

Peachland's New 97



1 Hypothetical bypass route shown

Welcome readers, to “*The New 97*”, the newsletter that keeps members of the Highway 97 Task Force Society and concerned citizens informed about the developments and background regarding the future of Highway 97 through, or around Peachland.

Retailers and local services may be concerned that a bypass could “darken the town” and Peachland will no longer be a destination or an impromptu stop for passers-by spending money. If true, one has to consider then, who are these people? Besides townspeople, they are truckers, travelers, tourists and tradespeople. I ask people from Kelowna and elsewhere if they have visited Peachland and a common response is “No, but I’ve been through it” - on their way to someplace else. Why stop if you don’t know anything about the town? Is there a false perception that there’s “nothing here”?

They are truckers, travelers, tourists and tradespeople.

There are at least four or five “hidden” Peachlands - that are not seen from the highway. There is the Walkway and the beauty of the public waterfront. The slopes and benches rising in curves like an amphitheater, giving many residents a spectacular view of the lake and Okanagan Mountain. Nor can the passing motorist see the vistas from Turner Park, The ravine at the top of Princeton, the ranches of Paradise Valley or the sun flickering through the leaves at Hardy Falls with the Kokanee salmon running underfoot the wooden bridges.

The sentiment of the Society, with its 765 paid members, is:

To effectively save the town from the permanent decline that would result from four-laning (widening) the highway in-place.

We advocate for a bypass around Peachland, behind Pincushion Mountain, and propose that such a new highway is not only feasible, it is more economical to construct, is significantly better for transportation and provides a long-term benefit for Peachlanders and those investing in the local economy and beyond.



Welcome to the town of Mittagong, (Little Mountain) or “Mitta”, a town of around 8000 people located in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, “The Gateway to the Southern Highlands”, Mittagong is on the Old Hume Highway, which linked Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne, but the highway was diverted in 1992. The opening of the bypass was expected to negatively affect business in Mittagong, but instead the location has become a rest stop for drivers and a day-tripper destination from Sydney, about one hour away.

Today, the town offers visitors the chance to explore its history, scenery, small waterfalls, bushwalks and its famed "Waratah" flowering in November. Tourists can

visit Mount Gibraltar, Lake Alexandra and various wineries located around and in Mittagong. The main street boasts a wide array of retailers and many antique shops. The wineries have established themselves in the region since the 1980s due to the soil and climate of Mittagong which is perfect for viticulture. Sounds familiar, Mate? I feel Mitta is worth a visit someday.

Until the 1990s the town was dominated by trucks and now the New Hume Highway bypasses Mittagong and all of the towns and villages of the Southern Highlands, including Yass, a larger town along the Hume (see inset). The bypass was first evaluated as having a slightly negative impact on Mittagong's economy for about a year after its opening, due to the loss of traffic-serving business. Expectations were re-evaluated as mildly positive in 1994 taking into account hard-to-quantify benefits such as the increased appeal of the town as a place to live.

“On the day the bypass ribbon was cut and the trucks stopped rolling through, the council was holding a jobs expo in the main street.”

“It was quite a celebratory moment to suddenly not have those trucks roaring down our main street”, - said the Economic Sustainability Manager of the town of Yass,

“It was a great moment to consider, this was going to be a future, this is suddenly what we are going to have, a much quieter and more peaceful amenity and a chance for us as a town to reclaim our main street and to look at what we want to do with our future and how we want to reinvent and reinvigorate ourselves.”

(source: Wikipedia)

Plan Ahead and Plan Early

The bypass was in the pipeline for more than a decade and the council started planning for it two years before it opened. As well as working on a master plan to beautify the main street and widen footpaths to encourage alfresco dining, the council developed service centers on the outskirts of town, providing further employment at new businesses where the bypass highway re-connects to the now *Historic* Hume highway.

Dr Bruno Parolin, a transportation consultant who has been examining the impact bypasses can have on towns since the early 1990s, says the secret to surviving a bypass is to plan ahead, and to plan early. The plan from Antlers Beach to Princeton Avenue will either be freeway or a five kilometer extension of Beach Ave, with shops, piers, a nice hotel and new attractions.

Dr. Parolin studied the impact bypasses had on New South Wales towns such as Yass, Goulburn, Mittagong and Berrima in the 1990s. According to Dr Parolin, Yass is still seen as a success story because it had a strategic plan well before the bypass opened. One study showed that the number of people who stopped in Yass in 2011 was higher than before the bypass was built, with day-trippers now attracted by the restaurants, cafes and other amenities that have developed over the past few decades.

The “Win-Win-Win” Bypass

The Hume bypass was not an option for the towns of Mitta, Yass and the others, it was set upon them by the real demands of increasing *through-traffic* that took precedent over their local economies, yet they were given adequate notice to prepare. An actual decision on a bypass was made and then all constituents organized accordingly, *knowing their future*. We don't yet have a decision on the future of Highway 97, and that's a good place to be for Peachlanders. We need to educate ourselves and debate our “two futures” before we have no say.

From the perspective of the Provincial Government, First Nations, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) and the District, the building of a new highway requires a comprehensive cost/benefit analysis - and preferably a “Win-Win-Win” outcome - to be rationally considered as a worthy expenditure of taxpayer dollars.

A “shovel-ready” cost comparison can be estimated for a new bypass highway versus doubling an existing highway, such as the segment from Summerland to Greata Ranch. Widening a highway through a quiet community - while maintaining health, order and commerce - is a cost much harder to estimate. The monetary cost of either option could conceivably be similar – “a wash” - especially if the losses to local business during construction are factored in. So then if money is hypothetically not the issue, what is?

If a referendum were to be held in Peachland, it's highly likely that a bypass would be favoured over widening highway 97.

Our unique community, so highly residential, is a retirement destination and a growing tourist attraction.



2Photo: Castanet

Who Cares?

We see redundancy being proposed for the electricity supply to Peachland and North Summerland due to outages caused by fires in recent years. Businesses and residents also expect “up-time” reliability in our transportation corridors.

The obvious incentive behind widening any highway is that adding another lane in each direction mitigates “down-time” caused by accidents and serves to handle increasing volume over time. This is true in theory but it does not fully consider the impact to those who visit or reside here.

If the highway were widened, the bridge over Trepanier Creek will be doubled. Where would the big rigs pull over to rest? The large trucks would still drive through town, *in ever increasing numbers*, and be forced to take their hungry and disappointed stomachs further up and down the line. Peachland is the only location from Sicamous to Oliver where big rigs can pull over.

With a bypass, all the rested and hurried through-traffic travelers would enjoy the smooth, top-speed, unimpeded run from Westbank to Summerland, while those needing a rest, some recreation or a meal can plan their stop in our quiet “Norman Rockwell-esque” Peachland.



3 Hypothetical bypass route from Connector

It goes without saying that the town *will be* transformed whether a bypass is created or if 97 is widened in-place. Citizens would likely all agree that the Peachland they enjoy today is on borrowed time, for even the status quo (leaving the highway as it is) would result in a reduced quality of life for residents and a growing headache for all travelers destined north and south.

In the clarity of the present, whatever fervent resistance to an exorbitant cost or the fears of a past great capital project is actually forgotten over time, discarded in fact, after the benefits it enabled for future citizens and the expanded interests of commerce were ultimately realized. It's a truism. If the bypass existed today would there be a citizen's movement to remove it?

Peachlanders need to get on and off the highway to patronize local businesses. The local cross-traffic impedes through-traffic and is a growing time and safety concern.

Who Benefits from the Bypass?

The major property development projects that have been proposed, approved and started over the years (notwithstanding their current status), demonstrate that Peachland is desirable and its

population could double in 20 years if the economy continues apace. Peachland is growing and everything depends on access to the highway. All through-traffic depends on the highway. That kind of dependency on a single piece of infrastructure is a risk to both commerce and safety. A bypass with alternate access and egress would certainly be a net benefit for many.

There would be no requirement for road closures during the building of a bypass. If all the while a brand new engineered highway is being constructed “up in the hills”, the town will not suffer, in fact it will benefit for a time as highway workers patronize local businesses. There will be no extra planning or costs related to keeping traffic moving during construction, MOTI can work at their own schedule through relatively spacious areas

MOTI has had various ideas over the years for widening the highway through Peachland, some of which could not be approved today but were considered in the past. These past planners could not imagine the future “Peachland experience”. Before the existing elevated Highway 97, there was actually a plan to four-lane Beach Avenue and filling in the lakeshore!

While that image is formulating in your mind, imagine what four lanes would look like where there are now two? Certain residents would be displaced, their homes demolished or properties carved up. The intersection at Princeton Avenue alone is difficult to comprehend but all intersections would be either very large or eliminated. It’s very possible the local economy could decline if the highway is widened.

Imagine the logistics trying to blast Drought Hill and keep traffic moving? Leaving the highway as it is and constructing a bypass through an unpopulated area would leave local residents and businesses unviolated.



4 Hypothetical bypass route from Greata Ranch

Why do travelers stop in Peachland today? For some it is a need for gas or food. Truckers bring their own accommodations and park overnight in front of the mall to grab breakfast in the morning and be on their way. They stop *because it's convenient*. Others come because it is so very beautiful.

Is Peachland a Truck Stop?



Peachland is a truck stop. 24-hours a day truckers park on the shoulders in front of the mall both north and south. Only a few trucks can safely park and depart now, certainly there will be less accommodation if the highway is widened so the ever-increasing number of truckers would be unable to stop for lack of convenience.

The “Win-Win” answer to this dilemma is to build a real truck stop on the bypass where it would cross Princeton Avenue.

The logical location of this amenity would be the large flat property that used to be a log dump and is now open to grazing cattle, shown above. This is the likely location that the bypass would intersect Princeton Ave. The only trucks that would be attracted down Princeton to Beach Avenue would be contingent deliveries to local businesses in the event of a closure perhaps, so the load on Princeton would be slightly increased. This could be discouraged entirely by banning turns south from the bypass onto Princeton Avenue.

New Revenue Opportunitites for Peachland, more Business and new Jobs.

From a transportation perspective the bypass and truck stop has several logistical advantages. With its location as the terminus of the Connector, tandem trucks coming from Vancouver could split their trailers, with one going north and the other going south, in a staging area. Having both the bypass and the historic route, the risk of having any north-south delay due to an obstruction in Peachland is nearly nil. The bypass would create an additional exit route for Peachlanders in the event of an evacuation due to fire threat. Silver Lake and the Zip Zone would enjoy the new accessibility and would likely see an increase in business.

Less stops and starts, less acceleration and braking (including noisy echoing “engine brakes”), less asbestos and diesel residue in the local environment are all benefits to having a bypass.

A smooth bypass with a 24-hour truck stop will bring new commerce and jobs to the top of Peachland, with the new access and opportunities. Ensuing decades of increasing truck traffic will be diverted from our quiet downtown, yet encouraged to stop and spend “Up Top”.

The Tipping Point? *Tourism.*

Will a bypass increase tourist traffic? That is a projection based upon case studies of towns in similar circumstances – towns with something to offer day-trippers, towns that lure tourists off the highway. If there is one thing that Peachland has in its favour, its that a lot of tourist pass through in the summer. The potential boon for local business is staggering. Slowing the speed on the Historic 97 will calm the town and provide the opportunity for increased access.

There could be an exit from the highway onto a multi-level parking structure behind the Edgewater Hotel, with cars entering on the second or third level. A pedestrian bridge could be constructed across the highway at the high point on Huston Road, connecting the stairway to the start of Beach Ave at Davis Cove Resort. Pedestrians could then walk the entire length of Beach Avenue and continue up to Parrot Island, unimpeded. Cars would be permitted to park along the highway shoulders, if needed during special festivals or events. Pedestrian access from the highway to the downtown core would attract cyclists and motorists to visit.

Of course effective marketing will need to dominate the post-bypass planning books - to create a destination theme for the town. “Hiker’s Paradise – from Shore to Summit”. “Golfer’s Paradise” (eventually), “Swimmers Paradise”, “Boater’s Paradise”, “Kayak and Paddle Board Paradise”, “ATV Paradise”, “Diner’s Paradise”, “Camp in Paradise”, “B&B Paradise”. These can be signs along the road every kilometer on the way into town, as an idea.

Day trippers are one thing but attracting multi-day visitors is a major challenge for Peachland. Bed and Breakfasts and camping aren’t for everyone so Peachland needs a boutique hotel, a family oriented motel and the like. This becomes a significant problem when planning a wedding in town, for example. The only locations where a hotel can be built are on large parcels up on the benches, away from the downtown, or along the highway on the vacant and partially developed properties. A new hotel near the downtown can only happen if the highway isn’t widened.

Peachland is geographically blessed and desired. As it is in the “elbow” of Lake Okanagan facing south east and enjoys a climate grade warmer than other communities in the area. Its location also lands it on a logical transportation path that has existed for centuries due to its convenience.

Peachland will never get new boutique hotels or family accommodations along the waterfront if Highway 97 is widened

Who will Invest?

Who can invest, design and build along the highway when no decision has been made as to its future? Were a decision handed down tomorrow to leave the highway as it is and a bypass will be constructed, it is conceivable that all those properties would sell quickly, destined to be future hotels, condos, shops, homes, etc.

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Lake Okanagan's Second Crossing?

Yes, it's coming. The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure is undertaking a planning study TO DEVELOP POTENTIAL ROUTE PROPOSALS to address future mobility in the Central Okanagan. The study area for the Highway 97 corridor extends from Greata Ranch, 4 km south of Peachland, to just south of Vernon. The study will examine route options including preferred locations for an additional lake crossing. The website for this study is:

www.engage.gov.bc.ca/okanagasecondcrossing

The Peachland Bypass could be constructed as the first segment of the eventual Kelowna / Westbank / Peachland bypass that would materialize in the event of a second crossing north of Kelowna. A non-stop route from Vernon to Summerland would be a boon to commercial transportation and through-traffic, lightening the load on local infrastructure while improving the Okanagan experience for us residents and our truckers, tradespersons, travelers, tourists alike.

Challenge Question:

What is the most unique quality that Peachland enjoys over any other Okanagan community?

It's the only town on Lake Okanagan that does not look directly across at another community. Peachland has the only panoramic view of the all-natural Okanagan Mountain Park.

Join Us. Be a Volunteer.

Become a member of the Highway 97 Task Force and let your voice be heard. Our politicians and MOTI are listening. Please visit our website at www.hwy97taskforce.com to participate. A three-year single membership is only \$10 or \$15 for a family. The third annual highway traffic count is underway, thanks to 38 local volunteers, including Bert Put who put it all together. Thank You!