

Over the Back Fence  
For Friday January 25, 2008  
Approx 640 words

The buck stops...  
By Alva Wood

One benefit of living in the boondocks is that you don't have to duck every time a politician throws money at a problem. You know that none of it will come your way.

When B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell and Transport Minister Kevin Falcon unveiled their new \$14-billion plan to build new rapid-transit lines and bus routes and highways earlier this month, mayor Jake Bowers listened intently to see if any of that money was likely to reach us.

Not a penny, it seems.

Most of it is going into the Lower Mainland or Victoria, where it's already possible to ride a bus or a transit line almost anywhere. The rest will go into rebuilding the TransCanada Highway through the Kicking Horse canyon, so that the transport trucks that go off the road and close the highway for hours can be going faster when they do it.

River City might get a couple of the "1,500 new, clean energy buses" that the Transport Minister promised for communities around the province. Which might let them divert one more particulate-belching oil-dripping gas-guzzling nausea-inducing older bus onto the route for our village.

There was an impromptu town meeting in Erma's Bakery and Coffee Shop the afternoon that the dynamic duo from Victoria made their announcement.

"Fourteen billion?" says administrator Henry Hill

"Yes, but they're only putting in \$4.75 billion," says Jake. "The rest comes from the federal government."

"And local governments," adds former mayor Bull Durham.

"Oh, good," says Nellie Rinehart. "That means my taxes will only go up half as much as I was afraid they would."

"One third," corrects mayor Jake Bowers. "We're not putting anything into it."

"Just as well," says Manfred Czarnecki. "We not getting anything out of it either."

"We never get anything any time," growls Sam Burkholder.

Erma refills everyone's coffee cups.

"Biggest mistake the government ever made was letting the CPR rip up the rails on the old KVR," says Bull. "We coulda had a rapid transit line down to River City."

"The KVR was never rapid," says Ollie Armitage, who's old enough to remember travelling on it.

Erma brings another plate of donuts.

"It's supposed to save 4.7 million tonnes of GreenHouseGases," says Hector Wentz.

"How much is a tonne?" Sam wants to know.

"A little more than a ton," explains Hector.

"About one return trip to Vancouver in Dunc's truck," says Nellie.

Ray Hiebert does some rapid mathematics on a paper napkin. "At about 80 litres each way," he says, "that's 160 litres, which would be about 40 gallons, which would be about 200 pounds..." He looks up from his calculations. "Dunc would have to make ten trips to Vancouver to pump out a ton of emissions."

"But," says his wife Cynthia, "they're only talking about saving that much by 2020. That's still 12 years away. How many trips is Dunc going to make between now and then?"

"And there's trips to the Olympics too, eh?" says Bull.

"Y'know," says Terry Brown thoughtfully, "maybe, if we could help the premier achieve his goals, he might throw a small reward our way."

Everyone looked puzzled.

"Well, what I'm thinking," says Terry, "is that if he bought Dunc a Toyota Prius, that would be almost 20 tons less right there. It would be a lot cheaper than one of those hybrid buses we won't see anyway."

"Give him a call," suggests Jim Smith. "See what he says."

Terry goes to the pay phone in the corner. He punches in the government's 1-800 number.

He waits. And waits. Everyone but Jake drains their coffee and leaves. An hour later, Terry comes back to the table.

“What did the premier say?” Jake asks, staring into his empty cup.  
“Dunno,” says Terry. “They put me on permanent hold.”  
“Same thing happens to me,” says Jake sadly. “Every time.”