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A Time to Plan, and a Time to Act

Leading change. Hard work. Collaboration and shared commitment. The responsibility to leave a legacy that future generations can be proud of. These are central to the Port 2050 initiative, as is the view of all those who shaped the effort, that a ‘Great Transition’ looks almost certain to be at the core of how and why we do things in the future.

When I began thinking about this address some months ago, I planned to talk only about the Port 2050 strategic visioning process. That’s because the 2050 initiative was an eye-opener for the Port, and for all the stakeholders who took part in it. They included small business. Big business. Unions. Farmers. First Nations. Railways. Truckers. Environmentalists. Shipping companies. Federal, provincial, and municipal officials.

There were diverse opinions and wide-ranging views. Yet, we all emerged from the visioning effort in agreement that while we can’t accurately predict the future, we can certainly plan to be ready for it.

Since then, however, we’ve seen some remarkable developments. Developments that seem to indicate that some of the changes and volatility that we collectively envisaged in the scenarios process is closer than we perhaps thought. The Greece crisis. The Italy crisis. Monetary and market upheavals. The Occupy movement, and the questioning its early hours provoked in the public about fundamental and important issues. The future is coming at us faster than we could have imagined, faster than the capacity and adaptability of some to face it head on.

The message from all of these developments is that planning processes are important, and what’s more important is the individual and collaborative action required to advance them. Not action decades from today, but action now.

So that’s what I’m going to talk about today: a time to plan, and a time to act. We need to start taking the actions that will allow us to preserve and increase the jobs that produce our standard of living and support the services we need and rely on.

We need to start acting on job creation today.

When I used that phrase with a colleague —“We need to start acting on job creation today”— the response was, “You sound like a politician.” Well, I’m not a politician, that’s not my field, but if that statement signifies some common ground, then it does mean, to me, that there’s a greater opportunity for collaboration. And through the Port 2050 experience, and our collective experience of recent events around the world — there is ample evidence that all of us need to act together to succeed in leadership.

The 2050 initiative showed us that whether it's a short- and mid-term increase in exporting our oil and gas and a long-term move away from hydro-carbon fuels, or the effects of climate change, or a restructuring of global trade and international markets, or the inevitable and necessary growth of our own population here in Canada, change will always wait outside our door.

We know that the frightening 'Missed the Boat' and 'Local Fortress' scenarios will be realized if we don't collaborate within the Gateway supply chain.

Given the velocity and implications of situations like Greece and Italy, 'The Great Transition' scenario doesn't seem so futuristic at all. The triggers may be more economic and societal, rather than the climate change and environmental triggers we perhaps imagined when preparing the 2050 scenarios. But the effect is the same, and it seems like it's already beginning. I think it makes some feel that change is coming so fast and so hard that maybe we can't cope with it. We feel powerless. Helpless.

Yet we are positioned to emerge through this rough and risky period as a global success that sees us institutionalize a triple-bottom-line involving the economy, the environment, and the services that sustain our society.

But Port 2050 isn't just about the Port and port communities. And, we can't do it alone. Neither can your business or your industry do it by yourselves. It will take all of us to drive a collaborative effort, and ensure that we have the leadership that has the will to turn that collaboration into the action and the results needed to meet these challenges.

How we meet change will determine if all of us in this room, our neighbours, the people of this region, this province, this country, and the next generation, will prosper. Or not. Success is not guaranteed to any one of us. As the Port 2050 process made clear to us, there is no certainty.

It also demonstrated that the chances for success and prosperity — yours, mine, all of ours — are dramatically increased when the job generators face the future together and take the action necessary that gives meaning to the preparations.

Why? Because, in lean times and in good times, people want to work.

They want to work, and see their children work to build their own bright futures.

And we need to do what's required so they can.

We are the businesses and industries that create the jobs people need. We're not politicians, but we can drive the job creation that must be the core of any political agenda.

Here in the Lower Mainland and in BC, we owe so much of what we have today to the simple fact that it was here that a transcontinental railway reached tidewater. First in Port Moody, then Vancouver, the Port allowed trade and commerce to flourish. Today, Port Metro Vancouver has become Canada's most important asset in the growth and prosperity of our Pacific Gateway, a driving force in delivering and leveraging supply chain value for industry, communities, and our nation.

The most diversified port in North America: with facilities and operations in sixteen host communities, with benefits that flow to dozens of other communities right across the country, through indirect links and port-related jobs.

This port — built by people in this room, built by our neighbours, and built by those who came before us — is Canada's largest and busiest, trading \$75 billion in goods annually. It's an essential component of our national economic and social fabric, handling and shipping what we manufacture, what we mine, what we harvest, and what we need.

Through it, working Canadians — here and across the Western provinces — export wood, grains, coal, sulphur, potash, oil and gas, and other resources to more than 160 trading economies around the world, economies that know in an instant whether we're up to the challenge or slipping behind our competitors. Through the Port, we import the goods and consumer products from the Asia-Pacific region that we depend on locally, across Canada, and in communities across North America.

But what we export and import today — and from where we export it and import it— will change in the coming years. Markets and commodities and consumer goods will rise and fall and change — and we have to prepare for that. But just how do you prepare for chance and change when what you're preparing for is, at this point, almost by definition, either unshaped or unknown? We discovered, through the Port 2050 visioning initiative, that you do it by putting in place that which gives you the ability to adapt to change. You tackle the hard problems and you put in place the policies and programs and people that will allow — to the greatest extent possible — the flexibility to deal with change in external circumstances that also allows us the greatest chance of success in adapting to it.

Do we need to do this? It's certainly not an easy task. But Greece and Italy tell us that if we don't, then we face a bleak future.

Not so long ago, some might have answered that question by talking about the need to preserve our size, our rank, our reach, our prestige, or our prominence. I've just spoken about the Port in the same way. But increasingly, with so much global economic uncertainty and turmoil, I find it more important and fundamentally helpful to answer the 'why' question this way: 129,000 jobs.

That's 129,000 jobs in the Port's supply chain alone. There are tens of thousands — hundreds of thousands — more jobs, in the heart of communities throughout our nation, that depend on the Port to get their goods to market or bring their goods from overseas.

You'll know the number of jobs your business or industry generates. But for the Port, those hundreds of thousands of jobs are why we need to re-examine current policies and programs that have a bearing on whether we can preserve and increase those jobs.

Why we need to take action when policies of governments or agencies threaten existing jobs and impede the creation of new ones.

And why we need to be unafraid to replace policies and programs outright, if doing so allows us the flexibility to deal with change, and adapt.

At a time when markets reel because the United States creates only 80,000 jobs in a month, hundreds of thousands of jobs in Canada depend on this Port. But what's more important than the jobs, is who those people are.

It's the family in Delta, who depend on employment in a company that maintains port cranes.

The family on the North Shore who depend on employment as an engineer designing new machinery to load grain.

The family in Richmond, who depend on a firm that produces and maintains software for a trading and shipping company.

The family in Surrey, who operate a container truck that services port facilities.

The family in an Interior First Nations community working for a mining operation that has a contract to produce and deliver its commodity to a South Korean manufacturer.

The family in the Kootenays who depend on employment as an accountant for a coal company that ships to Japan.

It means that for people and families across Western Canada, who want to make a go of it in their community, everything we do here to help the Port in this community — or that we fail to take on if it's threatening the Port or limiting its future — everything counts. And counts enormously.

It means that an efficient and competitive port, with an efficient and competitive supply chain, represents the family in the Alberta oil patch, who needs to get that critical commodity to China.

It includes the families in Saskatchewan and Manitoba who grow grains and crops and depend on economical and timely shipping to global markets.

Beyond Western Canada, it includes the family in Montreal or Newfoundland that sells shoes made in Vietnam, or installs air conditioners manufactured in and imported from Qingdao.

Those jobs depend on this Port and this Gateway, jobs that provide the revenue that municipalities, provinces and the federal government need to provide the services everyone requires. All of those jobs depend on a competitive and efficient supply chain that may begin or end in towns and cities across the land, but ultimately depend on the jobs and the services that we've created here.

How do we get ready for change, big and small, and how do we protect and grow jobs, when we don't yet know the effects of change? In our case, we began by talking. And through that, we quickly learned that we need to collaborate, to be fearless in our discussions, and be willing to take action.

You may already know what is required to handle change in your world, about what your businesses and industries need to prosper in the future. You may already know what your neighbours think is required in their world. About what your municipalities, your province, your country will need to be flexible and able to deal with situations, structures, obstacles and approaches that threaten our jobs, our economy, our services, our environment, our society.

While each of you will have a response that differs from that of your neighbour, I can tell you — having gone through our Port 2050 visioning process — that I think you may be surprised at what we can agree and work on together.

What sorts of things need to be examined? Each of you will likely have an idea of what's important. And so does the Port.

Certainly, we think there has to be a cooperative process with federal, provincial, and municipal governments, where everyone is able to express their hopes along with their fears, in a respectful way, but where all can find input into a process that ultimately allows what we make, what we mine, what we harvest, and what we need to have efficient access to the markets that will buy them. That's how we'll ensure those thousands of jobs, and more of them in the future.

But we need to be bold, too. We need to be fearless, taking on issues and forging linkages that preference or easy practice have put off limits in the past. And before they can be accepted, or rejected, they need to be openly and honestly discussed.

For example, some have suggested that the time has arrived for a single West Coast Port. One that ensures BC ports aren't competing with one another at each other's expense, but are, instead, working together to compete against other ports in other countries that want the jobs and the economic benefits that our ports have won through hard work and effort.

Others might suggest that it's time to seriously re-think land-use planning, so that the facilities and infrastructure required by our own inevitable population growth and a changing world will be accommodated without sudden or unexpected impact. Perhaps it's not just an Agricultural Land Reserve that's needed in British Columbia, but a Jobs Land Reserve. A reserve where land that is critical to the jobs we have, and the new jobs that we will require over the next 30 to 40 years, allows them to grow and flourish.

Others would go further still. These voices might suggest that it's right to bring innovation and leadership to bear on Port land-use decisions — to better address the threat to job preservation and growth arising from multiple, expensive and separate municipal engagement and decision-making processes — to ensure that the next generation in Delta, the North Shore, Richmond, Surrey and throughout the Lower Mainland have the chance to secure their future through good jobs, with good paycheques, made possible by a Gateway that has prospered through integrated and affordable municipal decision-making, and streamlined and efficient engagement, on how the Port uses its lands.

All of us in this room — our businesses, our industries, our business groups like the Vancouver Board of Trade and our chambers of commerce — need to think fast and hard about these changes. In recent years, there have been some spectacular failures of leadership and institutions around the world. Some have lost hope as a result, and others are losing it. Cynicism and doubt are building about what can be done, or if anything can be done at all.

Never has there been a greater need for those who generate jobs to make their voices heard on what's required to counter this cynicism and this despair: the preservation of jobs and the creation of new ones. We need to keep those 129,000 Port jobs, and the hundreds of thousands of other jobs the Gateway supply chain supports, and we'll need to create more of them for the next generation, and the one after that.

Yes, there will be voices that decry such an effort, or discourage its effectiveness. There always are. Perhaps Greece and Italy offer us an example of what happens when those who decry prevail. Politics, too, will always continue to factor in. But there is common ground on that front, as well, with recognition the effort must be about growing and preserving and creating the jobs that BC needs to ensure the jobs that Canada needs can be created, about creating the wealth that we need to support the social services we require. Political parties may have differing views on many things, but they fundamentally agree that a healthy economy, with good jobs and good paycheques, is absolutely necessary to support what a government needs to do, or wants to do.

The key, though, is us. The Port, our Gateway partners, the Board of Trade, all of us need to step up. And we need to do it now. When the global economy goes from being a media phrase to something that threatens our jobs or our retirements or the services we receive from our governments, then it's suddenly very personal. And unsettling. Hope can get lost. And when hope gets lost, fear takes hold. Fear that our future will be bleak. Fear that our hopes and dreams are dashed. Fear that what we've worked for will be lost.

But Port 2050 tells us that leadership and action trump those fears. And because so many people feel they are losing hope, we must lead like never before. It's up to us to identify the roads to job preservation and creation and the economic prosperity and the government services and the environmental sustainability that job creation makes possible. It's up to us to face what keeps some of us apart and to deal directly with what's hindering job creation. I believe there is an important role to be played by our business, and yours, that will gain us the ability to face change in the future with confidence instead of pessimism or fear.

The Port, of course, faces its own threats. Recently we've seen the U.S. Federal Maritime Commission open an inquiry into Canadian and Mexican ports. U.S. politicians say we're "diverting" U.S. traffic from their ports to ours. They fail to mention that this traffic, and where cargo enters or leaves North America, is the choice of shippers who seek out the most competitive and efficient Gateway through which to ship.

There are some U.S. voices of reason, however. They've called the U.S. action nonsense, and suggest that the U.S. should focus on domestic impediments to U.S. port competitiveness, not external ones. These same voices call what we've done in this country a best practice that the U.S. can learn from.

It's always nice to hear Americans sing Canada's praises for our people and our practices, and there's been much of that these past few years. This latest bit of U.S. political chicanery seems born of fear that their economy, their way of life, is slipping away. What's wrong in America cannot be fixed by attacking what's right in Canada, but that's what happens when jobs are lost, job creation sputters, and fear takes hold.

I raise this example because whether it's this threat to us, or a threat to your business, we need to work together and stand together to put down such distractions. Because we've done good things. We've come through the early part of the global meltdown in better shape than most. And we need to stand together, to work together, and make the changes required in order to succeed whatever else the world has in store.

I urge you to consider what you think needs to be done to ensure that our futures are bright, to keep and create the jobs and the paycheques and the services we depend on, in a world where the

only constant is more change. I encourage you to join together, to put your issues and ideas on the table, and fearlessly discuss them. I challenge each of us to step up and lead. Because it is our industry and yours that will create the jobs and make hope, reality.

It is jobs, and all they provide, that will get us to the kind of future we want.

The key to our Anticipated Future, is to act.

We need to do it, and we need to do it now.

People want to work.

And we all want a bright, vibrant, future.

Let's work together to create those jobs, and shape our future, for the port, for our communities, our Province, our Nation.

For all of us.

Thank you.