

# Killing RAV was not a smart move

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## CITY VISION

**K**illing RAV was another nail in the coffin of smart growth in the Lower Mainland.

Good urban planning, affordable housing and smart growth are all concepts that seem to have been lost in the decision by the TransLink board to halt work on the RAV line.

Residents living along the Cambie corridor celebrated as though Translink's decision was their victory. In fact, they are huge losers.

Instead of welcoming the prospect of more compact neighbourhoods with a range of housing choices, local services and the ability to walk safely to meet most of their daily needs, they're going to continue coping with the noise and pollution that comes with living along a busy regional arterial street already congested during rush hour. They will have no relief from their own struggle entering the stream of traffic with their own cars to go fetch a loaf of bread.

Whether you agree or not the RAV project should have been a priority among a number of long overdue urban infrastructure projects, the fact is that RAV was one vital urban planning tool that all levels of government had committed to fund when government funding commitments for such projects are few and far between.

More importantly, the RAV project was one of the first few pieces of a modern public transit network that needs to be built in the Lower Mainland. Casting it aside when only a few other pieces of the network are yet in place is like throwing away a finely turned piece of wood and then wanting to sit on the stool to catch your breath and think about things when that stool only has one leg.

We need to build a fully integrated public transit system that is made up of many parts, a mix of technologies, transit modes and geographic connections if we are going to preserve our quality of life in

the Lower Mainland.

Why? The answer lies in density. Higher density mixed-use developments strategically served by public transit connections are the key to promoting more affordable housing options and healthier urban lifestyles.

Transit-oriented development is smart growth. It creates convenient neighbourhoods with higher density to increase the number of nearby destinations. These neighbourhoods can include restaurants, shops, offices, entertainment outlets and other services to support daily living. Housing can be located closer to job centres. Safe, attractive and convenient pedestrian connections can radiate out from transit stations. Imagine the kind of density that clings to the commercial core of Oakridge Centre radiating a few blocks in either direction of a new transit station at 41st and Oak Street. Aligning a rapid transit line along the Cambie corridor would provide numerous opportunities to develop these kinds of quality urban developments in various parts of the city.

One such site is at 37th and Heather, where the existing offices are soon to be vacated by the RCMP when the national police force builds a new B.C. regional headquarters in the Fraser Valley.

Another is that stretch of older apartment buildings along Cambie between King Edward and 18th Avenue, where newer higher density affordable housing would flourish along a rapid transit line.

In Richmond, RAV would have been an even more powerful tool for suburban renewal. Like it or not, Richmond city centre is an urban centre that doesn't yet look like a downtown. Richmond's main street, No. 3 Road, still looks too much like Kingsway and countless other suburban strips.

The RAV project would have fixed that. With an at-grade rail transit system down No. 3 Road, Richmond's downtown could have been one of North America's model suburban renewal projects, especially with its tremendous cultural diversity so evident in trade and commerce locally.

Projects like the RAV line, with four funding partners and eight proponent agencies, are difficult projects to get through even the early planning stage. When parochial politics gets in the way of good urban planning and kills a project like this that has progressed to the bid stage, the entire region suffers.

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