, safety, community and environmental effects, high-occupancy private vehicles.
 - Manage demands on the transportation system through acting as a catalyst for carpooling and encouraging people to work close to where they live and live close to where they work.
 - Pursue funding, policy and institutional arrangements that support coordinated planning, development and improvement of the region's transportation system.
 - Pursue development of bicycle and pedestrian networks as part of the region's transportation system.
- Work with municipalities and the development industry to create new forms of development that combine a mixture of residential and commercial uses, provide a variety of housing types, tenures and costs, and place greater reliance on walking, cycling and public transit.

Serving a changing population

- Increase the GVRD's ability to undertake regional social policy research, intermunicipal policy coordination and advocacy with senior levels of government in such areas as affordable housing, race relations, poverty, family services, disability issues and services for the aging.
- Establish a special experimental program that brings together municipalities in the development of a child care initiative.
- Strengthen and pursue the Regional Health Planning Program in conjunction with the provincial government, health agencies and community interest groups.
- Work with municipalities and the provincial government to ensure an equitable distribution of services throughout Greater Vancouver.
- Continue efforts to improve police services throughout the region as a means of securing the safety of residents.

- Encourage municipalities to support the development of affordable and locationally balanced housing through ensuring an adequate land supply, planning for a mix of income ranges, secondary suites and new housing forms and supporting the delivery of social housing.

Maintaining the region's economic health

- Help to create a supportive climate for economic change and growth with particular attention to transportation, tourism, and export-oriented business services and technology-based manufactured products.
- Encourage a distribution of economic growth that supports Livable Region objectives.
- Initiate a dialogue with the provincial government on ways of sharing growth with other parts of British Columbia.

Managing our region

- Undertake, in consultation with municipalities and the provincial government, a review of the need for renewed GVRD regional land use, transportation and social development mandates.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive public communications program to provide information on regional change and choices and on how individuals can contribute to achieving Livable Region objectives through such actions as controlling solid waste, water conservation and protection, and transportation choice.
- Develop and implement a capital expenditure and debt management plan which provides a framework for investment to respond to the region's environmental, social, and physical needs, to maintain the fiscal integrity of the region's communities, and to secure equitable cost-sharing arrangements with other levels of government.

A full report on the 54 actions — "Creating Our Future: Steps to a More Livable Future" — can be obtained from GVRD Information Services, 432-6339.