

*FEBRUARY 2, 2016*

# A REGION AT A CROSSROADS

A research challenge

Open to SFU Urban Studies and Master of Planning students

## Where we are

Vancouver (and, as a matter of required consistency, each municipal plan), including the Lower Mainland Regional Plan (1966), the Livable Region Proposals (1975), Creating our Future (1990) the Livable Region Strategic Plan (1996) and Metro Vancouver 2040: Shaping our Future (which is due for a five-year review and update in 2016).

The principles for planning and shaping the region in these documents can be summarized as follows :

Growth will be accommodated within the existing built-up urban areas and in complete communities that provide opportunities for living, working and playing without the need to travel long distances on a daily basis

Higher density residential, commercial and institutional development will be concentrated in regional and municipal centres

Metro Vancouver will have an automobile-restrained, transit-focused transportation system that offers enhanced transportation choices

Metro Vancouver will continue to have a Green Zone comprising lands that have a better use than urbanization as part of a working landscape of agricultural areas, forests, watersheds, wetlands and regional open space

Metro Vancouver will have a sustainable future in which the needs of the current generation will be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet social, economic and environmental needs

There has been a h

As widely supported as the consensus is, determining whether it is being fulfilled on the ground is a significant challenge because of the need to document and measure the myriad aspects of the region's development in a comprehensive and comprehensible way.

Governance in a large and growing metropolitan region involves a complex matrix of decision makers, including not only the local governments who are formally responsible for planning but also federal and provincial agencies and special purpose authorities, not to mention the private sector. It has always been clear that the regional vision could not be achieved unless most if not all decision makers were broadly in alignment with it and are able to reconcile the diligent pursuit of their responsibilities and objectives with the vision of the region reflected in the regional consensus. The lesson from the failed transportation and transit plebiscite is that it is risky to reduce complex problems and consequences to simple questions.

While the Vancouver region continues to attract worldwide attention for its livability and the quality of its urban form, there is enough evidence that decisions made recently and today will take us away from the regional vision rather than closer to it.

Therefore, the research questions to be explored in this challenge are:

Are the residents getting it?

Using Metro Vancouver and one other decision-making authority or Metro Vancouver and a particular project or event of regional significance , trace how decisions taken during the past 30 years have advanced or not advanced the regional vision;

Is there an alternative vision that would have the potential to serve the region better in the future?

What three key steps would you recommend to the region's decision makers?

## Parameters and considerations

Each entry must be from a team of two to five current students , including at least one from the SFU Urban Studies Program and one from the SFU Public Policy Program.

Each team must create a five -minute presentation and approximately a 500 -word proposal for a April 15<sup>th</sup> 'Pitch Event' evening

The winning team will complete a research project with an essay that will constitute significant original and secondary research as described in the pitch

The essay will be up to 7 ,500 words in length, not including references, tables and appendices (all of which are expected)

This analysis of the regional authority s hould consider such factors as:

service delivery responsibilities and operating costs

decision-making powers and overrule

communication and cooperative agreements with other organizations

## Timeline

Feb 4, 4:30 pm – Announcement and launch, Urban Studies work area, Harbour Centre 2<sup>nd</sup> floor

Apr 15, 5 pm - "Pitch Night" for entries and team presentations to jury

Apr 30 –Announcement of winner of \$5 ,000 prize at the 'Rethinking the Region IV' event in New Westminster. There will be an initial payment of \$2,500

June 1 - Deadline for submission of final research essay and payment of remainder of award