

CLEANBC ROADMAP 2030: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PLANNERS?

/ Eric Doherty RPP, MCIP



THE BC GOVERNMENT'S October 2021 climate plan update included an ambitious new transportation target with big implication for planners. The *CleanBC Roadmap 2030* calls for reducing “distances travelled in light-duty vehicles by 25% by 2030, compared to 2020.” Less automobile travel is now the goal and not just fewer fossil fuel powered cars. Reducing distances

traveled and shifting travel to transit and active transportation is now at the top of the priority list.

This is a drastic change. Governments have been planning to accommodate more and more cars for over a century. But planners have also been preparing for big changes. The Canadian Institute of Planners' (CIP) 2018 *Policy on Climate*

Change Planning asserts that responding to the climate crisis “requires immediate and committed action [and] requires a drastic shift in the way our communities are built and function.” Crucially, this Policy also establishes that planners have a professional obligation to “advance policies and regulations” to meet governmental climate targets. The CIP *Model Standard of*

When you subtract space for cars, traffic evaporates.



Practice for Climate Change Planning goes a step further and asserts that “planners must play a leadership role in enabling a climate-neutral society.”

The *CleanBC Roadmap 2030* does not have much of a description for how the Province plans to reduce traffic by an average of over 2.5% every year between now and 2030; BC’s new *Clean Transportation*

Action Plan is not due until 2023. Many people, not just planners, will have to decide to take immediate and committed action to meet the target, or adopt a wait-and-see approach which has been the norm in the past.

The Municipal Role – Traffic Evaporation

The evidence for how traffic is increased through infrastructure – known as *induced* traffic – is well accepted. If you expand roads, highways, and parking lots you get more people in cars. Less well understood is that congestion is self-limiting – if congested highways and roads are left as-is, traffic volumes will stay close to where they are. However, the *CleanBC* target is for steeply reduced traffic and not just the unsustainable and unpleasant status quo.

Planning for induced traffic can also work in reverse – when you subtract road space for cars, traffic evaporates. The extensive evidence for traffic evaporation was summarized in the *Municipal Engineer* paper “Disappearing Traffic: The story so far” (2002). The article states that when “reallocating road space from general traffic, to improve conditions for pedestrians or cyclists or buses... significant reductions in overall traffic levels can occur.” In fact, large reductions in traffic levels are normal with road space reallocation projects.

In the past two decades, road space reallocation for transit lanes, protected bike and roll lanes, pedestrian priority streets, and wider sidewalks has become a widely accepted part of climate action in larger cities like Paris, Seoul, and Bogotá. Despite this, Dario Hidalgo, a Bogotá based civil engineer, notes that, “While traffic evaporation has been well-documented for

more than 20 years, most decision- and opinion-makers are still under the impression that reducing car lanes will make traffic worse.”

Ignorance of traffic evaporation is still commonplace. However, things are changing fast. In Paris, which was once choked with cars, traffic is down about 45% since 2001 with their adoption of reallocating road space. Vancouver’s *2020 Climate Emergency Action Plan* calls for reallocating at least 11 percent of road space to “walking, cycling and transit [to] greatly reduce dependence on fossil fuels through a reduction in vehicle ownership and kilometres travelled by vehicle.” To meet the 2030 provincial traffic reduction target, most BC municipalities will need to adopt similar goals and act on them immediately.

The provincial government had dozens of highway expansion projects planned when the *CleanBC Roadmap* was released, ranging from modest projects like the Keating Flyover in Greater Victoria to the four-billion-dollar plan to replace the four lane Massey Tunnel with a new eight lane tunnel. Immediately reallocating these funds to public transit, walking, rolling, and cycling would go a long way to meeting many sustainable transportation objectives.

In the summer of 2021, the Capital Regional District unanimously approved a policy calling on the provincial and federal governments to reallocate funding from highway expansion to alternative transportation routes in Greater Victoria. If other regions follow suit, it will be much easier for the provincial government to overcome the inevitable opposition to fully implementing their new climate *Roadmap*.

The CIP *Policy on Climate Change Planning* asserts that planners have an obligation to “champion climate change solutions that counteract, rather than exacerbate, impacts on vulnerable groups and under-resourced areas.” BC’s climate *Roadmap* notes that Indigenous peoples are calling for improving public transportation in BC’s rural areas.

To meet BC’s ambitious traffic reduction target, and meet the needs of rural and Indigenous communities, a public bus network will have to be better and more affordable than Greyhound ever was. One option would be to expand and improve BC Transit’s modest BC Bus North network. Frequent and affordable bus and passenger rail service between communities would also make life more affordable and safer for people across BC. People in rural areas and small town spend a lot of money on long drives, and crashes on snowy highways are a serious threat.

Reallocating road space can make life better for vulnerable groups. Owning cars is a financial burden for lower income families, and improved public transit, walking, cycling, and rolling options in urban and suburban areas would relieve this pressure. The City of Victoria recently took steps to legalize the use of wheelchairs and mobility scooters on ‘all ages and abilities’ bike and roll routes, welcoming seniors and people with disabilities to access pleasant and affordable low-carbon transportation.

The devastating wildfires and floods of 2021 show why planners must take their professional obligation to “advance policies and regulations” to meet provincial climate targets seriously. Reducing traffic 25% by 2030 is the kind of drastic action needed, and planners have a duty to lead. ■

Eric Doherty is Principal of Ecopath Planning on Lekwungen Territory in Victoria, BC. He can be reached at eric@ecoplanning.ca

¹ Traffic Evaporation: What Really Happens When Road Space is Reallocated from Cars? (2021) thecityfix.com/blog/traffic-evaporation-what-really-happens-when-road-space-is-reallocated-from-cars/

Not getting enough survey responses?

Book a complimentary review

Surveys.TheWGroup.ca/Discover

Surveys by

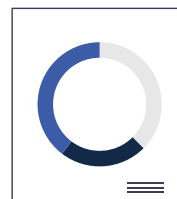
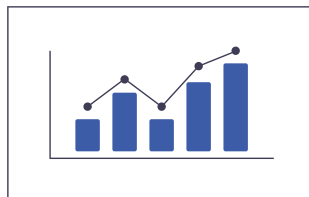


Your Municipal Survey Experts

Get the most out of your survey results.

Book a complimentary review

Surveys.TheWGroup.ca/Discover



Surveys by



Your Municipal Survey Experts