

A glimpse into Metro Vancouver's future

There'll be a million more people, and Surrey's population will rival Vancouver's

Kelly Sinoski, Vancouver Sun

Published: Tuesday, October 07, 2008

[Read the growth strategy report](#)

Metro Vancouver is expected to be home to 3.4 million people in the next 30 years, with a third of those new residents expected to live in Surrey and White Rock - bringing that area's population to roughly the same size as Vancouver's by 2040.

One million people are predicted to land in Metro Vancouver in the next three decades, their arrival driven largely in part by immigration. Of those, about one in three, or 332,000 people, will make Surrey and White Rock home, bringing that area's total population to 766,000.

Vancouver will welcome another 149,000 people, lifting its population to 767,000 while Burnaby and New Westminster will see 177,000 new residents and the Tri-Cities 169,000, according to Metro Vancouver's draft regional growth strategy for 2006-2040.

The strategy, which acts as a blueprint for growth and land use planning across the region, could change the face of the region if its recommendations around increasing industrial land and protecting greenbelts are approved by municipalities next year.

"When you're trying to imagine what the region needs by 2040 and still keep it spectacular and working efficiently it's a tall order," said Christine DeMarco, Metro Vancouver's division manager for regional development.

"How do we ensure we have enough land to sustain an increase of a million people?"

The strategy - the fifth to be released since the 1960s for the region - is designed to "promote human settlement that is socially, economically and environmentally healthy." It requires the support of TransLink and 20 municipalities before it can be approved.

It has similar challenges to its predecessors in that it calls for urban centres and the protection of agricultural land.

But unlike in 1996, when amassing of industrial land was considered a "thing of the past," the 2006-2040 strategy focuses on preserving more large tracts of industrial land for manufacturing and processing to

ensure the region's economic needs are met, DeMarco said.

About 1,200 hectares of industrial land has been swallowed up or rezoned into non-industrial uses during the past 10 years as a result of the heated residential property market and the demand for retail properties.

DeMarco noted the issue is likely to be contentious and is an area "where we're having a lot of debate."

DeMarco said it's not known yet whether individual municipalities will be able to decide which land to set aside for industry or whether it should be a regional-wide approach. The region expects to add 600,000 jobs and 550,000 new homes in the next 30 years.

"How do we ensure we have enough industrial land for 2040?" she said. "How do you accommodate one million people, 600,000 jobs and over 500,000 houses and keep this place a great place to live and do business?"

In its strategy, Metro Vancouver is calling for more business parks that are well connected to the region's transportation system to ensure "the region remains an attractive place to do business."

The industrial parks fall in line with Metro Vancouver's plans to develop more "urban centres" as the focus for office, retail, community, culture and higher density housing to keep people living and working closer to home or along the transit corridors.

The region currently has seven urban centres, but Metro wants to add Surrey Metro Centre to the list to highlight the booming growth in the area and the importance of developing a second downtown south of the Fraser River in the Whalley neighbourhood.

DeMarco noted the Simon Fraser University campus in Surrey and the city's plans to move its city hall offices to Whalley are encouraging signs that a vibrant city centre can be developed by 2040.

"Surrey Metro Centre is distinguished from the rest to put emphasis on the growth needed in that centre," DeMarco said.

Surrey Mayor Diane Watts agreed the strategy is in line with her city's livable region plan. The city has a policy in place restricting the conversion of industrial land into residential to ensure there are jobs locally. It is also focused on developing Whalley into a cultural and vibrant city centre with a museum, library and a performing arts centre next to several highrise developments.

"We recognize that we're the next metropolitan core in the region," Watts said. "[The strategy] supports us in what we're doing right now."

The strategy is also proposing at least seven more municipal centres in rapidly growing areas such as Langley Township's Walnut Grove and Willoughby neighbourhoods and Surrey's Fleetwood and Newton areas to allow people to walk to the shops or other activities within the cities.

Vancouver's Oakridge neighbourhood is also a contender because of its location near the new Canada Line, DeMarco said.

The aim of the urban and municipal centres is to reduce the use of cars and the rising levels of greenhouse gases, which the province has promised to cut by 33 per cent by 2020, DeMarco said. Transportation is responsible for 40 per cent of greenhouse gases in Metro Vancouver.

DeMarco noted the 2006 census results found that more than 50 per cent of those who lived in Burnaby's Metrotown walked or took transit to work. Of those who worked in the area, more than 40 per cent used transit.

"That's means a big shift of how we're getting around in the region," DeMarco said. "They have to have choice and be able to walk to shops."

If recent trends continue, Langley Township and Langley City are expected to see their population grow by 127,000. This is more than Richmond/Delta, which will see another 117,000 people, Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows with 68,000 and North Vancouver, West Vancouver, Lions Bay and Bowen Island, which is predicted to lure another 53,000 people to their communities.

The strategy recognized that Metro Vancouver's aging population will be significantly higher in the next three decades, with higher proportion of people over 65. The challenge is to ensure the continuation of strong inclusive communities with access to community, health, recreation an cultural facilities.

The draft strategy notes that it will also have to look at more inter-regional transportation linkages to meet the needs of people who are moving to Squamish, Whistler, the Sunshine Coast and the Fraser Valley because of the high housing and commercial costs in Metro Vancouver.

But while the push is on to find and secure more industrial land and develop urban areas, Metro Vancouver is also taking pains to curb any development sprawl from spreading outward into rural areas.

It's calling for large rural acreages, 60,000 hectares of agricultural land reserve and recreational areas to remain relatively untouched and protected as part of the region's "green zone," which will encompass nearly 21,000 hectares.

This will include everything from Boundary Bay and Burrard Inlet to the region's forests and "pocket parks" and trees in urban areas, wildlife sanctuaries and greenways that span municipal boundaries.

The strategy also recommends keeping rural properties of two hectares or more for low-density residential and suggests agricultural land be used to feed the region.

It states the region's natural assets are "under threat" from the impact of urban development, pollution and climate change" and must be protected. It recommends agricultural land be protected to encourage the active farming for food production.

"The heightened importance of producing fresh regionally grown food to meet environmental, health and security objectives is reinforcing the need to protect the region's rich agricultural land," the strategy states.

The strategy, which will go to the Metro Vancouver board this Friday, requires support of all the municipalities as well as TransLink before it can be approved.

ksinoski@vancouver.sun.com