In the November 1997 issue of Plan Canada, Alan Young summarized the 1997 CIP Conference session titled Plan Monitoring: Are we getting it right? The session included a general overview of monitoring and case studies of how Calgary and Greater Vancouver are approaching the challenges of plan monitoring.

A year later, the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) completed an annual report, while further developing various aspects of a monitoring program for the Livable Region Strategic Plan (LRSP). These efforts have answered some questions, raised others, and helped us learn about the possibilities and pitfalls of plan monitoring.

Monitoring the Livable Region Strategic Plan (LRSP)
The LRSP is the regional growth strategy for Greater Vancouver, addressing the challenges of growth management, transportation, and environmental protection in one of Canada’s major metropolitan regions. Provincial legislation requires a monitoring program that tracks progress on implementation efforts as well as progress toward the goals of the LRSP. This legislation also requires annual progress reports.

Our initial scan of current practices in plan monitoring suggested that we would need both a set of indicators to measure regional progress and a process for their interpretation. We reviewed over 1,000 potential indicators and identified approximately 10 short-term and 20 long-term measures. Example short-term and long-term indicators are provided in Table 1. Feasibility testing of various indicators is in process.

Also underway is a review of plan monitoring processes that focuses primarily on approaches to public involvement. In Greater Vancouver, metropolitan growth management is a consensus-based, inter-municipal activity. Numerous technical intergovernmental advisory committees exist and can assist in interpreting indicators in relation to the LRSP. However, current “best practices” suggest that interpreting indicators is more than a technical exercise, and public input is needed to provide wider validation. Resolving this tension will be a significant challenge.

The first annual report of the Livable Region Strategic Plan
The first annual report of the LRSP (GVRD Strategic Planning Department, 1997) was completed in September 1997. The core message was that the region had made considerable progress toward the goals of protecting the Green Zone and achieving a compact metropolitan region, but was lagging in the area of increasing transportation choice. Drawing on early Census results and recently completed transportation surveys, the annual report illustrated regional trends and achievements in relation to goals and targets in the LRSP.

The Green Zone, comprising the region’s key natural assets and forming the urban containment line for the region, was strengthened by successfully securing conservation and recreation areas, the strong performance of the agricultural economy, and an increasingly solid base of supportive plans and policies. The LRSP’s growth management strategies for achieving a more compact metropolitan region and more complete communities were also strongly supported by actual achievements. Between 1991 and 1996, 67% of the GVRD’s total population growth was accommodated within the LRSP’s Growth Concentration Area, which was highly consistent with the LRSP’s target of 70%. This was achieved even under the more challenging circum-
stances posed by more rapid overall growth than anticipated when the LRSP was prepared.

In the LRSP, increasing transportation choice relies on concentrated efforts to improve transit service to provide a competitive alternative to the private automobile. The LRSP annual report, however, noted that car travel had grown substantially between 1985 and 1996, and transit mode share had plateaued in the peak hour. Perhaps of most concern, transit expansion plans were lagging behind what was required to support the LRSP. The LRSP assumed three rapid transit lines and a fleet of approximately 1,900 buses by 2006; approved transit plans proposed two rapid transit lines and a fleet of 1,200 buses.

Supporting decision-making
The core messages of the LRSP's first annual report—growth was being managed consistently with the LRSP, but transportation supply was lagging—became available at a critical time in negotiations between the local and provincial governments concerning realignment of responsibilities for transportation governance and finance. After the LRSP was adopted in 1996, the GVRD Board and the Provincial government agreed to review the current arrangements, given the strategic importance of increasing transportation choices in achieving the LRSP.

A proposal to establish a regional transportation authority was presented in the fall of 1997. At the technical and political meetings to discuss the proposal, the LRSP annual report underlined the importance of being able to effectively address transportation challenges and more closely link land use and transportation decisions. The key messages were also reinforced by sustained media coverage of transportation problems in the region. Public surveys reported that transportation problems were the number one issue on people's minds.

In November 1997, the GVRD Board gave preliminary approval to the proposal to establish the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority (GVTA). After consulting with member municipalities and the public, the Board endorsed the proposal at the end of February 1998. Legislation establishing the GVTA was proclaimed in August 1988.

What have we learned so far?
Based on the LRSP experience to date, monitoring reports can be effective in supporting decision-making if they:

- are straightforward and easy to read;
- incorporate many graphics;
- focus on a few core findings; and
- are communicated effectively and broadly through mechanisms that include existing technical, advisory, and political committees as well as the media.

Monitoring programs can have a range of products directed toward different purposes and audiences and containing different information. While our monitoring program and reports will strive for consistency in indicators over time, our annual reports will be more flexible in the indicators included and the issues highlighted.

The LRSP's first annual report had the benefit of including data from a national Census and several recent major transportation surveys. This will likely not be the case in future years. We will need to be cautious when interpreting annually based information, such as housing starts, given the long-range focus of the LRSP. Data interpretation techniques such as moving averages may be helpful in "smoothing" dramatic shifts.

The LRSP monitoring program is being designed to maximize the use of currently available or easily obtainable information. We are looking beyond the usual data sources, however, before giving up on a number of potential indicators. Partnerships may be one way to fill data gaps affordably and effectively.

Finally, we are learning as we go. Not
Table 1. Selected indicators for monitoring the *Livable Region Strategic Plan* (LRSP).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LRSP policy area</th>
<th>Selected annual indicators</th>
<th>Selected five-year indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protect the Green Zone</td>
<td>• New housing in the Green Zone</td>
<td>• Gross farm receipts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Change in size of the Green Zone</td>
<td>• Wetlands under protected status</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Area proposed for exclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build complete communities</td>
<td>• Proportion of new housing near transit</td>
<td>• Proportion of region’s jobs near major centres</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Proportion of new housing in major centres</td>
<td>• Jobs-housing ratio in the region’s communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Achieve a compact</td>
<td>• Share of housing inside the Growth Concentration Area</td>
<td>• Population in the GVRD and the Growth Concentration Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metropolitan region</td>
<td>• Nonresidential building permit values inside the Growth Concentration Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase transportation</td>
<td>• Vehicle kilometres travelled (VkmT)</td>
<td>• Transit mode share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choice</td>
<td>• Transit ridership</td>
<td>• Commuter trip length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participation in ride-sharing program</td>
<td>• Growth in transit capacity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vehicle ownership per household</td>
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Having a finalized monitoring program has allowed us to use the annual report process to reflect on the usefulness of various recommended indicators. We avoided committing to an expensive monitoring program at the beginning; instead, we are building an appropriate monitoring program in phases.

**Notes**

1. The GVRD is a partnership of 20 municipalities and two electoral areas, providing region-wide essential services such as regional growth management planning, liquid and solid waste management planning and coordination, air quality management, regional parks, and drinking water supply. The GVRD is led by a board of directors consisting of elected officials appointed from member municipal councils and elected representatives from the electoral areas.

2. For a copy of the *Livable Region Strategic Plan*, contact the GVRD Policy and Planning Department, 4330 Kingsway, Burnaby, BC, V5H 4G8, or call (604) 432-6375, or visit the World Wide Web site at [http://www.gvr.d.bc.ca](http://www.gvr.d.bc.ca).

3. Criteria used to evaluate potential indicators included relevance, affordability, responsiveness, and ability to communicate to nonspecialized audiences.

4. The Lower Mainland Nature Legacy Program, a broad-based investment partnership, pooled about $60 million and secured over 55,000 hectares of Green Zone in 1995.

5. The agricultural economy grew rapidly between 1990 and 1995. Gross farm receipts increased by about 44%, significantly outpacing growth in the GDP.

6. The total number of trips across major screenlines around the core metropolitan area increased by an average of 33%. Rapid growth in total vehicle kilometres travelled (VkmT) in the morning peak hour between 1992 and 1996 suggested that the LRSP target of 4.8 million VkmT in the year 2021 could be exceeded as early as the year 2013.

7. Studies also indicated that transit mode share had grown in off-peak times and in corridors with improved transit, suggesting considerable latent demand.

**References**


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