

# Be proud of the way we've managed growth



**BOB RANSFORD**  
VANCOUVER SUN

## CITY VISION

The other day I met a couple in downtown Vancouver who were visiting from England. This was a return trip for them; they were last here in 1980. "Vancouver has really come of age," they remarked on the city's transformation.

A friend related a similar story the other day. He is hosting friends from Montreal who haven't been in Vancouver for

more than a decade. His visitors were simply awestruck by the housing options and the diversity that exists in almost every neighbourhood. They commented repeatedly on how livable our city has become.

From Coal Harbour to the Steveston waterfront, from Lonsdale Quay to the Tsawwassen town centre, growth has exploded, neighbourhoods have been transformed and for the most part quality of life has been enhanced.

We certainly haven't achieved perfection, but we've managed growth a lot better than many other North American cities.

The Greater Vancouver population has grown almost 70 per cent over the last two decades, with almost one million new people showing up in those 20 years. We've accommodated that kind of growth without a lot of the consequences one normally associates with growth.

The biggest demographic influence of this growth has been the increase in ethnic diversity, yet we have accommodated that diversity without ethnic ghettos. In fact, the diversity has created a cultural and social fabric that is a true tapestry.

Suburban sprawl plagues most of our suburbs, as the single family home on a large lot is still the ultimate "dream home." Yet the realities of land prices and a dwindling land supply have forced a densification of some of our suburbs. That transformation has occurred at a point in the evolution of those suburbs much earlier than in most cities.

Just compare Richmond's more livable city centre today to the same sea of shopping centres and single family lots that dominated it two decades ago. Look at the successful urban-scale infill developments that have brought people to the town centre of Tsawwassen

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or Port Moody's higher density new town centre, known as Newport Village. Owning a condominium home is now a goal instead of an alternative.

While we struggle to cope with growing traffic congestion and the kind of parochial politics that is inhibiting the development of an integrated and effective public transit system, we are still leaps

and bounds ahead of many.

Congestion in the Lower Mainland doesn't even compare with cities like Seattle and Los Angeles. While the process to approve the next stage — RAV — in a region-wide rail transit system has been frustrating, we have to remember that we have had a fixed rail transit system operating for nearly 20 years, when places like Seattle are struggling to get their first project working.

We don't have a huge freeway bisecting or even looping around our downtown. Instead, we have people who live and work and play downtown. They live in high rise towers, ground-oriented townhouses, on board float homes and in loft housing in converted warehouses. We have two major universities, at least one community college and a fine arts college all with downtown campuses.

Stroll along one of Vancouver's stunning harbour-side seawalls on

any given day and you'll see recreational sailors navigating everything from a surfboard to a sailing sloop. You'll see the world's most luxurious yachts alongside some of the most rugged workboats on any coast. You'll see huge freighters unloading container cargo from around the world. You'll watch seaplanes, tour boats, water shuttles, sea buses and helicopters maneuver for position. Just across the water, you'll see majestic mountains carpeted with forests.

We've changed a lot in the last 20 years, but it sure looks like we've managed change pretty well.

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