The region's duelling futures:

THE FUTURE IS BAD

More cars, more suburbs, bad air

reater Vancouver may be on its way to becoming a sprawling, polluted area with much of the region's farmland and green space turned into paved suburbs, roads jammed with angry commuters, the air foul and the economy stagnant.

It's a risk we face if we make the wrong decisions as the region's population grows by a million over the next three decades.

And it is the direction we are currently headed in, says Dave Biggs, co-founder of Vancouver software company Envision Sustainability Tools.

Envision is marketing MetroQuest, a realworld version of the Sim City computer game,

in which players try to build a viable city.

MetroQuest generates future development scenarios based on policy choices, and Biggs said they show we are headed towards deteriorating air quality, diminishing green space, and higher taxes and cost of living.

Single-occupant vehicles are increasingly the region's dominant transportation choice, which encourages people to live farther away from work, shopping and schools.

That means more suburbs, less agricultural and natural land, more roads, longer driving distances, less efficient transit, and more traffic congestion.

Suburban municipalities that lack large commercial and industrial tax bases will have trouble paying for the roads, and that means higher taxes or reduced services. Biggs said some U.S. suburbs are going through that experience now.

Schools are getting worse, roads are getting worse, everything is getting worse because they simply do not have the tax base to support the kind of infrastructure that's needed there.'

Choking the roads

Land use has the most dramatic effect on the computer model, said Randi Kruse-Ferdinands, who has run about 50 workshops with residents and planners using the Georgia Basin Futures Project's version of the Quest software to map out alternative futures.

"If we don't densify, it not only has an effect on parkland and unprotected natural land, but also agricultural land," Kruse-Ferdinands

"We see the cost of living go up. We see greenhouse gas emissions increase, because it's difficult for public transit to be efficient in a low-density environment.'

Other pressures are pushing us in the same direction says Andrew Ramlo, director of Urban Futures Inc.

Baby boomers will soon be retiring in great numbers, and Ramlo said Greater Vancouver will need accelerated immigration rates to replace them in the labour force.

But most boomers intend to stay in their homes into their 70s and 80s, and that means the new arrivals will have to look to the sub-

'There's going to be more land developed for residential uses, and there's going to be a heck of a lot more cars on the road," Ramlo

People will spend more time commuting, "and they're probably not going to be quite as

Several recent studies, including one by UBC transportation expert Lawrence Frank, have linked suburban living and longer commutes with increasing health problems.

But new low-density suburbs will be impossible to serve with transit, said Johnny Carline, chief administrator of the Greater Vancouver Regional District, and that means pressure to build more roads, attracting more cars, leading to more congestion.

'Even existing neighbourhoods that are surrounded by congestion will be under increasing pressure for what were their shopping streets to be widened, their convenient parking to be removed, and ultimately maybe whole new roads to be driven through their neighbourhoods," Carline said.

Seattle: how not to

Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell agrees that "If we screw up, our quality of life starts deteriorating. We don't maintain our standing in the world as the No. 1 city.

"People will start moving out instead of moving in because of the degradation of the environment.

'If we do not deal with transit in a manner that is renewable and that does not just add more cars to the road, we're doomed.

"But I don't see that happening," Campbell said, adding he's optimistic the region will make the right choices in the coming years.

Dave Park, the Vancouver Board of Trade's chief economist, argues the region needs more road capacity alongside more transit to remain vibrant but sees the same downside if we allow too much congestion to build up.

"If you want to see the mess we could get into, go down to Seattle," Park said. "We were told three years ago by their chamber of commerce that they cannot attract another major company to that city because of the problems with rush-hour traffic."

If we go that route, "It will become much

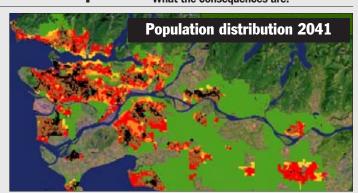
more difficult to attract new employers, economic growth will suffer, and we will essentially strangle on our own traffic." □

— William Boei

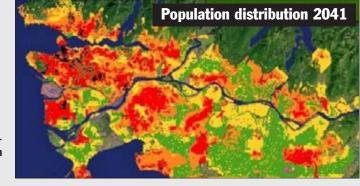
Greater Vancouver's options

Compact development or urban sprawl? What the consequences are.

MetroQuest, a software package developed at the University of B.C. and marketed by a Vancouver software company, predicts Greater Vancouver will become a huge conglomerate of sprawling suburbs by 2041 if current development patterns continue. But if the region can follow "sustainable" principles such as compact development in town centres and along rapid transit corridors, it can preserve most of the farm and natural land we have now and maintain workable transportation systems.

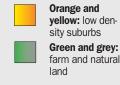


The top map shows the development pattern predicted by the Metro-Quest software if the region follows sustainable principles. The bottom map shows the likely result if development continues unrestrained.









THE FUTURE IS GOOD Lots of transit, lots of density

re're going to be living closer together 30 years from now, and we'll be riding transit more and driving less, if all goes well.

That's the vision shared by most people interviewed by *The Vancouver Sun* about the future of Greater Van-

There will be 3.2 million of us, a million more than today. But we will be living in not much more space than we're using now, if we follow the compact development strategy the region adopted more than a decade ago.

Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell has no problem envisioning what's over the horizon.

"I imagine," he says, "a city that has solved its transit problems by having a system of high-speed transit, either underground or above-ground, that's fed by hydrogen buses.

I see a city that has densified along those transit corridors, and has recognized that you have to have housing for everybody, that it all can't be high

There will be no twinned Port Mann Bridge, Campbell says, touching on a seething controversy that is pitting Vancouver, Burnaby and New Westminster against Surrey, Langley and other communities south of the Fraser

But we will have less-congested roads, Campbell says, because we will build "a high-speed train that comes from Chilliwack straight down the middle of the freeway," fed by buses and park-and-ride lots.

More of us will walk or bicycle to work, all our bridges will have bike lanes, and Greater Vancouver will have surpassed the Kyoto Accord's clean-air standards.

In Vancouver itself, the Downtown Eastside is transformed into a kind of new Gastown, Chinatown has been restored and people are starting to move there from Richmond.

Campbell's frequent adversary in regional politics, Surrey Mayor Doug McCallum, sees a similar outcome farm land intact and higher density in the town centres.

But McCallum says we can get there by a slightly different route, with more road-building, more development south of the Fraser River, and the region's 21 municipalities becoming four large cities — Vancouver-Burnaby-New Westminster, Surrey and the other south-of-the-Fraser communities, the North Shore and the northeast.

Corridors and clusters

In our brightest futures, the region preserves most of its farmland and natural areas, says Dave Biggs, cofounder of a software company that's marketing MetroQuest, a real-world version of the popular city-building computer game *Sim City*.
Plug in your preferred land-use

choices, transportation policies and a host of other factors, and the program shows you what the region is likely to look like in 10 to 40 years.

Biggs says in the generally preferred outcome, Greater Vancouver develops along transit corridors and clusters population around town centres. People live closer to their jobs, schools, stores and other amenities. And we don't need to drive as much.

Nor would we want to. Parking is scarce and expensive. More than ever, we walk, we bicycle, we take the bus or the train.

If we follow that route, the Metro-Quest program says our air quality will be better in 30 years, we will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we can reduce taxes because compact living means spending less on infrastructure, and even a family's cost of living will go down as we spend less money on transportation.

Vancouver's southeast False Creek housing development will be nearly 25 years old, and a showcase for green living. It will begin as the Vancouver Olympic Village for the 2010 Winter Games, then expand into a neighbourhood based on sustainable principles.

"If they pull it off, it will probably be a real turning point for people to look at and say, 'You can do it in a sustainable way,' " says Johnny Carline, chief administrator of the Greater Vancou-

ver Regional District.
"That's possibly one of the most important developments in the history of this city, maybe in the history of this country. It's very important that we get these demonstration projects right, so that people who are afraid of them, uncertain, can look at these pioneer developments and say, 'This

Denser and denser

We will see more densely built-up areas, not necessarily with highrises like the West End's, but more like the condo clusters of Fairview Slopes and many of North Vancouver's recent developments. Carline sees "a steady infilling and intensification of land use all around the region."

That can be done on a human scale, he says. People will live in places that may feel like villages of bygone eras, with houses mixed in with shops, offices and other work places.

What we won't see is many new subdivisions with single family homes on large lots. In a region that wants to keep its green space, we can no longer afford them, Carline says.

'We are close to occupying all the land that we want to see developed. Then does it make any sense whatsoever to have a low-intensity use of that

The Vancouver Board of Trade shares a similar vision — a livable region strategy with growth along rapid transit corridors.

But don't forget the roads, says the board's chief economist, Dave Park.

"It doesn't work unless we have the transportation to match," Park says, adding outlying areas have serious traffic congestion problems, and the movement of goods and services through the region is at risk.

"We can't just say, don't build any more roads, because we can't begin to accommodate the growth on buses or in rapid transit. We've got to have a balanced program going forward."

- William Boei

Untrammelled, sprawling growth or an orderly, planned vision: It's our choice



WILLIAM BOEI VANCOUVER SUN

ere's how you charm a wary Vancouverite, according to Dave Matychuk. You tell him, "You know, this is the most beautiful city in the world," and the Vancouverite sighs, "Aah."

"But, it's too expensive," you say, and the Vancouverite goes, "Mmh."

"But, it's worth it," you add.
"And then you've got him. I've been using that Matychuk lives in Surrey but makes his living

in Vancouver, and so he straddles the region's two solitudes — the lovely, somewhat insecure downtown peninsula, and the sprawling, often maligned southeastern suburb.

"They desperately want it to be a big town, but it's not," he says of Vancouverites. "They'll get all bent out of shape if you call it No Fun

Matychuk's day job is managing the magazine racks in the downtown Vancouver Chapters bookstore, and by night he's an alternative rock musician and stand-up social critic. He's also known as Dave M., and his band is called No

He likes to drive, but doesn't much nowadays. He remembers when he could leave home in Surrey an hour before show time, drive to Vancouver in 40 minutes and be in plenty of time for a movie on Granville Street.

"Now, forget it."

So he commutes from Whalley, where he owns a house down the road from the King George SkyTrain station.

"I can walk out of my house in Surrey at five after seven, walk to the end of the road, get on the train, always get a seat because it's the first train, and I'm always on time here at Robson and Howe. I always punch in before eight

Matychuk says Vancouver has grown up about as much as it needs to.

"We have to stay a small town. We have to stay impressed with celebrities and not be jaded, and I think Vancouver always will."

As for Surrey, he says it was once considered the end of civilization, but now it's part of the regional city, "just one big thing, pretty much all the way out to Aldergrove, if not Abbotsford. It's not an endless downtown or anything, just a

He likes it like that, and he figures we don't have the physical space to become a huge city, anyhow.

"Vancouver has this beautiful little setting. It's always going to be like that. It's always going to be this thing stuck to the tail end of Canada, and I think it's a wonderful thing."

We might not have a choice but to take good care of the city, says Johnny Carline, chief administrator of the Greater Vancouver Regional District. The world will insist.

Step back a moment and take a global view, he says. China, India, Indonesia and other underdeveloped, heavily populated countries are racing into economic development. If they develop the same way the now-devel-

oped world did — with coal and dirty industries, oil and internal combustion engines — the planet will be in serious trouble. "If we expect them to develop in any other

way," Carline says, "they're going to expect us to make some adjustments at the same time. In that sense, Kyoto is the tip of the iceberg. So our choice, really, is between waiting for some massive environmental and economic crisis that forces us to make drastic, sudden

changes, and planning now how to adjust to the world of the future. Carline says that will mean looking at the energy and materials that we produce and consume, reducing "the intensity of consumption,"

maximizing re-use and minimizing waste. "We haven't considered what it means yet to plan neighbourhoods or towns on the basis of maximizing the efficiency of energy use and

minimizing energy waste," he said. But a good guess is that it's time to wake up from the suburban dream of the 1950s, the single family home with the big green lawn, the comfortable car in the garage, the solitary drive to the tree-lined office park.

"That is probably a pattern of life that we just can't afford. And it will be increasingly a marginal lifestyle."

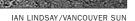
Jacquie Gould is ready for a little down-sizing, and she favours making better use of resources.

"I'm in my 40s now," said the North Vancouver assistant movie director, script writer and editor. "I've had money, I've spent money, I've been a huge consumer.

"I had a big car. I've just downsized. I'm starting to realize that bigger isn't better."

Gould spends more time thinking about fam-

Continued on C3



Dave Biggs: 'We've got to realize that we have to make some choices. Is it more important to you to have clean air or a big yard? Is it more important to drive your car or to pay low taxes?'



Dave Matychuk: 'We have to stay a small town. We have to stay impressed with celebrities and not be jaded, and I think Vancouver always will.'

From C2

ily, about the environment, about recycling, about

living in "a stunning city" and not wrecking it.
"I don't believe in building more highways, building more and more stuff, getting more and more into debt," she said. "I don't see Vancouver being a huge metropolis. What can we do with

That brings her to her frequent walks — rain or shine - through the woods in the Cleveland Dam area.

For much of the year, tonnes of fresh water spills over the dam, and Gould wonders why we don't use more of it.

"We have a gold mine in our backyard. We could sell our water and make money to make our city better, and we don't.

"If I took a hike today, there would be buckets of water going over that dam. But every summer I can't water my garden and I lose plants, and yet it rains eight months of the year. You know?'

The Greater Vancouver region is headed away from green concepts like sustainability and compact development, according to MetroQuest, the computer model that generated the maps with the accompanying story on page C2.

Without a change of direction, we're cruising towards the sprawl scenario, the one that shows dots and blotches of yellow and orange — lowdensity suburbs — all over the map of Greater Vancouver and the Fraser Valley.

But that same software — actually its cousin, called Georgia Basin Quest — reveals that when we are faced with the graphic consequences of our decisions, we can make tough choices and change the future, says Randi Kruse-Ferdinands, community engagement coordinator with the

Georgia Basin Futures Project. The Quest software has been more than a decade in the making with more than 70 people working on it from forestry, medicine, sociology, education and other fields at the University of B.C., Simon Fraser University and the University of Victoria.

The data that went into it came from local, international and provincial sources, including the official community plans of every municipality in the region. It took five years just to compile the data base, and for the last two years, Kruse-Ferdinands has organized about 50 workshops with community groups, municipal planners, members of the public and various organi-

"We use Quest as a discussion tool to provoke people to talk to each other and to think in ways and about issues that they haven't before," she

Participants are divided into groups and asked to come up with a consensus on what kind of community they would like to see, with choices involving everything from development patterns to transportation trends, economic alternatives, consumption of goods and services, tax rates, water use, agricultural practices, and others.

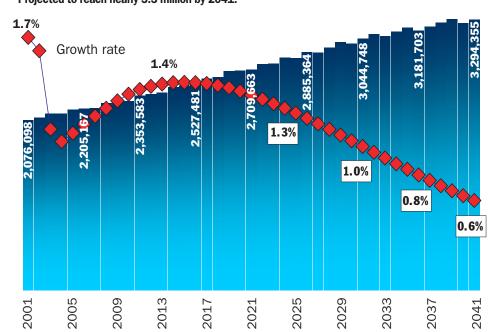
Their choices are entered into the software, and "we show them the results over a 40-year time frame."

Density or lack of it is a huge factor in shaping

the region, the researchers found. "If we don't densify, it not only has an effect on

Projected to reach nearly 3.3 million by 2041.

Population growth for the GVRD



Source: Urban Futures Inc.

park land and unprotected natural land, but also

agricultural land," Kruse-Ferdinands said.
"We see the cost of living go up. We see greenhouse gas emissions increase, because it's difficult for public transit to be efficient in a low-density environment. Public transit options are less and less available if we sprawl."

Increase density, however, and the model shows we can retain green space, traffic congestion is reduced, public transit becomes more viable and people are able to work in the same communities where they live.

People are often taken aback by the region created by their choices. All they wanted was a quiet, leasant suburb, and they get gridlock hell instead. Fortunately, Quest sessions allow them to make adjustments.

"You keep playing until you start to get a future that you like," said Dave Biggs, who has been working with MetroQuest, the commercial version of the Quest software, which is being marketed by his company, Envision Sustainability Tools.

"Once you've got a future that you like, you can go back and say, what choices did we end up having to make in order to make that future? Let's

break that down. One thing the software does is force decisionmakers to think about a much longer time frame than the usual three-year election mandate or five-year community plan. They have to make economic, social and environmental decisions

based on a 40-year result horizon. People often start with unrealistic expectations, Biggs said.

"They want generous yards, pristine agricultural and natural land, they want low taxes, they want uncongested roads, they want a short drive to work, and good police services and good

schools and everything.

'We've got to realize that we have to make some choices, because we can't actually deliver all of those things simultaneously.

'So, is it more important to you to have clean

VANCOUVER SUN

air or a big yard? Is it more important to drive your car or to pay low taxes? "We need to elevate the discussion with stake-

holders to the level where they're actually prepared to say, 'This is more important than that is. I'm willing to make that choice."

And they do, Biggs said.

"After people play around with some alternative futures, they come to a consensus very quickly. They start to migrate to the kinds of policies that the GVRD is actually recommending.'

But it's not just a matter of bludgeoning the public into embracing the GVRD's solutions,

The region is going through a detailed examination of how it governs itself. For that matter, so is the provincial government. Some regional politicians are demanding changes, and when a GVRD or TransLink meeting dissolves into

TransLink chairman, GVRD director and Sur-

chaos, they get public support.

rey Mayor Doug McCallum is one of them. McCallum, who champions more road- and

bridge-building alongside transit development, says Greater Vancouver and its 21 municipalities are far too fragmented.

The solution, he says, is to divide the region into just four cities:

The three inner cities, Vancouver, New West-

minster and Burnaby.
• The south-of-the Fraser communities, Richmond, Delta, Surrey, White Rock, and Langley city and township.

• The northeast sector: Port Moody, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Pitt Meadows, Maple Ridge

as well as Anmore and Belcarra. • The North Shore: West Vancouver, North Vancouver city and district, plus Bowen Island

Voters would elect their municipal councils and a regional executive committee of perhaps nine members who would deal with major crossborder services and issues like sewer, water,

transportation and air quality. Our notion of region may also change, McCal-

"I see a bigger picture of the region, from West Vancouver to Hope, or even from Squamish to Hope.

McCallum argues that the centre of this Lower Mainland region, geographically and administratively, will be Whalley, in north Surrey.

Whalley? Yes, he says, seriously. Stimulated by the extension of SkyTrain, Whalley is seeing "unbelievable" growth and development. "A lot of the new development is now heading south of the Fraser River, and I see that as the centre of

the region." The other thing the region needs is for some municipal leaders to start minding their own

business, McCallum says. That's a shot at the mayors of the inner cities, who don't want the Port Mann Bridge and the Trans-Canada Highway opened full throttle because that could turn their municipalities into

parking lots, and encourage sprawl in the valley. "Centres that just want transit, that's fine,"

McCallum says. "They can have that. "But those centres shouldn't be telling other centres that they don't need roads if those other centres need roads. That's the problem we have

McCallum says the south-of-the-Fraser communities will get what they want — more road capacity — and that the region can still remain

"The only way we'll ever mess it up is if we don't listen to the residents of this region. I think it's very important that we listen to how they want to see the region develop, and that us as politicians need to stay out of that."

Others suggest more of us have to become

involved in shaping the future. "The answers are only going to come from you and me," says Andrew Ramlo of Urban Futures Inc. "They're not going to come from the Greater Vancouver Regional District or any other form of higher political bodies saying you should be doing this or that."

Like the participants in MetroQuest workshops, we have to acknowledge that our lifestyle decisions have consequences and that taken together, they determine the shape of our city and our region, Ramlo said.

Regional government faces a similar challenge, Carline added. The regional district, the transportation authority, the 21 municipal councils, the provincial government and all the agencies that provide utilities and services in the region will have to get on the same page rather than working at cross-purposes.

"I don't think we're going to have that luxury in the future." \Box

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