

THE NASTY BLACK CLOUD THREATENING PEACHLAND'S BRIGHT FUTURE
April 2013

Peachland is unique. It is built into a narrow strip of land just one and one half km deep, sloping up 400 metres from 11 km of lakefront. Only 20% of the area is level and most of that is at higher elevations, far from the lake. Those benched slopes provide a remarkable number of wonderful view lots. And that view is panoramic, North to Kelowna, South to Naramata. The downtown, fronting on 4 km of tastefully developed lakeshore is the Gem of the Okanagan.

When Brenda Mines shut down in 1990 the economy sank, miners moved on and Peachland was seen as an ugly duckling. Today's bird is a beautiful swan. Two desirable major developments, a high end boutique hotel-residences complex, redevelopment of a main downtown block all promise a doubled population and substantial, sustainable employment. Is it too soon to rejoice?

A nasty black cloud darkens this bright picture, Highway 97. It blights 4 km of our 11 km of lakeshore. It cuts a busy, 2 lane swath through lower Peachland, It is the downtown's noisy backstop and the only direct route, North to South for town traffic. It is also the designated international route for the steadily increasing Alaska bound traffic pushed by congested Western alternatives. In recent years, in a subdued economy, traffic volumes have increased alarmingly. A recent report confirmed that four lanes are only a stopgap. The stretch between Kelowna and the airport will soon be upgraded to six lanes. **Our turn will come. It will take drastic surgery on the landscape of lower Peachland to provide right of way for four more lanes, internal roads and an overpass. We will get at least two years of short term pain for permanent loss and pain.**

To avoid gridlock, upgrading the Peachland segment should be **completed within five or six years. It is MOTI policy to base major upgrade decisions on a business case cost-benefit analysis.** On February 8th 2011, Shirley Bond, then the MOTI Minister, promised a study based on Peachland's proposed high level route but it has been "premature" to start. Only if a bypass is off the table (technical and legal issues add years to the process). Is a strategy in play?

Considering both short and long term impacts the Council and a large majority of the 5,000 residents have good reasons to be fiercely opposed to upgrading the highway in place:

- Serious economic disruption and dislocation during two or three years of construction
- Drastic terrain surgery for future 6 lanes, service roads, and town road replacements.
- Loss and impairment of our limited parking and few amenities (Antler and Doggy Beaches, Tennis and Skateboard Parks etc.) All when the population is planned double?
- Permanent degradation of livability and a stranglehold limiting development potential
- A bypass may take longer with more direct expense but construction is out of sight and mind without harm to businesses including new developer sales and/ or construction.
- Major consequential and indirect costs for road system upgrades, mitigation of impacts, lost tax base revenues (from conversion to unobstructed lakeshore), negative cost impacts suffered during and after construction by current and possible future developers

Is history about to repeat? Will Peachland's fast track to doubled population, a health themed tech park, tourism magnet status with a tax base of all 11 km of unobstructed waterfront be realized? Or will the Highway upgrade be the next Brenda Mines setback derailing a brighter future? Hopefully not, if all the common interests of all the stakeholders are considered.

Peachland Council's Highway Committee requests MOTI's renewed commitment to and an early start on the long promised business case comparison. Showpiece bridges are fine but voters expect MOTI to recognize and enhance the charm and potential of little places like Peachland.

John W. Abernethy
Highway Committee Chair