

# Attracting Students to the Asia Pacific Gateway



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For the Asia Pacific Gateway Skills Table

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## **Introduction**

Over the last four decades trade between Canada and Asia has increased dramatically. This has been accompanied by an increase in the demand for labour to ensure that Canada's transportation infrastructure is able to operate at capacity. The Canadian Construction Sector Council estimates that a further 29,000 workers will be needed in B.C. by 2018, and many more will be required to meet the specific transportation demands of the Asia Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative (APGCI). Finding those new workers has proven difficult, and many employers and labour groups are becoming concerned for the future of the industry and the region.

The easiest and most cost effective way to find these needed employees is to look to the young people of British Columbia, specifically high school students. Students are just coming into the labour market with, in many cases, no firm idea of what they would like to do. Currently youth interest in transportation is low, but this is not insurmountable.

In this report, we examine why young people are not drawn to careers in transportation and related trades and propose solutions to this problem. It is our goal to explore the nature of the problem facing employers and labour groups, to explain its causes, and to propose workable solutions so that the region's labour needs can be met.

To this end we have identified the parties who exert influence over student career decisions and made certain to speak with representatives of various stakeholder groups. Our information was gained through the use of other studies, surveys, and interviews.

Because the APGCI is so large and encompasses so many different industries, we have generalised it as “the transportation industry” and have divided our research between the transportation industry in general, and trades related to the transportation industry. We made this distinction because trades are a very large part of the operation of the industry and are different from most other job descriptions as they require special schooling and licensing, while many other positions in transportation, like accountants and project managers, do not necessarily train specifically for careers in transportation.

It is our intention that the conclusions and recommendations presented in this report are general enough to be used by any employer in the industry. Some of our suggestions involve the role of the Asia Pacific Gateway Skills Table (APGST), while others are intended to be passed onto employers, industry groups, and labour organisations.

## Literature Review

### Youth employment attitudes, trends, and influences

Understanding what motivates youth to pursue a career is a fundamental part of our project. Though occasionally skewing towards minority issues, most of the present research aligns very clearly with our project by examining the relationship between students, parents, and teachers. By looking at the literature, we are hoping to gain an understanding of the “influence points” through which young people can be reached most effectively.

Insight into why young people choose the careers they do is crucial to developing a strategy that Gateway organisations can use to improve recruitment. Much research has been done in this area, and the general picture is that young people making personal employment decisions are very open to suggestions from a number of sources, but the two most commonly cited are family and school, qualified by economic status and ethnic group. This is stated explicitly by Palos and Drobot (2010) who studied influencers of career decisions in youth.

As a point of career influence, family was by far the most popular area. Whiston and Keller (2004) identify the family as being the crucial pivot for youth career decision making, suggesting that any strategy for attracting young people should also involve their parents or guardians to be effective. This point is supported by evidence from Otto (2000) who found the trend of parental evidence to exist across gender and class as well as race.

The second point of career influence appears to be schools and neighbourhoods. Although the research is more scarce and the conclusions less unanimous, most studies that looked at youth career influences in general mention the role of school and similar institutions. For example, Fisher and Griggs

(1994) recognise the dual role of parents and school in shaping career aspirations in young people. The role of schools is emphasised by Bauder (2001) who demonstrates the powerful role of schools by comparing the results of two different methods of career counselling.

This would seem to suggest that in order to successfully reach young people, employers must raise their profiles with both parents and schools. Our research will look deeper into this relationship and attempt to uncover what is currently being said about careers in Gateway industries and to gain insights about how best to attract students to these careers.

The literature on self-direction or educational goals related to careers is even sparser, but Rojewski and Kim (1995) argue that young people going to college are less driven by occupational aspirations than by educational ones and maintain relatively stable ideas of their career goals while those who do not plan on attending post-secondary are more volatile in their plans. In both cases, however, their ideas of occupational prestige are forged by early adolescence and are resistant to change. This could potentially have an impact on attempts to expand the labour pool for Gateway careers and suggests that the perceived prestige of different careers in Gateway trades should be a central area of examination throughout our study.

### **Careers in Trades**

It is apparent that the careers young people enter into are determined in large part by the influence of parents and teachers, so our next task is to determine what that means for the employers represented by the APGST. It is good to know how attitudes are formed, but before any work can be done those attitudes must be dissected and understood.

There is very little research on parents' or teachers' perceptions of careers in the relevant industries and the Greater Vancouver Gateway Council's study on awareness of the Gateway project (2009) is, as far as can be determined, the only such study of its kind. Unfortunately, no firm conclusions

are drawn about the attractiveness of working under the Gateway umbrella versus working on an isolated trade, which is certainly an area of interest.

The problem itself is outlined in *Skilled Trades: A Career You Can Build On* (2004) and what is concluded in this area suggests that young people are not attracted to trades for reasons commonly thought of as conventional, such as perceived low social standing or parental pressure to attend university as the first option. This is explained further in the *Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Awareness Perception Study* by Taylor (2005). The author argues that the most desirable benefits of working in trades are not things like “flexibility, job mobility, and constant upskilling” but are more to do with their perception as being “manly” and the perceived stability of skilled employment. This is only one study but it suggests that unconventional forces may be at work both in attracting and repelling young people from Gateway careers. It is a main goal of this study to understand these influences and devise solutions to either utilise or redirect them.

When answering the question of how attractive working in trades is to young people, their perceptions of the workplace should be considered. The study, *What Employers Look For*, by Taylor (2005) outlines what young people are looking for in a workplace and, possibly, what aspects of a career in trades should be emphasised when marketing to young people. If this project is to be successful it will require the willingness of employers to sell themselves to potential employees by first learning what those employees are looking for and then promoting those aspects of their workplace that most closely reflect those values.

### **Similar Cases**

Understanding how a similar problem has been solved is less for the construction of our survey than for the conclusions and avenues of further inquiry. Most of the cases written about are not specifically about instances directly related to this project, but they can still be used to infer strategy and

best practice. What are present are studies of the effectiveness of youth training programs. While these do not enter our scope, they do present some general ideas for how a youth recruitment program could be run.

When looking at the cases, it is clear that the only constant for success in youth programs is a willingness to constantly change and adapt. Levin and Fennan (2007) found that all successful youth programs were staffed by engaged and energetic people who were willing to tinker with their methods. Additionally, Walker and Pearce (2005) found that when designing and running a program, it mattered less about whether it was youth run or adult run than if it were flexibly run.

This suggests that in designing any program to attract youth there is no universal solution and no alternative to careful planning and thoughtful implementation.

## **Methods**

We approached this study as a labour market research problem. In this way we wanted to understand as many of the stakeholders as possible and get a detailed understanding of their positions. To do this we wanted to use a combination of in-depth interviews [Appendix 1] and survey questions [Appendix 2], as this would get us the most viewpoints with the greatest detail. Unfortunately, conditions were not favourable to the use of a survey, so we undertook to conduct more interviews to make up for any informational shortfalls.

## **Interviews**

In deciding who to talk to we attempted to contact as broad and representative a group as possible to ensure that our information was accurate in more than one sector and for more than one employer. Therefore, we met with employers, a labour organisation, an industry group, a tradesperson, teachers in three school districts, career counsellors, and male and female students in grades 10-12 in an attempt to bring as many of the parties together as possible.

## **Survey**

This report was undertaken to understand more about young people, and it was our desire to reach as many as possible. Therefore, we developed a short survey that could be administered by a teacher and would give us access to a large number of students. We contacted 5 schools in 3 districts and unfortunately were denied by all of them. We feel that this is fairly indicative of the challenges that employers will face talking to students if they are unable to first make personal connections or if they are unable to convince the school administration of the benefits to speaking to students in their classrooms.

## **Findings**

### **Employers, Labour Organisation, and Industry Groups**

Most people that we spoke with are experiencing a shortage of qualified applicants or are preparing for one by undertaking mitigation strategies like increased IT, centralisation of management, and use of alternative labour pools. There was an almost universal desire to speak to students about their industry, unfortunately coupled with universal uncertainty over how that could be accomplished. It was frequently suggested that the APGST or a similar organisation could work to bridge schools with employers.

The main symptoms of the shortage were an over-reliance on older workers, no succession plans, and sky-rocketing prices for labour in boom periods. It was occasionally suggested that the shortage was cyclical, but appeared to be worsening.

Some interviewees criticised both the school system for tailoring the curriculum to the needs of the university-attending minority and other employers for being hesitant to take on apprentices. In some part, they said, this was due to the project-based nature of the work that compelled small companies to lay off their staff between jobs, which would make getting hours as an apprentice difficult. One proposed solution to this is more union hiring halls that would assign apprentices where they were needed, even if it meant working with several different crews over the course of their training.

### **Schools**

The career counsellors and teachers that we spoke with were almost entirely positive about encouraging students to enter trades or to follow other non-university paths. Some of them expressed uncertainty at the attitudes of what they called, “older, more traditional teachers” who opposed promoting anything that wasn’t university, but it was generally felt that these were in the minority. They also reported that students were very interested in trades and the programs that were on offer were

almost always filled. New programs are continuing to be created in several districts, including one at Caribou Hill in Burnaby called Transition to Trades Training Foundation Program that allows about 45 students to try out six different trades in a year and has been fully attended for both years of its existence.

Information and resources vary greatly between regions. For example, teachers interviewed in the district of West Vancouver were very positive and supportive of careers in trades, but they reported having difficulty locating information and were unsure of where to even begin looking. Neither teacher had ever been approached by a representative of any APGCI industry employer, but both were open to the idea as a way to learn more. They said that what they needed from employers or organisations like the APGST was information containing simple step-by-step instructions that would clearly lay out how young people could enter a career and what that job would entail, but didn't know where such things could be found. Burnaby, on the other hand, appears to be a model for trades education and produces exactly such a pamphlet [Appendix 3]. It is evident that there is very little communication or information sharing across districts.

Most teachers and career counsellors were unfamiliar with the idea of working in transportation. The consensus was that they could look into it if individual students asked, but there was no information for it the way there was for trades, and there were very few relationships with employers. All the educators we spoke with expressed a willingness to have employers, labour representatives, and current employees of transportation companies speak to their classes, but said the information on how to do it was not there.

Many educators suggested a clearer web resource for students. We were told that in order to successfully promote a career in transportation, with or without a skill, a website that made getting involved easy would be an essential asset.

## **Parents**

While we didn't speak directly with parents, they were a constant feature of our conversations with all parties. The general feeling of most employers was that parents were generally opposed to any career that wasn't science or business and that this was a large obstacle to attracting the young trades people the transportation industry requires. Some teachers shared this sentiment, but many were more optimistic that we were in a period of cultural change and more parents were coming around to the idea of trades education.

Students almost always cited their parents in their top 3 influences, but most said that their parents would be supportive of anything they wanted to do. For this reason, many of our interviewees, both educators and employers, recommended that any information regarding transportation or trades be directed at least partially at parents.

## **Students**

This study is focussed on addressing the interests of students, and they provided some of the most alarming results. There was nearly 100% ignorance of what the transportation industry entailed, and no one we spoke with had any desire to investigate possible careers. This is worrying because, even if students are interested in becoming trades people, the industry will not benefit unless they apply those trades to transportation or construction in projects relevant to the APGCI.

Most students were unable to name more than a few jobs related to transportation, and almost all of those were some variation on bus and truck drivers. When asked if anybody had ever presented transportation as an option to them, all responded negatively.

They told us that their main sources of information for career research were the internet, their parents, career counsellors, and people who already worked in a field of interest. None had come across any information regarding a career in transportation from any of those sources.

The students we spoke with primarily wanted work that would be fulfilling and interesting to them. Money, they said, was important but generally secondary to enjoying their job. Several of them expressed an interest in working in a position that would allow them to make a difference, and all were clear that they wanted to know what their significance within the organisation was.

Most students were open-minded about careers in trades, several said that this was because they knew people in the ACE-IT program who were doing well. Particularly encouraging was the positivity of the young women we spoke with. None of them said that the male domination of these positions would deter them if they were interested. This sentiment matches with the small-but-growing number of female students enrolled in trades programs in Burnaby.

## **Conclusions**

Because the Gateway project is large with many aspects and different industries, there is not one central lesson which can be drawn from our data. Instead, we have tried to divide our results into two broad categories: those having to do with trades specifically and those having to do with transportation in general. We have approached the problem in this way because it is one of the only ways to make sense of the problems facing the labour needs of the APGCI as trades are the most distinct of any of the forms of employment we are considering, but are still related to the transportation industry. Many of our conclusions apply both to trades and transportation, but there are some distinctions.

We have used our research data to answer these main questions: is there a problem with the labour market, if so, what causes it, and are all the data negative.

Despite the relatively small sample sizes, this study has uncovered several distinct trends. These involve the nature and reality of the labour shortage, an assessment on the current level of inter-group communication, an examination of negative and positive trends related to APGCI industries (related to both skilled and non-skilled occupations), and an evaluation of the current marketing of Gateway careers. There is definitely a period of serious labour challenge facing all of the industries associated with the APGCI, but not all the news is bad as there are promising signs in some areas.

### **The Shortage**

Most of the employers, labour representatives, and industry group leaders we spoke with agree that we are entering a period of skilled labour shortages. It is unclear if this is being felt in other industries, but it is certainly a problem for those operating in the transportation sector.

Some stakeholders compare our current demographic position to the narrow edge of a wedge of skills shortages, which will only grow wider over time. Others take the view that the labour market operates like a sine-wave, with peaks and troughs due to fluctuating demand, cultural changes, and other competing employment opportunities. Even if this is correct and the labour supply is not permanently depressed, this fluctuating model represents a problem for the Gateway project, which requires a stable labour force.

It should be noted that this shortage is not being felt uniformly. Some industries and strategies lend themselves to avoiding feeling the effects of a skills shortage by lowering staff requirements or increasing employee retention. For example, Mr. Crook, director of maintenance at the Vancouver International Airport, had not felt a labour shortage. Mr. Crook told us that his department always had far more applications than jobs available and had never had trouble finding people to fill positions and has very low turnover. This is certainly true for his organisation, but it should not be taken as a dismissal of the industry-wide problem. Mr. Crook has been very successful in doing more with less by having his employees become certified in multiple trades so that smaller teams can tackle wider problems and his work is not project-based, so he never has to let them go as there is always work that needs to be done. This is a cost-effective solution that will likely allow him to maintain a stable workforce even as the availability of qualified workers oscillates, but not every employer will be able to insulate themselves in this way due to the nature of the more common project-based work, further highlighting the large differences between firms operating under the banner of transportation.

### **Information**

Because of the wide variety of positions required to make the transportation industry run, from carpenters to deck hands to accountants to drivers, one root cause does not appear to exist. Instead, we believe that there are several, interrelated causes that are hampering the industry. A possible shortage

of students interested in entering trades is certainly one problem, but focussing on it risks ignoring the larger difficulties facing the entire transportation industry.

By examining the way trades are promoted in various school districts, we have uncovered fairly positive results. Our research indicates that the cultural stigma attached to trades as “blue collar” work for “people who couldn’t get in to university” is losing some of its power as people realise that a university degree is not a necessary and sufficient condition to securing a good job. Some parents do still push their children towards university, but career counsellors and the students themselves have become much more open-minded to the idea that a career in trades can be a better option than university for some people.

The largest obstacle to enrolling more students in trades appears to be information. In West Vancouver we were told that there is a lot of latent interest in entering the trades, but students are unsure of how to do it because the necessary information is not provided to them. Burnaby, on the other hand, is a model for how trades education should be addressed across the lower mainland. They have many trades programs, including some designed to give students an overview of several trades, and they produce their own pamphlets for ACE-IT programs that answer all the questions students might have. Burnaby is evidence that, in order for a trades program to be successful, the information barrier must be overcome.

The transportation industry in general is facing a similar lack of information, but is, in many ways, worse off than trades. There is currently very little interaction between employers and schools and almost no information on careers in transportation available to career counsellors. The assumption seems to be that transportation is basic enough that everybody will be familiar with it, but our research shows that that is not the case. This is a problem for all related companies, including those that rely on skilled tradespeople, as once a student is enrolled in a trades program, the next challenge is to convince

them of staying in the region to work on transportation projects, rather than moving to another region or putting their skills to work on non-transportation projects.

Adding to the seriousness of this concern, some of the employers we spoke with did not think of themselves as working in transportation or as part of any larger project. Frank Crook, for example, considered his job to be that of maintenance coordinator and was surprised when we asked him about his role in transportation. It appears that even employers who we consider to be working in the field don't associate their work with the APGCI.

Our interviews indicate that the average student has never heard of the APGCI, never considered a career in transportation, and would not know where to start researching. When asked to name a possible job title related to transportation, some of the most popular answers were: bus driver, cab driver, and TransLink. These students almost uniformly indicated that they get most of their information from the internet, their parents, their peers, or their career centre, which suggests that transportation is failing to promote itself in any relevant medium. This represents a serious problem for the future of the transportation industry and the APGCI because if young people don't know what they should be looking for, they will not be able to find it. It is our belief that this information deficiency is the largest problem facing the transportation industry in the near future because it will deny employers access to large numbers of potential employees.

### **Positive**

However, we do see encouraging signs in some areas. While the stigmas against working in trades are still very real, in some neighbourhoods more than others, we have noticed concerted efforts from teachers, counsellors, and even students currently participating in trades-preparation programs to

change people's minds. The prominence of trades education programs in Burnaby and the high regard people have for BCIT are indicators that people are becoming more open-minded.

Gender barriers have long been a problem for trades, and even transportation as a whole, as almost all the jobs are traditionally dominated by men. This will not change overnight, but programs across Burnaby are seeing more and more young women interested in learning about trades. The numbers are still low, often with only one or two female students in a cohort of 16, but the fact that there are any at all is very encouraging. Additionally, all of the female students we spoke to told us that the predominance of men in trades and transportation was not a deterrent to their entry into the industry. This suggests that the culture has changed enough so that young women do not deny that other women belong in trades as much as men. This is very encouraging, and, if it continues, could be greatly beneficial to the Gateway.

### **Negative**

What our research has made clear is the importance of actively spreading information and engaging as many parties as possible. Trades have the potential to do very well, but that will be less valuable if the transportation industry as a whole or even just individual firms do not share information with students. If young people have not been told that these opportunities exist, it seems unrealistic to expect them to know what they should be looking for, and this will cause less young talent to enter transportation careers. If the success of the well-publicised trades programs in Burnaby is any indication, the gains from increasing awareness of what transportation does and how trades fit into it have the potential to be enormous.

In addition to making a career in transportation something a student might actually consider, there are likely large network benefits from operating in a society that understands and appreciates the role of transportation of freight and people in their communities, regions, and the country as a whole,

which could do much to improve the long-term position of the transportation infrastructure in this country.

## **Marketing**

Based on our observations, it is our conclusion that, while trades are often presented very well, the transportation industry and the APGCI are underrepresented in the minds of students and on the walls of career centers. The young people that we spoke with make use of wide range of research resources and share a set of common values, all of which can be used to tailor the message of potential employers, but, based on the ignorance of students and teachers, this does not appear to be happening.

It is the general consensus amongst teachers, career counsellors, and students that the information that they want is not easily reachable. They point to the lack of a website that could aggregate hiring positions within with the Gateway or even provide information on the different sectors and entry level positions.

Additionally, several students told us that when researching their options after graduation they primarily make use of the internet, their parents, people they know with experience, and career centres. These all represent potential channels for employers to reach students, and none are beyond the reach of determined organisations.

Our study indicates that most young people are primarily interested in work that is interesting and enjoyable rather than lucrative. Targeting messages to reflect this has a good chance of seeing results. Students indicated that they are interested in learning about the purpose of their job and several teachers have recommended that any career path be presented with clear steps, outcomes, and job descriptions, all of which would lead to more effective promotion of careers in transportation.

Finally, teachers have indicated a willingness to have employers or employees speak to their students about the procedure for getting a job and what their options are. We think that this is an

excellent way to capture the attention of students and spread the message about what the transportation industry does and what they're looking for.

## Recommendations

Based on the results of our research, we believe that employers and labour organisations involved with the Asia Pacific Gateway could benefit from the following five changes. They are generally concerned with spreading information and improving communication, which have been themes throughout our study.

### 1. Share or copy Burnaby's model for trades education

Our experience with high school career programs suggests that there are large differences in the way trades are promoted. It is possible that these discrepancies account for at least some part of the regional variations in attitudes towards technical education that we were told about.

The Burnaby school district is currently doing an excellent job of promoting trades education, and it is our belief that, as school districts do not appear to communicate with each other, producing pamphlets similar to Burnaby's for distribution across the lower mainland would be a good investment for trades employers and labour organisations.

Step-by-step instructions could be used to educate students about careers in transportation. Several entry level careers could be chosen and their duties and career path clearly defined. This would give students some idea of what transportation had to offer.

### 2. Create a central information repository

The students we spoke with all identified the internet as their primary career search and research tool. There is currently very little information on APGCI careers on the internet, and what is there is scattered over dozens of websites, many of which have not been updated for awhile. As a result of this, transportation employers are missing out on a cheap and effective way to attract young people.

We propose the creation of a centralised website, possibly as part of the Asia Pacific Gateway Skills Table, to which employers operating in any of the Gateway industries could post vacancies, maintain company profiles, and provide information about their company or industry. This unified career website would make the student's task of researching careers in transportation far less daunting and frustrating, and maybe even go towards educating the public about the region's transportation plans.

### 3. More cooperation with schools

All the teachers and counsellors we met with expressed an interest in having closer relationships with employers but were often unsure of how to do so. Furthermore, most teachers and student career advisors do not have a specialised knowledge of careers in transportation. Therefore, it is essential that employers attempt to engage with school staff.

We recommend that employers and industry associations contact the adult staff at schools and provide them with information to pass on to their students. This would require little administrative permission. It would also serve to educate potential allies (educators) about the opportunities available in transportation in such a way that their knowledge could sustain years of students coming into their classrooms.

Another possibility is to use recent graduates as "recruiters". Most of the teachers we spoke with were open to the idea of former students returning to talk to students about their current work. Sending recent hires back to their high schools would allow employers to make use of their employees' networks and be a convincing testimonial to the benefits of working in a specific field or for a particular organisation. This would allow organisations to build relationships with schools and create awareness with students, preventing young people interested in trades from moving elsewhere.

#### 4. Market to parents

High school students generally respect the opinions of their parents, in fact, it is often the parents who have the largest influence on a student's career path. Therefore, promotional material should be aimed at parents.

Currently, most parents appear to be either slightly hostile or neutral about recommending a career in skilled trades to their children, and almost all seem to be ignorant of the entire transportation sector. If careers in skilled trades or transportation were advertised to parents with emphasis on the benefits to their children, it is likely that some of these attitudes would change. At the very least, this would allow parents to make a recommendation to their children after having heard the arguments of the industry.

#### 5. Sell the workplace better

Young people do not necessarily share the same values as their parents and promotional material should reflect this. Our research suggests that students have a fairly clear idea of what they are looking for in a career, and this is what should be highlighted in promotional material. There appears to be a divergence in the values of students based on what career path they are considering, for example, it is possible that students thinking about entering trades want to learn more about the money, while those looking for university-educated positions might be more attracted to varied or interesting work. The desires of the target audience should be determined and met by the recruiters and promotional material of employers. This is important because attracting students will not be successful on the one-size-fits-all model, or by assuming that young people want the same things their parents did.

Similarly, benefits should be targeted at students, especially in skilled trades. It is unlikely that a young person starting off in a field will be interested in what a person nearing retirement wants, and unions and employers should begin to reflect this. For example, unions promising the inclusion of

dentures in their medical plans will probably be met with little enthusiasm from young people just entering the workforce.

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## Appendix I

### INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

#### Employers

##### **Allan Bruce, International Representative, Union of Operating Engineers**

“Training young people is planning for the future”

Mr. Bruce is concerned about the shortage of young people entering in to trades, a problem which he thinks is only going to get worse with time. He says that there is already a noticeable shortage of labour and, because not enough young people are entering the field, as the older generation begins to retire there will be no one left to take their place. However, he also says that because of the economic slowdown we are not suffering from a labour shortage at the moment, but as soon as things approach 2005-06 levels of activity, we will be acutely aware of its effects. He argues that this problem is the result of a the current relationships between students, teachers, parents, government, and employers and that all parties should be working together on solutions.

Mr. Bruce believes that high schools are set up in a way that discourages young people from entering into trades as a career. He feels that high school is focused on preparing students for university, which is a mistake because most high school students never attend university. Additionally, he claims that there is no communication between schools and employers, specifically skilled trades employers, and most teachers know very little about the subject themselves, so there is no way for students to learn about the area.

He also mentions a study designed to find out about the influence of parents on careers in trades. The results of this study indicate that parents are not actually recommending or even mentioning these options to young people, either because of social status or lack of knowledge.

Further, he says that employers are part of the problem. Many of them are reluctant to take on apprentices, despite the fact that they are, in many cases, more cost effective than senior tradespeople. Instead, older employees are relied on as employers do not want to take a long-term view of the labour pool due to the small average size of companies. Because of this, it is difficult to offer training and experience for young people, and a problem is being created in the future. (He estimates that because of the way training works, if we don't have a steady supply of young people, it could be a 5 year shortage.) In addition to this, many skilled young people choose not to stay in British Columbia but move to Fort McMurray or other oil-sands towns where the pay is higher. Another problem he identifies is that the current compensation packages (dental, pension, medical) are not attractive to young people as they have been designed to age with the largest population.

He recommends that there be more communication and cooperation with high schools and wants a transformation of the curriculum to more practical applications of concepts. He also suggests that there

be university credit for trade school as academic requirements for trades are very high, and that employers have to change their attitudes. This is difficult because many teachers and schools are disdainful of trades, and most individual employers are too small to be able to see the picture clearly and are hesitant to hire apprentices because they don't understand benefits.

Joint board models (apprentice works with more than one company as he or she is needed) and union hiring halls attempt to address this, but with limited success.

### **Frank Crook, Director, Maintenance Services, Vancouver Airport Authority**

Mr. Crook reported that he had been having no recruitment problems. Mr. Crook told us that every position that YVR had advertised for was quickly filled and they received dozens of applications. He also told us that his staff had a very low turnover rate and a high level of job satisfaction.

Mr. Crook credits the attractiveness of the system at YVR for this. He tells us that YVR has a very flat structure and there is lots of room to move around and up within the organisation, from maintenance to engineering, for example. A large part of their retention strategy is the generous way they reward their employees and the amount of input they have in their own jobs. For example, the airport uses a large book of safety and best practices which was developed by and for employees with constant employee revisions, rather than being imposed from the top down. By doing all of this, Mr. Crook believes that YVR has gained a reputation as a good employer, coupled with the prestige inherent in working at an airport.

Because Mr. Crook and the unions have agreed that all members should be skilled in at least two trades, he has been able to reduce employee needs by 3-4 times and increase efficiency. This lean model, a large change from the way things were done in the past, has allowed them to do much more with less and could be a potential model for a new system if the shortage of skilled trades people is a long-term trend.

The airport operates closely with BCIT and participates in apprentice training programs. Very few of these apprentices are hired back, which theoretically puts more trained young people into the general market. Mr. Crook expressed an interest in the "Trading Up Fair" which gave his organisation a chance to meet more young people, but has no serious concern about the future of his labour supply.

### **Stephen Brown, President, British Columbia Chamber of Shipping**

Stephen Brown represents the interests of a varied group of maritime shipping employers, large and small, seaside and on land. He sees a looming shortage of reliable workers to fill the positions of senior people who will be retiring in the near future.

Shipping requires both sea-based and shore-based employees. Traditionally the shore-side workers have been drawn from the sailors, but fewer people are interested in going to sea. This is because of the danger from pirates, the criminalization of seafaring (individuals can be liable for oil spills), and the

heavy regulation in the industry. Another deterrent, specifically to shore-side work, is the lifestyle with its long hours, travel, and demanding schedule.

So far shipping companies have had difficulty getting into high schools to talk about careers. Mr. Brown believes that the main goal should be increasing exposure to the marine industry. He believes that, even though Vancouver is a city that is, in many ways, dependant on the port, most people don't understand all of the jobs that need to be done in the shipping industry. Another focus should be on getting women involved, he says.

Because all of the employers in the marine industry are represented by the BCMEA, at negotiations there is some cohesion. However, not all companies would be interested in a unified hiring or advertising strategy as they might prefer to keep their hiring practices to themselves.

Stephen Brown wants the APGST to bridge the gap between industry and high school so that students will at least be able to consider a career in shipping. This is increasingly essential as a labour crunch is looming and international shipping in Vancouver is only growing.

#### **Ed Ashley, Owner, Danfoss Couriers and Freight**

Ed Ashley's operations require employees to drive vehicles and to work in his office.

Mr. Ashley is in the process of consolidating Danfoss and plans to expand his operation by taking over operating duties of other transportation companies, many of which are staffed by people nearing retirement with no succession plan, and managing them from his main office. This strategy would drastically reduce his workforce needs. His vision involves bringing technology to the industry and he says that what he will be most in need of is IT staff, and he thinks young people would be valuable in those positions.

Drivers are becoming increasingly difficult for him to find. He says that reliable young people are not applying and his workforce is rapidly aging with no likely replacements. He speculates that this is because the work is low in prestige and perceived pay, and he believes that some larger companies do not operate with their drivers' well-being in mind. Other concerns are the high cost of insurance for couriers and the lack of a provincial program to certify drivers of small vans; he argues that both of these must be addressed in order for the industry to keep pace with projected growth. He currently has no firm plans for how to attract more young people, but it appears to him that we are at the beginning of a very difficult period.

Most of Danfoss's new hires, and most new hires in the courier business in general, are recent immigrants. He has only one female driver out of a fleet of more than forty, and he attributes this to cultural attitudes towards driving work, both from society and other drivers. Mr. Ashley believes that the best hope for hiring more young people into the industry is to look to first nations youth.

His general impression is that the whole industry is getting older at an alarming rate, and this presents both challenges and opportunities for businesspeople who want to stay in transportation. He is planning to meet this challenge by lowering workforce needs in the office, but is unsure of how to solve his driver issue. He would like to see more cooperation with the government to make becoming a courier easier, cheaper, and safer.

**Tristan Clark, 24, Self Employed Tradesperson**

“Anybody can do it if they have the right training”

Mr. Clark entered trade school immediately after high school at the insistence of his mother. She wanted him to do it because she had heard that the wages were good, the average age in his industry was 55, and there would therefore be many opportunities in the near future. He went along with her recommendation partly because of family duty, but also because he had no other firm ideas for careers.

He says that what he most enjoys about his work is the high pay, the good hours, and the variety of work. He is very happy that he was able to work right away because his skills were in demand, and remains happy about his position because there is always the possibility of moving up to management or even working longer hours to increase his earnings.

**Educators**

**Alyssa Reid, Stage Craft and Social Studies Teacher, Templeton Secondary School, Vancouver**

Ms. Reid believes that young people should have all of their options presented to them on an equal plane. She thinks that the current curriculum pushes kids towards university, even if that is not where they want to go. She says that she will actively encourage her students to consider careers in trades if they are hands on learners who, while bright and curious, do not enjoy the classroom setting. This attitude, she reports, is more common among young teachers but discouraged by older teachers who see university as the only option and pay little attention to what students do afterwards.

She says that, in addition to the resistance from older teachers to promote alternative paths, pressure from parents does a lot to keep kids away from trades or other related careers. This is because trades are perceived as lower class and many parents do not want their children to perform what they see as blue-collar labour. This attitude is particularly prevalent in the west side of Vancouver, as attitudes on the east side are generally more favourable to trades. What makes this troubling is that parents have a much larger role in influencing their children than schools or even other children, in Ms. Reid’s estimation.

A large obstacle in attracting young people to this area is that trades are considered a second choice or backup plan for those not able to get in to university. The prevalent mindset is that everyone who qualifies for university should go and only those who can’t do anything else should consider working in

trades. This attitude is reflected in those students who are encouraged to attend trade school: typically people who are not deemed to be academically inclined, possibly due to a learning disorder or disability, rather than any having any genuine interest in trades or working with their hands. This has led to the characterisation of students entering trades as “not as smart” as those entering university streams.

She admitted that she knew very little about trades, transportation, or technical education and guessed that she was fairly typical of high school teachers. She thought that the Career and Personal Planning course curriculum might have a brief discussion of university alternatives, but even if that were the case, the course is not generally taught by someone with knowledge of the field and the rest of the high school curriculum is directed at university, rather than any of those alternatives.

She is a proponent of the idea of a more balanced curriculum with more career education for students. Ms. Reid would be favourable to having industry representatives like employers or labour organisers to visit classes and talk about the options they provide, which would supplement the BCIT info nights that are currently the only outside information sources that she is aware of.

Change, she says, would be preferable to the current system but there will be stiff cultural resistance from older, more conservative teachers, parents, and even the Ministry of Education who is responsible for writing the curriculum used in British Columbia. She goes on to say that Vancouver is a very diverse place and some neighbourhoods and individual schools might be more flexible than others in terms of guest speakers and providing information to students.

**Greg Cormier and Victor Lo, Technical Education Teachers, West Vancouver Secondary School, West Vancouver**

In West Vancouver there are many students who are interested in entering trades but don't know where to begin. They agree that there is no central repository for information, because if there was they think that there is enough latent interest in trades to make it worthwhile. Teachers are often just as unsure of where to begin as their students. Any information about trades should be presented as simply and concretely as possible, and clearly list the requirements for a position, what they will learn, how much they will be paid, and a step-by-step analysis for how to proceed into that field.

Both teachers would like to see more opportunities for student work experience that would allow young people to audit careers in trades and see what these careers are like before committing.

To make these programs more attractive, there should be an emphasis put on work, money, and time as these are what young people are most interested in.

Many of the students involved in the ACE-IT program have done so as a stepping stone into university. A large part of the difficulties in attracting students to these areas is the stigma attached to trades. Students, generally influenced by their parents, view trades as blue collar occupations and a non-desirable alternative to university.

Mr. Cormier and Mr. Lo would both be open to having more employers speak to their classes, and think that bringing in former students who are now working in trades or transportation would be a good way to inspire more interest and increase awareness.

**Ms. Gingras, Secondary School Career Counsellor, Burnaby Mountain Secondary, Burnaby**

Burnaby offers many programs for trades people, and has placed students with the Port Metro Vancouver, the coast guard, Cathay Pacific, and the Fraser River ecology center. She says that there are currently no pamphlets available for either general careers in transportation or industry-specific work. This stands in contrast to their well-developed trades training programs, which has placed students with carpentry, electrical, and auto mechanic-related employers and is very well organised and promoted.

Ms. Gingras reports that some areas are more difficult to place students with than others, particularly carpentry, but generally employers are happy to take their students. The school district is also working with BCIT for a steel fabrication program.

While conducting parent-teacher interviews and during career nights she has noticed that parents in Burnaby are very receptive to the idea of their children entering trades. She credits this to a cultural change as the children of trades people have found that university is not a guarantee to a good career and are encouraging their children to consider learning a skill. She views interest and enrolment in trades programs as operating like a wave, with periods where trades are more popular matched by periods where future trades people are scarce. Ms. Gingras believes that the positive reputation of BCIT as a “good school” has opened more parents to the idea of encouraging their children to consider skilled trades.

However, not all parents are positive. Many students are still under pressure to take every science class offered to “keep their options open” as their parents want them to pursue either science or business. Ms. Gingras feels that this pressure from parents may prevent some students from considering all of their options. This poses a problem for the school system as parents are almost always the strongest influence on students, and teachers and advisors have to be careful to avoid upsetting them by encouraging their children to consider careers they do not approve of.

She reports that students who are interested in trades are generally bright but do not enjoy the more academic aspects of school. An exception to this is students who are drawn to engineering. Through her work she has found that many students, not just those who know someone employed as a tradesperson, are very interested in learning more. Their main reasons are curiosity and a desire to work with their hands. She emphasises that, at this age, most students have almost no clear idea of what they want to do after graduation and are generally receptive to most ideas.

Ms. Gingras says that a large reason for this open attitude is the success of programs like ACE-IT, Secondary School Apprenticeship (SSA), a new course called Transition to Trades Training, and the

programs offered by the Burnaby School District, which have made learning about trades easier and allowed students to see their peers going through these programs successfully and enjoying themselves. Burnaby's programs have grown quickly in the past few years, and there are now 45 students enrolled in them at Burnaby Mountain Secondary alone. These programs are free to students, with the only expense being a refundable deposit and their tools.

Female involvement in these programs is low, but shows encouraging signs. There are currently several female students enrolled in construction carpentry, one in the construction electrician program, and one in the auto mechanic program. Ms. Gingras reports that these young women are enjoying themselves and, in some cases, excelling in their classes.

### **Jared Cloutier, Trades Education Teacher, Caribou Hill Secondary School, Burnaby**

Mr. Cloutier teaches a program called Transition to Trades Training Foundation Program. This program provides students with an introduction to six trades (carpentry, machining, welding, plumbing, automotive, and electrical) that allows them to decide which trade, if any, is right for them.

The program is currently in its first year at Caribou Hill Secondary and has 16 students, one of whom is female. The program was promoted by the career office and through word of mouth. Most of the students didn't enjoy traditional school courses but were curious about trades. The program allows them to spend time thinking about what they are most interested in. After the program many students will enter the ACE-IT program to study the skill of their choice.

He says that students enter the program because they prefer hands-on activities and enjoy learning how things work. This program gives them the opportunity to use the tools and machinery in a practical way while learning about the industry in general. Money, Mr. Cloutier says, has never come up as the motivation for his students to enter the program. They are motivated by interest.

Mr. Cloutier is currently working to create more program awareness in the entire school district, not just his high school. Already many of the students have come from different schools around the district specifically to enter the Transition to Trades program. Parents who have heard of his program or who have kids in it are very supportive.

In terms of relations with employers and unions, people from trades come in and do presentations about what their work is like. Employers occasionally help with skills workshops. The class often takes walking trips to construction sites. Mr. Cloutier has his students research what it is like to work in a particular trade, but they have very few people come in to talk to them specifically about an industry like transportation or even how to go about getting hired. He says that he would be very receptive to this and would also be willing to distribute company/industry specific pamphlets.

### **Student Interviews**

**Michael, Grade 12**

**Career plans:** Wants to go to SFU to study biophysiology, then possibly medical school.

**Transportation Knowledge:** He had never considered a career in transportation and said he didn't know anything about the industry. He mentioned lack of knowledge as his main reason for not considering it. He said he would value information on related university programs, how to get involved, and someone to represent the industry or individual companies at the school career fair.

He had heard of the Asia Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative through his parents, but did not know anything about it.

When asked to name transportation-related jobs he said: train conductor, Sky Train operations, and other train-related positions.

**Influences:** Parents, internet, career centre

Michael's parents are very open to any career plans, as long as he enters post-secondary education of some sort.

He found the school work experience at a veterinary office to be very helpful.

**Values:** Primarily looking for work that he enjoys and is motivated to do, also cares about schedule, mentioned money third.

**Scott, Grade 11**

**Career Plans:** Currently interested in computer coding, planning on attending BCIT. Interested in graphic design

**Transportation Knowledge:** Had never heard of APGCI and had never considered a career in transportation.

When asked to name jobs in transportation he said: "cabs, busses, and other things like that"

**Influences:** Internet and parents

He says that he is making the decisions on his own, but his parents are supportive of his plans.

**Values:** He says that interest and wanting to look forward to work is his top priority, followed by money, the organisation he worked for, opportunity for advancement, and schedule.

**Kevin, Grade 10**

**Career Plans:** Wants to go to university or college to study sports science, but is still open-minded about other options.

**Transportation Knowledge:** Had never heard of APGCI and stated that he knew almost nothing about transportation.

When asked to name jobs in transportation he said, “bus drivers, taxi drivers, truck drivers”

**Influences:** His father, the internet, and the school career centre.

He says that both his parents would be supportive of whatever he chooses.

**Values:** He lists money, holidays, and benefits as being most important to him.

**Daniel, Grade 12**

**Career Plans:** Wants to be a journalist, but is unsure about attending university

**Transportation Knowledge:** Had never heard of APGCI nor had he considered working in transportation. He expressed a desire for more employer-specific information in transportation.

When asked to name jobs in the transportation field he said, “bus driver, flight attendant, Sky Train cop”

**Influences:** Internet, parents

He says his parents want him to go to university, but it is important to them that he do something he enjoys.

**Values:** Daniel wants a balance of money and enjoyment of his work. He says that he is unsure of the importance of an easy schedule as he is young and has no plans for a family at the moment.

**Alexandra, Grade 12**

**Career Plans:** Plans to study biology at SFU

**Transportation Knowledge:** Had never heard of the APGCI, and never considered transportation as a possible career.

She said that she felt the industry might be male-dominated, as were trades, but that that was not a deterrent to her personally. In her opinion younger people are more receptive to women in trades.

When asked to name jobs in transportation she said, “bus driver, airplanes, and ferries”

**Influences:** The internet, her parents, people that she knows

She says that her parents are supportive of whatever she plans to do.

**Values:** She says that the most important consideration for work is that it be interesting, followed by money.

### **Cecilia, Grade 11**

Cecilia is an exchange student from Mexico whose family is in the process of moving to Canada.

**Career Plans:** Unsure.

**Transportation Knowledge:** Never heard of the APGCI, and never considered a career in transportation. She said that she liked the idea of working for a large project like the APGCI but needed more information.

When asked to name jobs in transportation she said, “TransLink.”

**Influences:** Parents, internet, people she knows currently working in the field

Her parents have a strong preference for her to attend university over any other option, but are more open about what she does after.

Cecilia doesn't feel that the overrepresentation of men in trades or possibly transportation is a deterrent to entering the industry.

**Values:** She wants work that pays well but is also interesting to her.

### **An-zu, Grade 12**

An-zu is from Japan but has been living in Canada for three years. She says that her family is here and they plan on staying

**Career Plans:** Unsure

**Transportation Knowledge:** Has heard of the APGCI but can't remember where. She is unsure of what the project entails but would like to learn more.

When asked to name jobs in transportation she said, "planes, trading, TransLink, and immigration"

**Influences:** parents, other people currently working in the field.

She says that her parents would be supportive of anything she chose.

An-zu suspects that the industry is dominated by men, but does not believe that that would deter her if she were interested.

**Values:** Her main desire is to have a career that is both interesting and well paid

## Appendix II

### Asia Pacific Gateway Skills Table Youth Careers Survey

The Asia Pacific Gateway Skills Table is a non-profit organisation that works with employers, educators, labour, and governments to meet the employment needs of the Asia Pacific Gateway, which includes transportation and construction, and is intended to improve and increase trade between Canada and Asia. The purpose of this survey is to gain information on how to make careers in this area more attractive to young people. Thank you for your participation.

#### General Employment

1. Are you currently working?

- A. yes, full time
- B. yes, part time
- C. no

2. Do you already know what you'd like to do regarding either work or additional education after high school?

- A. No
- B. Some idea
- C. Yes, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

3. How much school do you plan to complete

- A. High School
- B. College Diploma/Certificate
- C. Bachelor's Degree
- D. Graduate Degree
- F. Unsure

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the least desirable and 5 being the most desirable, how would you rate the following options:

a. A career in skilled trades

Least Desirable 1

2

3

4

5 Most Desirable

b. A career in transportation (including trucking, rail, air or marine shipping)

Least Desirable 1

2

3

4

5 Most Desirable

c. Physical work of any sort

Least Desirable 1

2

3

4

5 Most Desirable

d. University education

Least Desirable 1

2

3

4

5 Most Desirable

5. Please rank the following in terms of importance in deciding a career

A. Pay

B. Free time

C. Parental approval

D. Prestige

E. Making a positive social impact

F. Working for a company that values the environment

G. Opportunity for advancement

H. Lifestyle

6. What else is important to you when picking a career?

7. Would you rather:

A. Change the world

B. Live comfortably

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8. Whose opinion and advice is most important to you regarding your career?

A. Parents

B. Teachers

C. Friends

D. Employer

9. How often do your parents talk to you about post-high school careers?

- A. weekly
- B. monthly
- C. twice a year yearly
- D. never

10. Would you like more involvement from your parents?

- A. Yes
- B. No

11. How often do you talk to school staff about work?

- weekly
- monthly
- twice a year yearly

12. Have your career counsellors or teachers recommended careers in trades or transportation (rail, road, air, or marine)?

- yes
- no

13. Are you happy with the level of career knowledge provided by your counsellors or teachers?

- yes
- no

14. What improvements, if any, would you like to see?

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15. How much do you know about:

A. Trade School

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What are the first one or two words that come to your mind when you think of trade school?

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B. The Transportation Industry

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What are the first one or two words that come to your mind when you think of the transportation industry?

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**C. Working in Construction**

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**What are the first one or two words that come to your mind when you think of working in construction?**

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**D. University**

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**What are the first one or two words that come to your mind when you think of university?**

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**16. If you were to look for employment, how would you do it? Select all that apply**

- A. Networking**
- B. Campus job fair**
- C. On-line job searcher**
- D. Parents**
- E. Others, specify\_\_\_\_\_**

**17. What do you think the largest obstacle between you and your career goal is?**

- A. Education Level**
- B. Lack of Information from teachers**  
**Lack of input from parents**
- C. Few personal connections**

**Asia Pacific Gateway**

**18. Do you know what the Asia Pacific Gateway is?**

- A. Definitely**
- B. Heard of it before**
- C. Not at all**

**19. Please describe the Asia Pacific Gateway. If you've never heard of it before, write what you think it is**

---

**20. The Asia Pacific Gateway is a large project that will affect many people. Is working for a project like this attractive?**

**21. Which of these would you rather work for (circle one)**

**A large company**

**A small company**

**22. What, if anything, do you think is attractive about working as**

**A) a tradesperson**

---

**B) in transportation?**

---

**23. What additional information would you like about these careers?**

**24. What would make a career in an industry related to the Asia Pacific Gateway ?**

---

**Demographics**

**25. What grade are you currently in?**

---

**26. Male or Female?**

**M F**

A vertical promotional poster for Secondary School Apprenticeship. The top section has a dark blue background with the text 'SECONDARY SCHOOL APPRENTICESHIP' in white. Below this is a light green background with various sections of text and bullet points. The sections are: 'What do I need to start?', 'When do I start?', 'What are the benefits?', 'When will work be scheduled?', 'After high school, how long will it take to complete an apprenticeship and become a Journeyperson?', and a final call to action. The logo for the Board of Education is at the bottom right.

## SECONDARY SCHOOL APPRENTICESHIP

### What do I need to start?

- Good employability skills including a willingness to learn
- Parent/guardian permission
- A suitable employer

### When do I start?

- Must be 15 years of age or older
- As early as the Summer between Grade 10 & 11

### What are the benefits?

- Start your apprenticeship while still in school
- Participate in 480 hours of paid work
- Earn work-based training hours credited towards apprenticeship hours
- Earn 16 graduation credits
- Be eligible for a \$1,000 scholarship
- Earn qualifications as a journey person that are recognized provincially, nationally and internationally
- Complete your apprenticeship and be earning a good wage by the age of 22

### When will work be scheduled?

- During the school year
- Evenings and/or weekends
- During vacation periods

School and employment schedules are taken into account

### After high school, how long will it take to complete an apprenticeship and become a Journeyperson?

- All apprenticeships require levels of technical training and hours of work-based training while most apprenticeships take a minimum of 3 - 4 years
- For information specific to the trade area you are interested in, visit [www.itabc.ca](http://www.itabc.ca) or [www.theskilledlife.com](http://www.theskilledlife.com)

**DISCOVER YOUR PATH TODAY. To find out more, contact a Career Program Advisor at your school.**

 BOARD OF EDUCATION