

Educating Todd Stone, the new minister of transportation and infrastructure

by [CHARLIE SMITH](#) on JUN 10, 2013 at 1:03 PM



The Hon. Todd Stone has an opportunity to rethink the way transportation ministers have traditionally operated.

MOST BRITISH COLUMBIANS probably read this headline and said to themselves: "Todd who?"

But those who pay attention to B.C. politics know that Todd Stone, the rookie B.C. Liberal MLA for Kamloops–South Thompson, has been catapulted into one of the most important positions in cabinet.

As the new minister of transportation and infrastructure, Stone oversees not only transportation planning and highway construction and maintenance, but he's also the minister responsible for ICBC, B.C. Transit, the B.C. Transportation Financing Authority, and the Crown corporation that operates the convention centre and B.C. Place.

These are heady times for the 40-year-old software entrepreneur.

Stone is going to be bombarded by lobbyists representing companies and industry associations that want him to approve new roads, bridges, and rapid-transit projects.

Port Metro Vancouver will put pressure on him to replace the George Massey Tunnel with a new Fraser River crossing.

He's in a position to advance several billion dollars worth of spending to the Treasury Board, even though he doesn't have a great deal of experience dealing with the transportation intricacies of Lower Mainland municipalities.

However, he has been on the board of ICBC, so he isn't entirely new to the topic.

One thing Stone probably already realizes is that young people are not driving as much as previous generations, particularly in urban areas.

ICBC stats show that among those 18 to 24 years old, only 69 percent had a licence in 2011, compared to 79 percent in 1994.

As a share of the modal split, motor-vehicle trips to UBC's Point Grey campus have dropped from 77 percent in 1997 to 43 percent by 2011.

Meanwhile, Golden Ears Bridge tolls accounted for three percent of TransLink's revenue in 2012, thanks to 10.8 million crossings. Toll revenues were up 15.1 percent over 2011, partly as a result of TransLink making changes to make use of the Port Mann Bridge identification technology.

But if traffic on the Golden Ears Bridge goes up, some of that likely comes from motorists trying to avoid the Port Mann Bridge toll. And if tolls are flowing into TransLink coffers rather than to the provincial government, this should be a concern for Stone.

Speaking more broadly, vehicular traffic is declining in many areas of North America.

The Seattle-based Sightline Institute's series, "[Dude, Where Are My Cars?](#)", recently reported that in Washington state, road use fell 0.8 percent in 2012.

The Washington State Department of Transportation has concluded that traffic in the state is slightly below what it was in 2002.

"The flat-lining of traffic is due not to one single factor, but to many," Sightline's Clark Williams-Derry [wrote](#). "Higher fuel prices are discouraging driving. Baby boomers have aged past their peak driving years. The 'millennial' generation is driving less. Mobile and internet technologies make transit

more convenient and rewarding. And the popularity of compact neighborhoods lets more people live in places where they don't need to drive much."

Of course, as Williams-Derry pointed out, traffic will increase if more roadspace is added.

Meanwhile, the website [Walk Score](#) is making it easier for people to discover how many amenities are in walking distance of any neighbourhood in Canada or the United States.

Kitsilano, for instance, is described as a walker's paradise with a Walk Score of 93. Surrey Cloverdale gets a rating of 70 and is considered "very walkable". Port Coquitlam, on the other hand, only gets a Walk Score of 47, earning the descriptor "car-dependent".

Toronto urban-design consultant Ken Greenberg told CBC's Michael Enright on the weekend that young people are increasingly relying on the Walk Score site to choose where to live. And it's transforming the real-estate industry.

Walking is also good for people's health. As the province tries to curb health-care costs, let's hope that the new minister of transportation and infrastructure recognizes how he can enhance public health.

For instance, we're seeing a growing body of research using [Walk Score data](#) to study the relationship between where people live and health outcomes.

"For example, public health departments are using Walk Score data to study the link between sprawl and diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular issues," Matt Lerner, Walk Score's chief technology officer, [wrote](#) on the site. "One of my favorite research studies involves giving GPS devices to participants to calculate a 'personal Walk Score' based on the places a person goes throughout the day. Cities are using Walk Score [ChoiceMaps](#) to measure how many residents can walk to fresh food or parks."

UBC professor [Larry Frank](#) has been a North American leader in analyzing the links between transportation, walking, and public health. He's involved in a major project looking at the relationship between changing travel patterns, physical activity, nutrition, and cardiovascular-disease factors.

Stone and the new health minister, Terry Lake, would be wise to read his [research](#).

Stone should also read and understand what transportation planning consultant Eric Doherty [wrote](#) in the *Georgia Straight* earlier this year about the replacement of the George Massey Tunnel.

And the new minister would benefit from visiting SFU to hear what former Vancouver councillor [Gordon Price](#) has to say.

If Stone does all of this and pays attention to transportation trends, he has an opportunity to become an outstanding minister of transportation and infrastructure. We haven't had one of those in a very long time.