

## Our International Trade Relationships: Gateway to What? Ben West, The Wilderness Committee, GatewayToWhat.org

I work at a wilderness preservation organization, "the Wilderness Committee". Historically the Wilderness Committee has taken people into remote parts of our beautiful province to protect ancient forests and endangered species. So sometimes people are confused about why we are trying to stop the expansion of Metro Vancouver's Port Mann Bridge, which is part of the federal and provincial "Gateway Project".

"Where's the wilderness on the Port Mann Bridge?" A friend of mine asked me plainly. It's a good question because the answer explains not only the problem with this bridge in this community, but in fact the core of what's wrong with the Canadian government's Asia Pacific Gateway Strategy. Ultimately this is a story about unsustainable development at home and abroad.

The wilderness that would be affected by this new bridge would not just be the Fraser River it crosses, but the area downstream, metaphorically speaking, if we open the flood gates of new traffic and the inevitable sprawling development (which are both induced by highway expansion).

It's my job to take people to see BC's farmland, green spaces and wildlife habitat throughout the region that are in danger from unsustainable, car-dependent sprawl, if the existing Port Mann Bridge is torn down and replaced with a mega-bridge more than twice its current size as part of the Gateway project. We are trying to help people understand that it is impossible to build your way out of congestion, and frustrated commuters need to know the real truth about why they're stuck in traffic.

Expanding highways only briefly relieves congestion, if at all. All we can do currently at the local level is move people more efficiently through congestion by building convenient light rail and rapid transit. Ultimately the best approach is to reduce the need for commuting by building smart, compact, independent communities. You don't have to look much farther than cities like L.A. to see what happens when you follow the old design model that Gateway is setting us up for. The inevitable result of this approach is sprawling development that would run right over some very important wilderness areas along these highway corridors. Our invaluable farmland, along with hundreds of unlucky people, are in the line of fire of this colossal mistake.

At the international level we see the same problem. A 2005 Maclean's article stated "China is shipping goods out of a fire hose and we are sucking it up out of a straw". When you see Gateway in these terms you realize Gateway is really about opening the international flood gates, and importing more and more low-cost disposable goods while exporting more and more non-renewable resources like tar sands oil and Canadian coal.

I seriously doubt Canadians want to be the enablers of the climate crisis, yet this current trade strategy is in truth a gateway to global warming that will open the flood gates of unsustainable trade that would enhance severe global climatic destabilization and will affect us all worldwide. We can't knowingly participate in this.

Even with what we know about climate change, another part of this trade plan is to build a "Gateway pipeline" across BC to export a third of the oil in the tar sands to China, India and

elsewhere in the world with low environmental standards. Sometimes I wonder if the proponents of this project actually understand what the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is saying and if they just want someone else to deal with it.

The Gateway plan would ensure Canada's relationship with China and other low-income nations would ultimately be all about continuing the race to the bottom in terms of sustainability and social justice. This strategy is designed to expand the exploitation of people and ecological systems. We need sustainable fair trade for the sake of Canada and the rest of world.

There is a growing international movement to create 'green jobs' that are locally based, environmentally sustainable, and are beneficial to local and international communities. Given Canada's control of some of the world's largest oil reserves, our "special relationship" with the United States and our proximity to the Asia-Pacific region, we are uniquely positioned to really make a difference in the world right now. We could be leaders in a much-needed transition or enablers of the crisis.

It has been said that we are really only borrowing the world from the next generation and their children. The financial, social and environmental challenges our children will face will already be huge, but Gateway would make it so much worse. We can't do this to them. We need to work together with all of our neighbours on this continent and across the Pacific to do what's right.

In Mandarin the word sustainability can be translated as a "virtuous circle", a lasting, mutually beneficial relationship. Children growing up in Canada and in China will feel the impact and pay the cost of the decisions we make today. All the countries of the world must achieve smart land use and transportation planning that ensures food security, equity and ecological balance. Working together we can help each other reach these goals. We must abandon the Gateway race to the bottom and replace it with a path to a truly virtuous life for those living on both sides of the Pacific Ocean and around the world.