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SFPR won't be tolled

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The head of the B.C. Trucking Association is pleased the new South Fraser Perimeter Road won't be tolled.

"The goal is to get trucks off the community's streets and roads and an untolled South Fraser Perimeter Road will do that," said association president and CEO Paul Landry.

The government has pledged to build new partnerships with the private sector and methods to help finance B.C.'s transportation infrastructure, which includes generating revenues from tolls.

However, unlike other new transportation infrastructure to be built, such as the twinned Port Mann Bridge and new Pattullo Bridge that will require drivers to pay tolls, the SFPR won't be tolled.

According to Ministry of Transportation policy, tolls will be implemented only if "a reasonable untolled alternative is available."

A spokesperson for the ministry said the goal of the SFPR is to divert truck traffic, therefore, it would defeat the purpose of building the new road if truckers elected not to use it because they had to pay.

Landry said the government correctly recognized the traffic volumes that will be generated on the new highway don't justify adding tolls.

"I think probably to a degree the fact that it's not tolled will help keep trucks out of neighbourhoods. Let's keep the trucks on the road that's being developed for them," he said.

Landry said the SFPR will absorb much of the truck traffic that's now on River Road and the fact there won't be a toll will encourage trucks to stay off River Road. As far as Highway 17, Landry said there will still be big rigs heading to and from the Tsawwassen ferry terminal.

Part of the Gateway program, the SFPR will be a 40-kilometre, four-lane route along the south side of the Fraser River. It will extend from Deltaport Way to 176th Street (Highway 15) in Surrey, with connections to highways 1, 91 and 99 and to TransLink's Golden Ears Bridge connector, which is under construction.

The transportation ministry points out there's currently no east-west transportation corridor to serve the port facilities, industrial sites and commuters on the south side of the Fraser River.

Landry said container traffic is expected to grow dramatically in the next few years, so the SFPR will be valuable infrastructure that will meet the needs of the economy. He said while it's important to recognize the need to improve the movement of people, improved goods movement also has to continue.

"The emphasis here is on commercial goods. It's going to provide connectivity between Deltaport and major industrial areas in the Lower Mainland, connectivity with the Trans-Canada Highway, connectivity with Highway 15 to the U.S. and, of course, it's going to provide connectivity among those businesses that are along the route."

The provincial government announced late last month the SFPR has received an environmental assessment certificate.

Not long afterward, the Ministry of Transportation issued a request for qualifications to identify proponents capable of designing, building, financing, operating and maintaining the new road.

The ministry says construction is to begin in 2009 with completion in 2012.

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