

Coast Comm Taking the high-in-

By Belinda Bruce

IF THE 1960S ANIMATED TV show *The Jetsons* was any indication of how people would be commuting to work in the twenty-first century, we would all be in flying cars with transparent tops along high-altitude highways.

While the personal “space car” has yet to hit the market, even in the futuristic vision of *The Jetsons*, space-age commuters like George Jetson experienced traffic congestion and some level of road rage.

Commuting to work is a necessity of modern life and a significant source of stress for Canadian workers. The average Canadian spends 70 minutes a day or nearly 12 full days a year getting to work and returning home, according to a Statistics Canada study released in 2000. That’s a lot of time stuck on a gridlocked highway or a crammed commuter bus or train, time that could be better spent with family and friends, getting work done or pursuing other interests.

At one time or another we have all been in a traffic jam, no doubt feeling helpless and a bit rankled by the amount of time wasted sitting in

our car. The *New England Journal of Medicine* found that nearly one out of every twelve heart attacks is linked to being stuck in traffic, and that you nearly triple your risk of having an attack when you get in a car. Commuting is also associated with hostility, high blood pressure and poor cognitive performance.

And the amount of time spent commuting is rising. An increasing amount of Canadians are moving to suburban and bedroom communities where housing is more affordable and quality of life is better than in large cities, and they are travelling greater distances to get to work than in the past. The phenomenon of the “extreme commute” is becoming more common; some people travel as many as six hours per day getting to and from work.

Opting for the good life

British Columbia’s coastal network of habitable islands is one of its greatest assets but also the source of a potentially complex commuting

situation for those who work at a considerable distance from their home. However, commuting between our desired place of residence and place of work does not have to be a source of stress.

When it comes to lifestyle choices, the West Coast is unique in Canada in that it offers superlative choices in both city and small-community life. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit’s livability survey in 2005, Vancouver is ranked as the best place in the world to live. The EIU study assessed nearly 40 indicators in five broad categories—stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education and infrastructure. With a temperate climate, the proximity of the Coast Mountain Range and a booming economy, Vancouver’s standard of living surpassed 126 cities around the globe.

With its rugged beauty, mild climate and friendly social environment, Victoria also ranks among the top 10 cities in the world to live. As the capital city of British Columbia, with a population of just over 300,000, it offers dual rewards: the diversity of a larger hub and the convenience of a smaller one.

The attraction of “island life” in B.C. draws

Commuters the-sky road



many people to live in small coastal communities such as Nanaimo, Ladysmith and Parksville on Vancouver Island. Willing to trade some of the advantages of large urban centres for affordable living and small-town life, the number of people 'going coastal' is expected to increase.

Whether commuting from Vancouver Island to the Lower Mainland or vice versa, commuters have two main options: a combo of walking/public transit/driving/ferry; or flying.

As of the 2001 Census, the most recent data available, it is estimated that close to 1,000 people commute regularly from Vancouver Island to the Lower Mainland and about 425 commute in the opposite direction. The primary mode of transportation for those commuters is car and driver, with links by ferry, which means a long commute. Car-based commutes include other cost factors as well: vehicle gas, insurance, maintenance and repairs.

Even if not commuting on a daily basis, stress and boredom are factors in enduring a lengthy commute.

Andrew Gray, a sessional instructor in the Creative Writing Department at the University

of British Columbia in Vancouver, moved to Nanaimo, B.C. on Vancouver Island three years ago. With two small children, a modest income and extended family on the Island, Gray felt the move made economic and social sense for him and his family. Gray commutes from Nanaimo to the university once a week. With the drive to the ferry terminal, a 95-minute ferry journey and drive from Horseshoe Bay to the university, Gray's door-to-door commute clocks in at 3.5 hours. It makes for a tiring day.

"There are people I see on the ferry who commute five days a week," says Gray in disbelief. "I fly sometimes as it's awfully fast and convenient."

When a flight between Vancouver and Nanaimo takes only 20 minutes, it's easy to see why people would spend a bit more than the cost of the ferry to get to work in considerably less time. The Victoria-Vancouver route takes only 25 to 35 minutes by air.

Travellers can connect at three terminal locations on the Lower Mainland: Coal Harbour at the lip of downtown Vancouver, the Richmond terminal and the newest terminal at



The choice is clear! There are three reasons: speed of the trip, convenience and service.

Christine Lee, Vancouver Resident

Langley Airport. On the Island, Harbour Air has seaplane bases at Victoria, Nanaimo and Maple Bay. Victoria's Inner Harbor seaplane base is one of Canada's top-five busiest harbours, with more than 35,000 takeoffs and landings each year. People seem to be catching on to the advantages of flying as the seaplane terminal experienced a 10.2 percent increase in passenger volumes in 2005.

While some people may view the air commute as a luxury, others value the benefits of flying—spending more time with family, getting more sleep, making morning meetings quickly and easily, getting home in time for dinner, to name a few—enough that it makes the extra dollars spent worth it in the long run.

Commuter profiles

Bob Hancox, 51, an executive coach, organizational development consultant and owner of Clarity Development Consulting, has been commuting by air for 11 years. He lives in Nanaimo, B.C. and flies to downtown Vancouver usually twice a week. He cites time saved and convenience of terminal locations in both cities as reasons why he flies rather than using other modes of transportation.

"And I really enjoy the folks at Harbour Air. From the counter staff in Nanaimo to getting a customized iced latte from Laura at the end of the day for the trip home from Coal Harbour, I find them to be extremely helpful and friendly." Committed to living in Nanaimo for the foreseeable future, Harbour Air is part of Hancox's long-term plans. He is particularly impressed with the 'little extras.' "They instituted small things like a shuttle, umbrellas and complimentary coffee, muffins and newspapers, as part of their continuing effort to be more customer-focused."

For Vancouver resident **Christine Lee**, 36, who commutes once a week to Victoria



It takes me
forty minutes,
building to
building. I love
floatplanes.

Dale Gann
Vice President
Vancouver Island Technology Park

by plane for her job as a business analyst for a software consulting firm, there's no other option. "You're asking a former air cadet to choose between a plane and a ship. The choice is clear! Seriously, there are three reasons: speed of the trip, convenience and service. By flying, I can get to our Victoria office in time for an 8:30 a.m. meeting, work all day, and be home for dinner at 6:30 p.m. All I have to do is get to the downtown or Richmond terminals 20 minutes before my flight. The service provided by the Harbour Air staff makes the commute fun and easy."

After four years of commuting, Lee is still awestruck by the scenery. "My favorites are the late flights home from Victoria in the summer. With the water smooth as glass and the sunset colouring the sky, I look down at the Gulf Islands and across to the city lights turning on in Vancouver. It's gorgeous, and I always feel very fortunate to be commuting by plane."

Dale Gann, Vice President of Vancouver Island Technology Park, says that he and his colleagues in the Victoria high-tech community commute from Victoria regularly for business. "It takes me forty minutes, building to building. I love floatplanes." For travels outside of the Lower Mainland, Gann likes the convenience of landing at the Richmond terminal and taking a cab to nearby Vancouver International Airport.

Dave Koot, 40, commutes between his residence in Nanaimo and Vancouver once

or twice a week on average, for his job as a leadership coach for Tekara Organizational Effectiveness Inc. Besides the advantages of speed, convenience and "great customer service" provided by Harbour Air, commuting by seaplane, says Koot, "provides me with a unique perspective on the pristine beauty of B.C.'s coast. It never gets old." With relatives in Richmond, B.C., Koot often takes trips with his family, who love flying on Harbour Air. "Recently I purchased three Harbour Air bears for my three daughters. They named them Blueberry, Pilot and Art—affectionately, after pilot Art Booth."

Alix Campbell, 61, a justice system consultant, has been commuting between Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland for 21 years. In 1983, when she first began commuting by plane, she lived in Vancouver and commuted to the Island almost weekly. She has lived in Victoria since 1986 and commuted exclusively by seaplane on a weekly basis for the past 16 years. Because most of her work takes place in Vancouver's downtown core, landing in Coal Harbour with its close proximity to downtown is extremely convenient. She says the ease of commuting made her decision to relocate permanently to Victoria an easier one.

Harbour Air is Campbell's airline of choice. "I am constantly impressed by Harbour Air's undiminished focus on client satisfaction. This is particularly evident in the late spring and summer when they are catering to two quite divergent groups of clients: commuters and tourists. It is easy to observe how Harbour Air contributes to the tourist experience—for example, circling over a pod of Orcas—without prejudicing the needs of commuters who want to get home."

And tourist season actually drives home the wonder of living on the West Coast, says Alix. "All of us commuters are reminded by tourist passengers of just what a stunningly beautiful place we live in and what a great opportunity a Harbour Air flight is, whatever its purpose, to revel in our gorgeous home." ❧