

Gateway Act to Improve Asia-Pacific ties.

Richmond Chamber of Commerce plans to help contribute expertise to new trade strategy council.

A commitment of federal money to establish a more unified, strategic approach to developing improved business ties with Asian markets should provide a boost for local and regional economies, and Richmond's business community is hoping to play a role in guiding its direction.

Announced Thursday in Ottawa by federal transport minister Jean Lapierre, the Pacific Gateway Act will supply up to \$35 million over a five-year period to establish a body called Canada's Pacific Gateway Council which will be tasked with developing advice and analysis to maximize the effectiveness of the Pacific Gateway and its contribution to Canada's prosperity.

According to a press release from transport Canada, the act establishes Canada's Pacific Gateway Council to "promote consensus among a full range of private and public sector stakeholders and to advise decision makers on priorities for developing the Pacific Gateway."

Based in the Lower Mainland, the council will be comprised of governor in council appointees reflecting various areas of expertise, such as transportation, business, international trade, security, labour and municipalities.



"Richmond is already well-known for its multitude of business and cultural connections in the Asia-Pacific region, and formalized focus to improve those links is welcomed," said Craig Jones, Executive Director of the Richmond Chamber of Commerce.

"What this does is formally recognize that there is a substantial opportunity for trade with Asia-Pacific countries that is a two-way street," Jones said. "It also says that we are open for business."

Jones added that the local wealth of businesses with experience with offshore trade, plus the community's significant ethnic ties to the region positions Richmond to play a major role on the new council. "And we will be lobbying to get representation on not only on the new council, but two other very important sub-committees one of which focuses on transportation," Jones said. "We will be letting them know that the Chamber has a very active transportation committee that would have a lot to offer."

Being able to contribute expertise in areas affecting road, sea and air links will be vital in furthering business opportunities.

"One of the key initiatives of the government promoting the Asia-Pacific region will be the development of a transportation infrastructure that can handle that expected increase in trade," Jones said. "If we don't deal with the bottlenecks we have now, the business could easily go elsewhere south of the border like Seattle, Portland and San Francisco.

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