

# Airport interchange should be a priority

Long-delayed improvements to the gateway to the capital are badly needed

BY GORDON DENFORD

The editorial "Smarter decisions needed on roads," Feb. 16, questioned the priority of the McTavish Road interchange overpass on the Patricia Bay Highway, and called for a regional transportation strategy before taking action.

The Pat Bay Highway is the key multi-modal route between Greater Victoria and the mainland. It links Victoria International Airport, B.C. Ferries and Washington State Ferries to our community.

It brings political and business leaders, families, friends, visitors, an overwhelming majority of tourists and most of the goods and materials we rely on every day. Pat Bay is the gateway to our capital city, our region and southern Vancouver Island.

Badly needed interchanges on the Pat Bay Highway have been recognized and studied for more than 20 years. In fact, the provincial government proposed their construction in 1988 and again in 1994 which, had they been built then, would have cost the taxpayers considerably less than today.

Furthermore, the Pat Bay would have become a safer and far less congested highway at peak periods. However, local politics and parochial thinking of the day created obstacles that gave the province reason to postpone their inevitable construction.

The Victoria Airport Authority's proposal seems to have generated a reaction that is focused not on the need or the number of interchanges, but rather who gets theirs first.

The airport authority board believes Greater Victoria deserves better. Our community has an important role to play welcoming visitors to British Columbia in 2010. The McTavish Road intersection has been put forward for provincial funding because it is the best candidate for action.

The existing situation is restrictive, dangerous and frustrating for people travelling to and from what has become a world-class airport.

Other intersections, although just as important to our gateway highway from a congestion and safety perspective, are more complex, involve much acquisition of private land, are more costly and do not offer the same oppor-

tunities for partnerships.

What distinguishes the McTavish Road intersection from all the others is:

- The \$11 million-12 million cost is considerably less expensive:

- The province has title to all of the required land;

- North Saanich council has offered to consider the rezoning of surplus provincial land created by the project to enable the province to recover some of the capital cost;

- The Victoria Airport Authority has offered to participate in a partnership with the provincial government.

It has solid community support and can be completed well before 2010.

If we are to achieve the stated goal of the province to double tourism revenue in the next few years, now is the time for action.

The construction of the McTavish overpass will not solve all of the problems of the gateway highway, but it is infinitely better than doing nothing and much better than another decade of studies.

*Gordon Denford is chairman of the Victoria Airport Authority.*



Travellers mingle in the rotunda area of Victoria International Airport. Victoria Airport Authority chairman Gordon Denford suggests proposed improvements to the McTavish Road intersection that provides access to the airport are long overdue.

*Debra Brash Times Colonist*