

Indian Arm Crossings That Might Have Been

Researched and written by: [Ralph Drew](#), Belcarra, BC, March 2022.

Beginning in the early part of the 20th-century, there have been a number of proposals over the past 110+ years for bridges, dams and causeways across Indian Arm to North Vancouver. None of those proposals ever materialized, although some came close to being realized, and any of the proposed crossings would have resulted in significant impacts to the communities on both sides of Indian Arm.

Canadian Pacific Railway Co.

Around 1908, the 'Canadian Pacific Railway' (CPR) began acquiring right-of-way for a railway branch line along the North Shore of 'Port Moody Arm', and in 1909 made a charter application to the 'Dominion Government of Canada' for its branch line from Port Moody to serve new industries on the North Shore opposite Port Moody. ⁽¹⁾ By 1911, there were 100 men employed grading the extension of the CPR railway along the North Shore of 'Port Moody Arm'. ⁽²⁾

Port Moody, Indian Arm & Northern Railway Co.

In 1909, Charles Trott Dunbar (1861–1927), pioneer real estate developer, planned a logging railway to his 'Timber Limits' on the 'Mamquam River' near Squamish. The route was to go up the east side of the 'North Arm of Burrard Inlet' (a.k.a. 'Indian Arm') to the 'Indian River' and proceed north over the 'Mamquam Pass'. On February 3rd, 1910, he obtained approval of the B.C. Legislature to incorporate the 'Port Moody, Indian Arm & Northern Railway'. This railway charter was subsequently acquired by the CPR — see 1911 map below. ⁽³⁾⁽⁴⁾⁽⁵⁾⁽⁶⁾

North Arm Bridge & Railway Co.

In 1911, the 'North Arm Bridge and Railway Co.', a company owned by the CPR, announced its intention to build a bridge across the 'North Arm of Burrard Inlet' opposite the eastern end of 'Keith Road' (today, 'Mount Seymour Parkway') in North Vancouver, and to connect up to the CPR branch line from the CPR mainline in Port Moody — see 1911 map below. ⁽⁷⁾⁽⁸⁾⁽⁹⁾⁽¹⁰⁾

Segur Oil Refineries Limited

In July 1911, a newspaper article about the CPR's proposal to construct a branch line along the North Shore of 'Port Moody Arm' stated that the purpose of the branch line was "to serve the industries which are promised for that district", and that "the 'Segur Oil Company' [*sic.*] is building a big refinery there". ⁽¹¹⁾ By October 1911, 'Segur Oil Refineries Ltd.' initiated a number of full-page advertisements ⁽¹²⁾ in Vancouver newspapers promoting a share offering in the joint stock company for the purpose of building a thousand-barrel-per-day oil refinery. The advertisement claimed that work had commenced clearing and grading the land of District Lot 219. The project was to include an extension westward of the CPR branch line, but the oil refinery and rail line extension were never completed — see 1911 "bird's eye view" below. ⁽¹²⁾

Canadian Pacific Railway Co.

In January 1912, the 'Canadian Pacific Railway' submitted plans to the Federal 'Minister of Railways' for the construction of a branch line from the CPR main line in Port Moody around the head of Burrard Inlet along the North Shore of 'Port Moody Arm' thence to North Vancouver. ⁽¹³⁾ — see January 1912 route map below. ⁽¹⁴⁾ The route of the proposed rail line was to follow the shoreline south and west, go through the 'Indian Reserve' south of 'Keith Road' (today, 'Mount Seymour Parkway') and across Seymour and Lynn Creeks. Two ways were proposed for crossing the 'North Arm': one by means of a rail-car ferry and another by way of a railway bridge which would touch the North Shore at the southern part of District Lot 575 (a.k.a. 'Strathcona') — see July 1912 route map below. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Boulder Island Bridge

In January 1931, a plan was proposed for a railway bridge across 'Indian Arm' just north of Dollarton at 'Boulder Island': ⁽¹⁶⁾

"A bridge, in two links, crossing at 'Boulder Island', 2000 feet [610m] and 1300 feet [396m] in length, respectively, would span the water ... There is already a railway connection from the [CPR] main lines to loco, so the only thing necessary would be to add the short distance to the bridge crossing. The 'Harbour Board Terminal Railway' on the North Shore could be extended to meet the railway at the bridge."

– **Vancouver Province, 20 January 1931.**

In February 1931, it was reported that: ⁽¹⁷⁾

"...the C.P.R. plans to complete the P.G. E., using the Ashcroft cut-off, then connect it with North Vancouver across the 'North Arm of Burrard Inlet' [Indian Arm] from loco, then by the proposed branch line into North Vancouver." and "...C.P.R. officials have gone to considerable lengths in revising data on a survey made more than 20 years ago for a line from Port Coquitlam to Dollarton." – **Vancouver Sun, 12 February 1931.**

North Shore Highway

In October 1954, plans were unveiled for construction of a new highway across the North Shore to link Squamish with Coquitlam: ⁽¹⁸⁾

"The proposal calls for a high-level span across Indian Arm in the vicinity of Deep Cove."

– **Vancouver Sun, 16 October 1954.**

Deep Cove Dam

In February 1965, the 'Vancouver Times' newspaper urged re-examination of a proposed dam across Indian Arm at 'Cove Cliff'. In response, the 'Vancouver Port Development Committee' requested that a survey be made of the harbour to ascertain the flow patterns of tidal currents that were a major problem in port development: ⁽¹⁹⁾

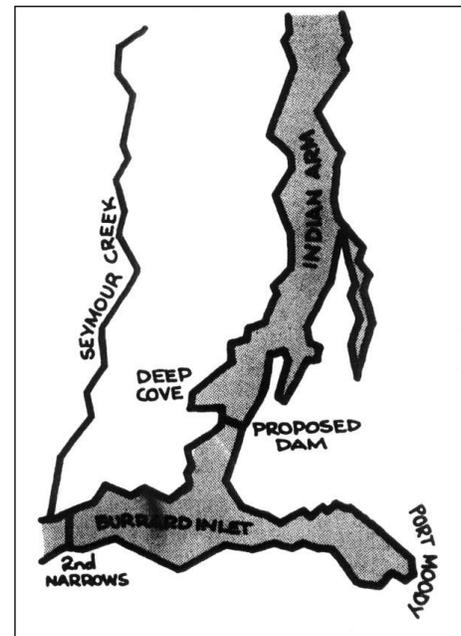
"Key to the study is a proposed dam across the 'North Arm of Burrard Inlet' [Indian Arm] from Cove Cliff, near Deep Cove, to Belcarra Park."

– **Vancouver Times, 25 February 1965.**

The 'Vancouver Province' newspaper reported: ⁽²⁰⁾

"Construction of a hydraulic model of the 'Port of Vancouver', extending from First Narrows to Port Moody, at a cost of \$150,000 to \$200,000 [about \$1.31 million to \$1.75 million today], is one of the long-term planning measures recommended by the 'Port of Vancouver Development Committee'."

– **Vancouver Province, 25 February 1965.**



Indian Arm Causeway

In March 1967, the 'Foundation of Canada Engineering Corp. Ltd.' (Fenco) announced that the company was undertaking a feasibility study of the 'Indian Arm' causeway proposal on behalf of a number of firms including CNR, CPR, PGE and others. ⁽²¹⁾⁽²²⁾

"Construction of a causeway, discussed in harbour circles for many years, would permit direct rail entry to the industrial area of the North Shore waterfront and also reduce tidal currents through the Second Narrows." – **Vancouver Sun, 11 March 1967.**

Tom Phillips, development manager of 'Vancouver Wharves' and president of the 'North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce', was quoted as stating: ⁽²³⁾

"The Indian Arm crossing should really be encouraged ... It would give us another rail and road route, which is something the North Shore really needs. A new route would be a great boon to our economy. The more approach routes to our community, the more they will assist in our growth. There is no question that a new link would have a considerable effect on our future development." – **Tom Phillips, Vancouver Province, 29 July 1967.**

In September 1967, Fenco announced its proposal to build a causeway across Indian Arm. The cost was estimated at \$15 million (about \$123 million today) with the estimated additional cost of a double-track railway from Port Moody to the Second Narrows at \$8 million (about \$66 million today), and the cost of a four-lane highway between North Vancouver and Port Moody at \$6 million (about \$49 million today): ⁽²⁴⁾⁽²⁵⁾⁽²⁶⁾

"The causeway would create a 12-mile [20 km] lake of virtually fresh water for recreational use. Access would be gained by means of locks, while a fishway would provide an entrance for spawning salmon." – **Vancouver Province, 15 September 1967.**

In November 1967, the proposed causeway across the mouth of Indian Arm was given support by the 'Port of Vancouver Development Committee'. ⁽²⁷⁾

Indian Arm Cable Ferry

In January 1969, Douglas Emery, president of 'Harbour Ferries' and a new company, 'Fleet Ferry Transit Ltd.', announced plans for three cable-ferry services across Burrard Inlet and the mouth of Indian Arm at a cost of about \$10 million (about \$76 million today). One of the proposed cable-ferry services was to be located between 'Strathcona' in 'North Vancouver' and 'Belcarra' on the eastside of Indian Arm — see 1969 route map below. ⁽²⁸⁾

The proposal was supported by all three North Shore mayors. ⁽²⁹⁾ However, a petition was signed by 173 residents of the 'Strathcona' area and submitted to the 'District of North Vancouver' Council in protest to the proposal. The Cove Cliff residents said that the ferry terminal would destroy the comparative peace and seclusion of their area: ⁽³⁰⁾

"A ferry terminal at the foot of Strathcona Road, or anywhere else in the area would cause a terrible traffic situation and make a shambles of our neighbourhood."
– **Vancouver Sun, 15 February 1969.**

References:

- (1) Ralph Drew, 2017, "[Townsite Tales: The History of Ioco, Anmore Valley & North Shore of Port Moody Arm](#)", Belcarra, BC, ISBN 978-0-9813113-2-6, page 171.
- (2) Chuck Davis, 2009, "Charles Trott Dunbar", The History of Metropolitan Vancouver (<http://vancouverhistory.ca/>).
- (3) "Railway Bills Before Committee", [Victoria Daily Colonist, Thursday, February 3rd, 1910, page 4.](#)
- (4) "To Build Railway Around Head of Inlet", [Vancouver Province, Monday, April 4th, 1910, page 1.](#)
- (5) "Port Moody, Indian River and Northern Railway", [B.C. Saturday Sunset, April 9th, 1910, page 31.](#)
- (6) "Port Moody, Indian River and Northern Railway", [Victoria Daily Colonist, April 10th, 1910, page 10.](#)
- (7) "Company to Bridge North Arm of Inlet", [Vancouver Province, Friday, June 2nd, 1911, p. 1.](#)
- (8) "Between The Bridges", [Vancouver Daily World, Friday, June 2nd, 1911, page 28.](#)

- (9) "Will Connect North Vancouver with CPR", [Vancouver Daily World, Saturday, July 15th, 1911, page 1.](#)
 - (10) "Notice", [Vancouver Daily World, Friday, September 22nd, 1911, page 24.](#)
 - (11) "Will Connect North Vancouver with CPR", [Vancouver Daily World, Saturday, July 15th, 1911, page 1.](#)
 - (12) "Advertisement – Segur Oil Refineries Ltd.", [Vancouver Province, Wednesday, October 18th, 1911, page 20.](#)
 - (13) "C.P.R. to Build to North Shore", [Vancouver Province, Monday, January 8th, 1912, page 1.](#)
 - (14) "Railway For North Vancouver", [Vancouver Province, Tuesday, January 9th, 1912, p. 13.](#)
 - (15) "Here's the Map, Now You Can Study It Yourself", [Vancouver Daily World, Friday, July 26th, 1912, page 28.](#)
 - (16) "Advances Plan for Inlet Crossing", [Vancouver Province, Tuesday, January 20th, 1931, page 17.](#)
 - (17) "C.P.R. to Link City, N. Shore in P.G.E. Deal", [Vancouver Sun, Thursday, February 12th, 1931, page 1.](#)
 - (18) "North Shore Highway, Span Urged", [Vancouver Sun, Saturday, October 16th, 1954, p. 29.](#)
 - (19) "Action On Deep Cove Dam", Vancouver Times, Thursday, February 25th, 1965, page 20.
 - (20) "Hydraulic Model for Port", [Vancouver Province, Thursday, February 25th, 1965, page 15.](#)
 - (21) "Feasibility Study Starts on Indian Arm Causeway", [Vancouver Sun, Saturday, March 10th, 1967, page 31.](#)
 - (22) "Indian Arm Causeway", [Vancouver Province, Saturday, March 11th, 1967, page 30.](#)
 - (23) "Causeway Idea Called a boon to North Shore", [Vancouver Province, Saturday, July 29th, 1967, page 10.](#)
 - (24) "Causeway Plan Revealed", [Vancouver Province, Friday, September 15th, 1967, page 31.](#)
 - (25) "\$29 Million Causeway Urged for Indian Arm", [Vancouver Sun, Friday, September 15th, 1967, page 37.](#)
 - (26) Foundation of Canada Engineering Corp. Ltd., Engineering Study, September 14th, 1967.
 - (27) "Port Group Supports Indian Arm Causeway", [Vancouver Province, Wednesday, November 15th, 1967, page 24.](#)
 - (28) "Cable Ferries to Ply Port", [Vancouver Province, Wednesday, January 29th, 1969, p. 25.](#)
 - (29) "Ferries Plan Wins Favor of Mayors", [Vancouver Province, Thursday, January 30th, 1969, page 28.](#)
 - (30) "Proposed Terminal Protested", [Vancouver Sun, Saturday, February 15th, 1969, page 12.](#)
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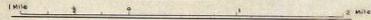
About the Author:

[Ralph Drew](#) is a local historian and self-publishing author who lives in the Tri-Cities community of Belcarra. In 2014, Ralph was awarded first prize in the [B.C. Historical Federation](#) annual book competition, receiving the [Lieutenant-Governor's Gold Medal](#) for historical writing for his self-published history, [Forest & Fjord: The History of Belcarra](#). In 2016, Ralph was awarded second prize in the [B.C. Historical Federation](#) annual book competition for his book titled: [Ferries & Fjord: The History of Indian Arm](#). In 2017, Ralph published his third book titled: [Townsite Tales: The History of loco](#). Ralph's fourth and most recent book was published in October 2018, titled: [Coquitlam Chronicles: Historical Crossroads on the Fraser River](#).



—ROUTE MAP—
NORTH ARM BRIDGE AND RAILWAY CO.

—Scale—

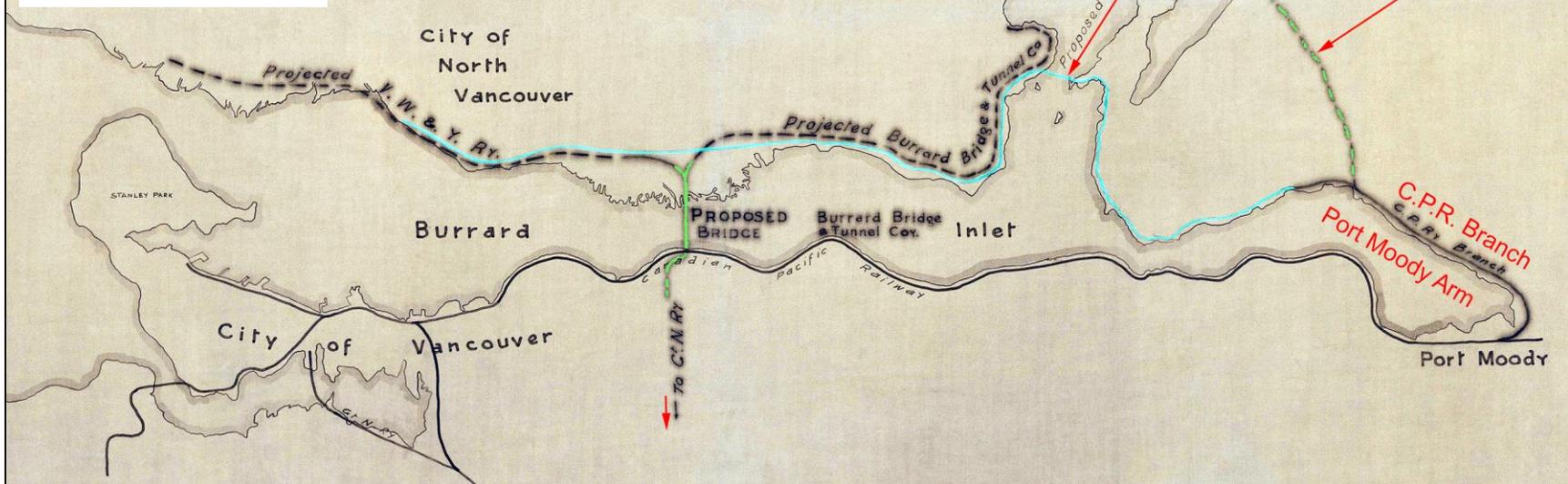


References:-

Proposed location of Bridge & Railway connections of North Arm Bridge and Railway Co.	Shewn in	
Other Proposed Bridges and Railways	" "	
Existing Railways	" "	

Vancouver B.C.
June 14th 1911

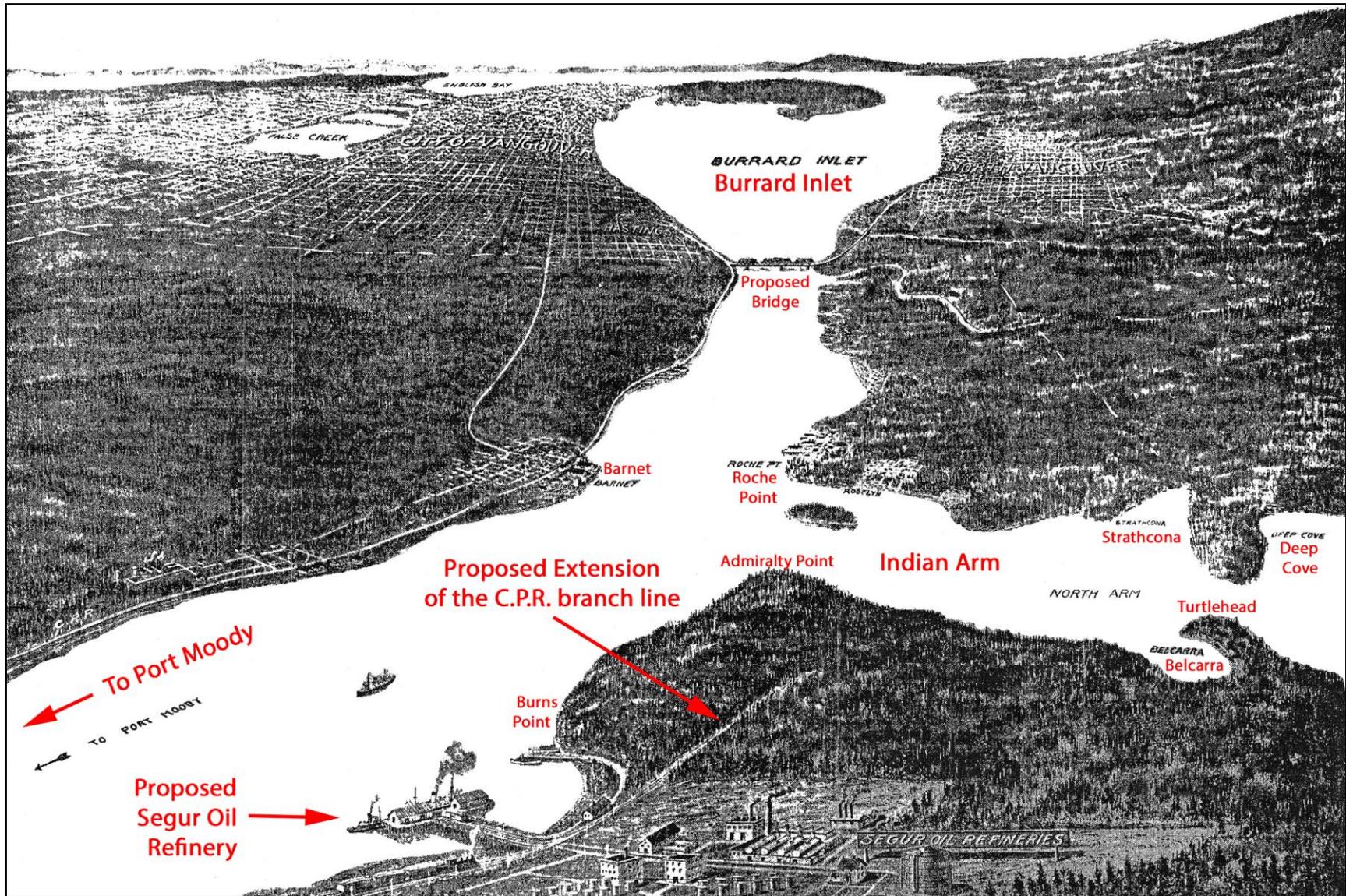
C. W. Carmichael
Chief Engineer.



Source: City of Vancouver Archives (CVA LEG1384.4).

Map annotated by Ralph Drew.

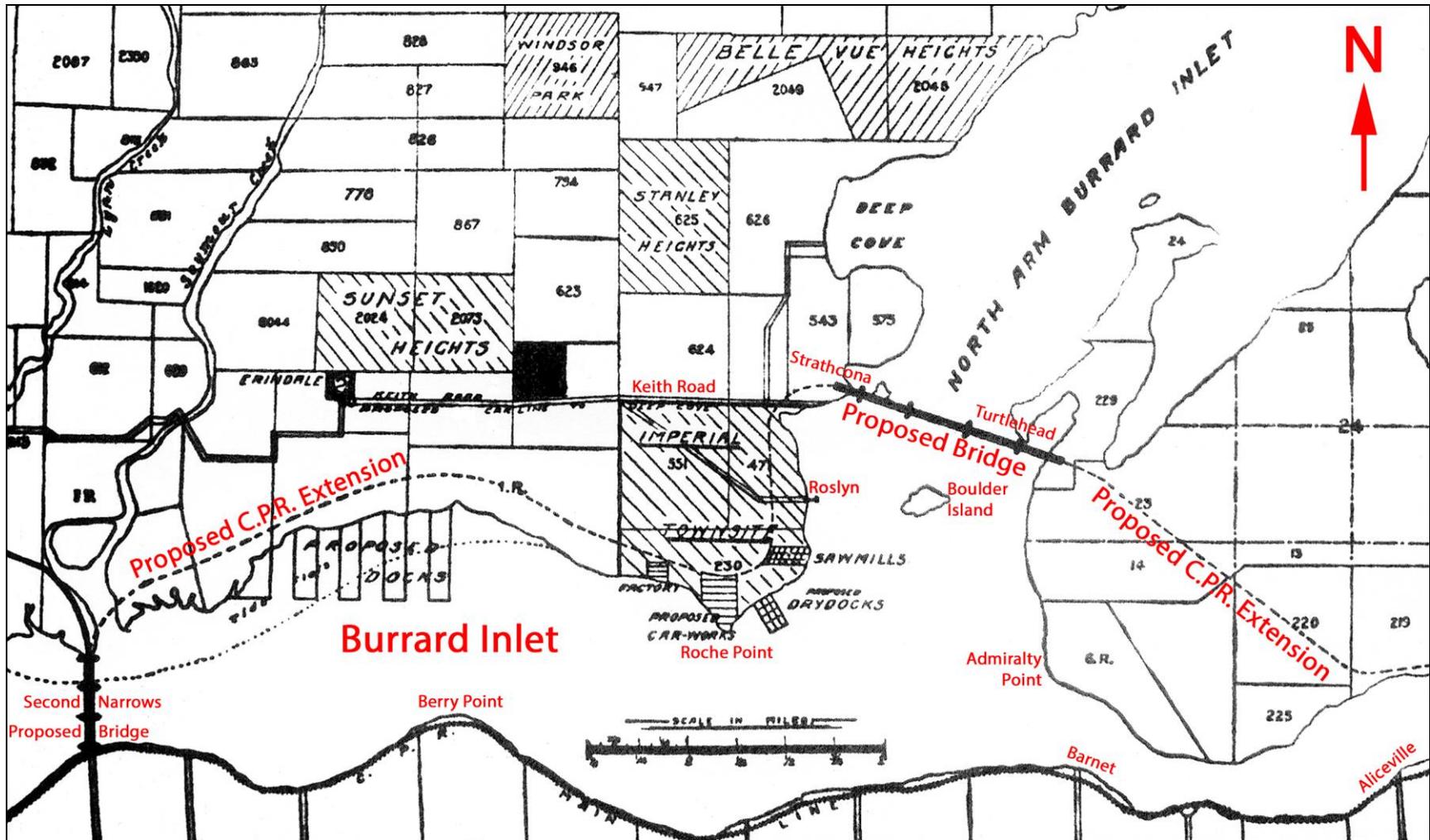
1911 route map of the 'North Arm Bridge and Railway Company' (blue line) proposed bridge crossing of 'Indian Arm' to North Vancouver — note the proposed North Shore section of the 'Vancouver, New Westminster & Yukon Railway' (V.W. & Y.R.); the 'Burrard Bridge & Tunnel Co.' bridge proposed for the Second Narrows (center); and the proposed route from the C.P.R. branch line in 'Port Moody' to the 'Indian River' valley.



Source: Vancouver Province, Wednesday, October 18th, 1911, page 20.

Map annotated by Ralph Drew.

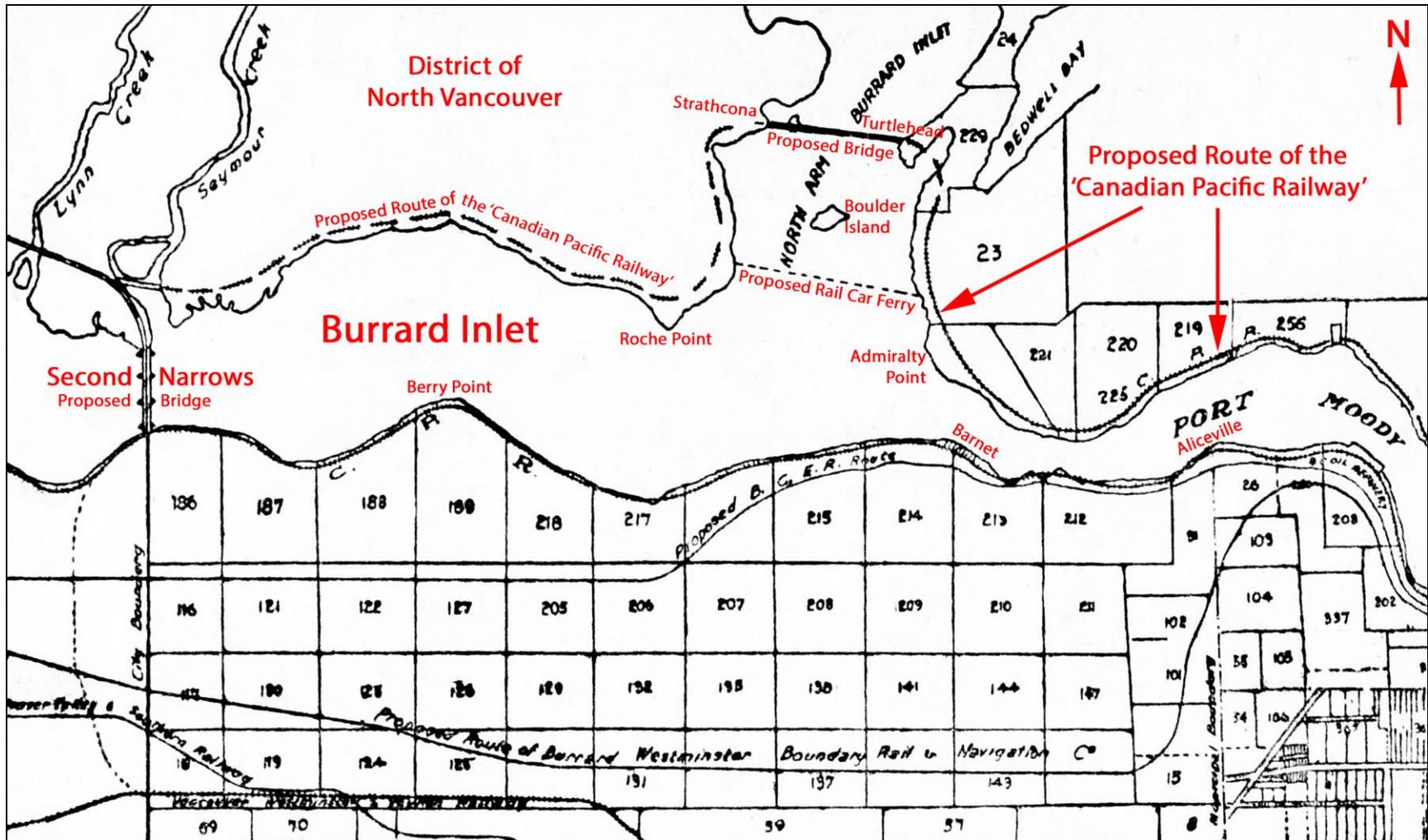
1911 Bird's eye view of 'Burrard Inlet' and 'Indian Arm' looking west — October 1911 — part of the 'Segur Oil Refineries Ltd.' proposal for the north shore of 'Port Moody Arm'. (12)



Source: Vancouver Province, Tuesday, January 9th, 1912, page 13.

Map annotated by Ralph Drew.

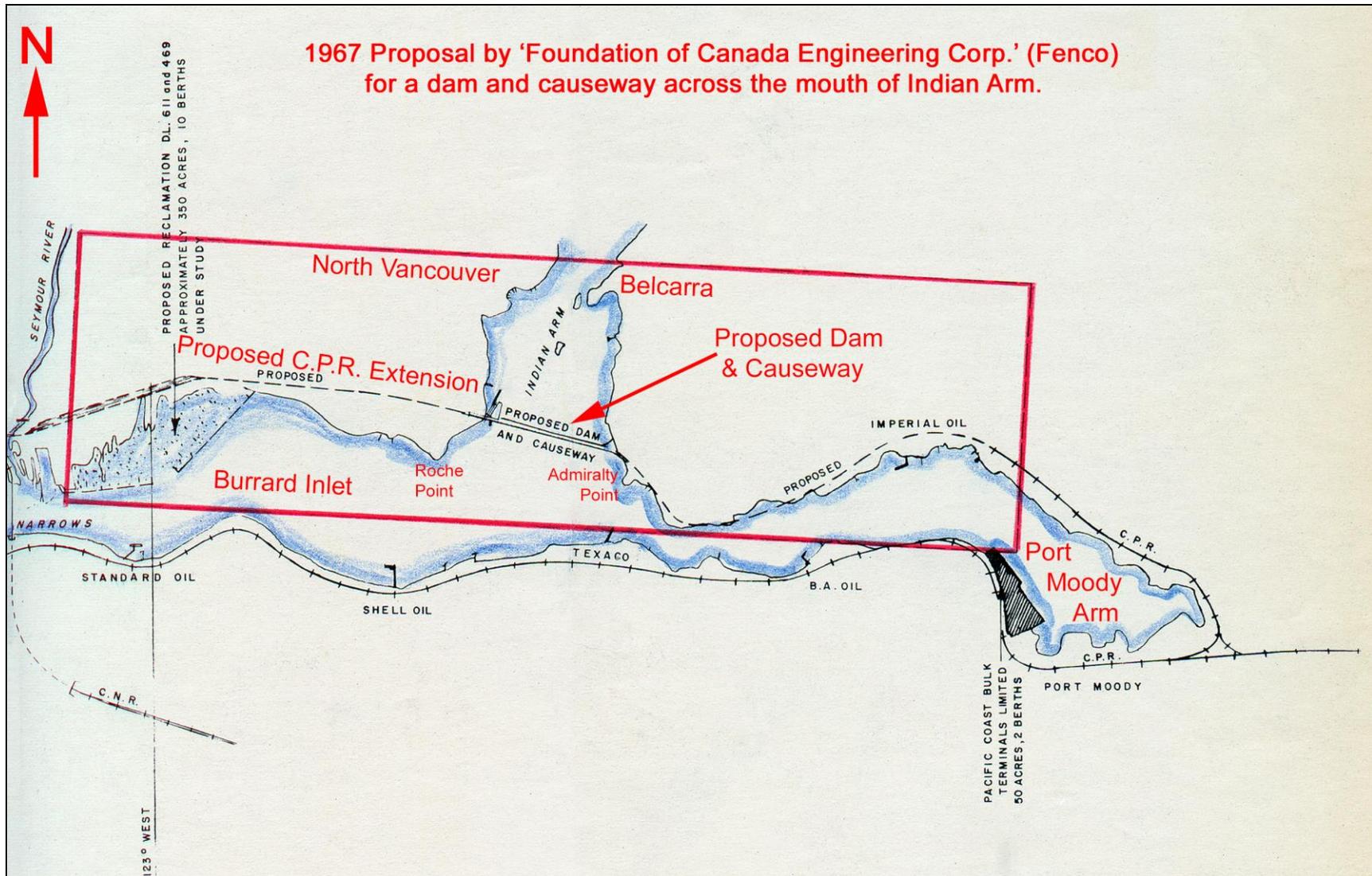
1912 route map showing the proposed C.P.R. railway bridge across 'Indian Arm' — part of the proposed C.P.R. railway extension to North Vancouver — January 1912 ⁽¹³⁾⁽¹⁴⁾ — note the proposed 'Rail-Car Works' & 'Drydocks' at 'Roche Point' (lower center).



Source: Vancouver Daily World, Friday, July 26th, 1912, page 28.

Map annotated by Ralph Drew.

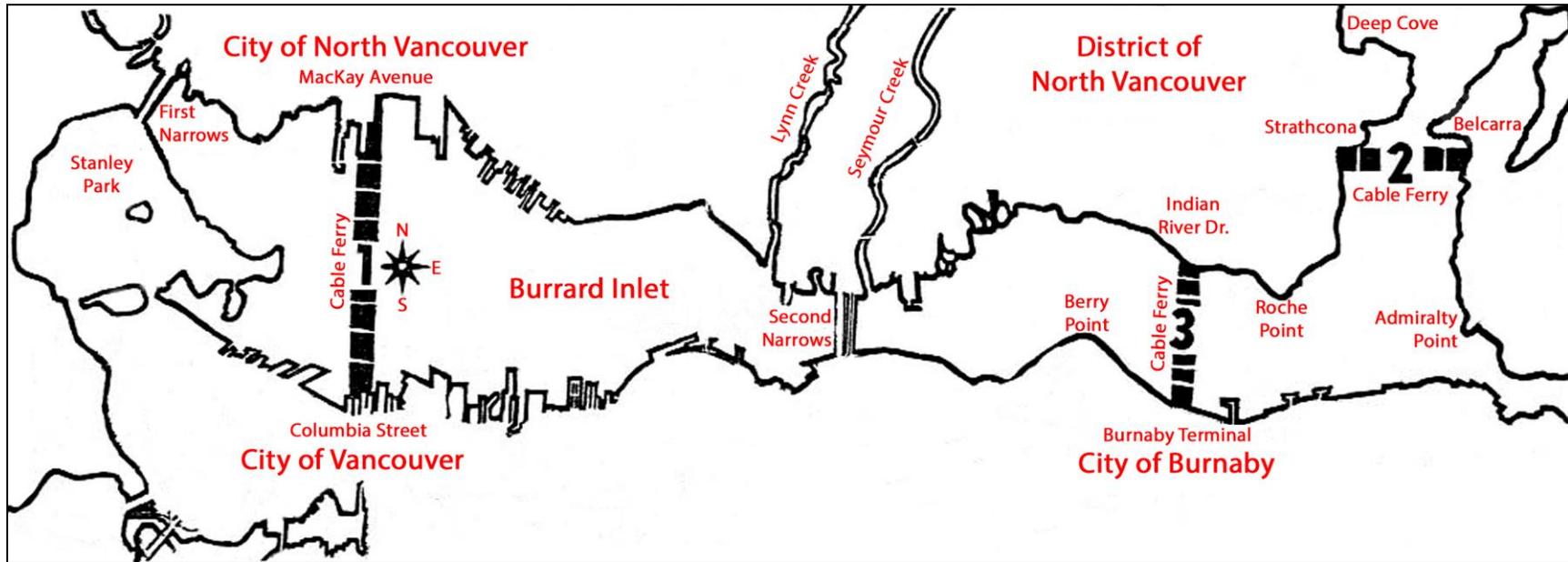
1912 route map of the railway bridge across 'Indian Arm' from 'Strathcona' to 'Turtlehead' — part of the proposed C.P.R. railway extension to North Vancouver — July 1912 — note the alternative 'Rail-Car Ferry' proposed for the mouth of 'Indian Arm'. (13)(15)



Source: Foundation of Canada Engineering Corp. Ltd., Engineering Study, September 14th, 1967.

Map annotated by Ralph Drew.

1967 map showing the proposed causeway at the mouth of 'Indian Arm' — September 1967. (26)



Source: *Vancouver Province*, Wednesday, January 29th, 1969, page 25.

Map annotated by Ralph Drew.

1969 map showing the proposed cable ferry across 'Indian Arm' to 'Belcarra' — January 1969. (28)

Cable Ferries to Ply Port (28)

"Plans for three cable ferry services across Burrard Inlet and the mouth of Indian Arm — to cost about \$10 million — were announced Tuesday by Douglas Emery, president of 'Harbour Ferries' and a new company, 'Fleet Ferry Transit Ltd.' First of the 'Fleet Ferry' vessels is expected to go into operation in about a year [1970]. It would operate from 'Columbia Street' in Vancouver near the CPR wharf, to 'MacKay' or 'Chesterfield' in North Vancouver. Final terminal sites have not been decided. This new ferry will replace the slower 'MV Hollyburn' and 'MV Harbour Princess' service which started last summer between Vancouver and the North Shore. A second service [Ferry No.2] is scheduled to follow shortly afterwards — between the 'Strathcona' area of 'North Vancouver District' and 'Belcarra' across 'Indian Arm' near loco — and a third, contemplated for 1975, would go from the end of 'Indian River Drive' in North Vancouver to a Burnaby terminal."

Emery said the cable ferries — designed by 'Cable Ferry Systems' — will be powered by submerged cables operated from the terminals. About 240 feet [73m] in length and with a 65-foot [20m] beam, the first ferry will be able to handle 1,650 passengers in buses and 600 foot-passengers, for a total of 2,210 on each trip which will take an estimated six minutes. Emery said this service [Ferry No.1], which he called the mid-harbour service, will carry buses, trucks and trailers but not cars. The other two ferries will carry cars. "Cable ferries are fireproof, pollution-free, unsinkable, reliable, and economical to operate." said Emery. "They are the answer to our transit problem."

He said a study prepared for former highways minister Phil Gagliardi about two years ago showed that 47 per cent of traffic coming from Nanaimo, Gibsons and Squamish is not bound for Vancouver. This traffic, he said, could be routed along the North Shore to the proposed Indian Arm crossing [Ferry No.2] and along a new road through Port Moody to the 'TransCanada Highway'.