

The Second Narrows Dam Proposal

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In the Spring of 1889, an announcement was made that a company was being formed for the purpose of constructing a canal from the head of Port Moody to the Pitt River — see 1902 plan below showing the proposed location of the canal — connecting the salt water of Burrard Inlet with the fresh water of the Pitt and Fraser Rivers: ⁽¹⁾

"The distance according to the reports of the engineers who have made a preliminary exploration of the projected line, is less than 3½ miles [5.6 km] to tide water in the Inlet from the banks of the Pitt River, and a little over four miles [6.4 km] to those of the Fraser, an entrance to which will be made by the first named stream a short distance below the railway bridge." — **Vancouver Daily World, 30 November 1891.**

At that time, the rationale for building the canal was to allow river boats that service points of call along the Fraser River above New Westminster to travel directly to the new City of Vancouver since little or none of the river trade previously went to that city. Also, connecting the Pitt River to Burrard Inlet would have converted the Inlet more or less into a fresh water body that was seen as an advantage for protecting wooden hulled ships from the dreaded *toredo* — a wormlike marine mollusk which can drill into wood causing substantial damage — and at the same time cleanse the vessels' sides and bottoms of barnacles. ⁽¹⁾

On February 9th, 1893, a petition was presented to the British Columbia Legislature asking that an Act be passed incorporating the petitioners and "giving them the power and authority to construct and operate such canal". ⁽²⁾ As fate would have it, however, between 1893 and 1896 there was an economic depression throughout North America — equivalent to the economic depression of the 1930s — that deeply affected every sector of the economy. That economic depression precluded investment in such a major infrastructure project as the proposed canal from Port Moody to Pitt River.

At the start of the 20th-century, the marine community was anxious to have beacons installed along the Second Narrows to aid navigation and thus improve shipping safety: ⁽³⁾⁽⁴⁾⁽⁵⁾

"The increase in industries on the shores of Burrard Inlet from Barnet down [west] has been so great lately that this is now a much-used waterway. To make it safe, particularly during the rainy winter season, there should be a series of beacons put along the north shore. The bank [gravel deposit] opposite the mouth of Seymour Creek is growing continually and, as is known, the bark [*sic. Barque*] 'Hankow' recently stranded on it."
— **Vancouver Daily World, 25 September 1901.**

It was pointed-out by a well-known Vancouver marine pilot that: ⁽⁶⁾

"...the channel at the Second Narrows has become narrower of late years and the shoals at the mouth of Seymour Creek have greatly altered their position since the eighties [1880s], when a large amount of shipping went up to Port Moody when the C.P.R. wharves were located at that point." — **Vancouver Province, 27 September 1901.**

In response to the appeal for navigation beacons at the Second Narrows, the Dominion Government of Canada conducted a survey of the narrows and subsequently installed the needed lights: ⁽⁷⁾⁽⁸⁾

"Commander Walbran [Dominion Government Ship 'Quadra'] and Captain McLeod [Vancouver Harbour Master], who were taking soundings in the Second Narrows yesterday, decided the location of the six beacons which the government will erect in that channel this summer. Two or three accidents have almost occurred to ships in that part of the inlet, and from representations made from marine men, appropriations have been made for these lights." — **Vancouver Daily World, 21 March 1902.**

Vancouver, Westminster & Yukon Railway Company

The 'Vancouver, Westminster & Yukon Railway Company' (V. W. & Y.) was incorporated in 1901 by British Columbia's foremost industrialist of the day, John Hendry, and shortly thereafter Hendry received a federal charter to lay track from New Westminster to Vancouver. In 1903, the company began laying track from New Westminster to False Creek in Vancouver.⁽⁹⁾ (Hendry subsequently sold most of the assets associated with the V. W. & Y. in the four years leading up to 1915, when the company's charter expired.)

In 1905, it was announced that the V. W. & Y. proposed construction of the company's railroad northward from Burrard Inlet via Squamish, and it was speculated that construction of the line would be dependent upon whether Government would grant substantial aid to the project:⁽¹⁰⁾

"The proposal of the V. W. & Y. is understood to be that wharfage and shipping facilities shall be established on the North Vancouver waterfront, and that connection with Vancouver and other points shall be furnished by means of the bridge to be built across the Second Narrows, and that the [rail] road shall be built up the Squamish Valley to some point in the North, where connection can be secured with the 'Grand Trunk Pacific' when that [rail] road is built." – **Vancouver Province, 22 March 1905.**

By 1906, the V. W. & Y. began discussing the company's plans to access the North Shore of Vancouver Harbour:⁽¹¹⁾

"Plans for the bridge across the Second Narrows, which the V. W. & Y. Railway Company proposes to build in connection with the extension of the system northward from Burrard Inlet, are now in course of preparation, according to good authority."

– **Vancouver Province, 28 August 1906.**

By the beginning of 1907, the V. W. & Y. company plans for a bridge at the Second Narrows were made public — see 1907 sketch plan below — although the company asserted that the surveys being made were only exploratory:⁽¹²⁾

"An entirely new light on the plans of the V. W. & Y. Railway Company across the inlet is shown by the announcement of the fact that a corps of surveyors, headed by the engineer of the company, is now in the field of the North Arm [Indian Arm] of the Inlet and in the vicinity of Deep Cove, which as shown on the accompanying plan is situated a short distance from Roche Point, where the North Arm separates from the main body of the Inlet." – **Vancouver Daily World, 10 January 1907.**

It was also announced that a branch of the 'Great Northern Railway' would run an extension of its line across the North Shore of Burrard Inlet to the North Arm and that construction of a bridge across the Second Narrows would begin very shortly:⁽¹³⁾

"Plans of the bridge across Second Narrows to the North Shore have been approved by the Board of Railway Commissioners at Ottawa, which is more than anything else an assurance that this talked-of construction will be a reality before most people think."

– **Vancouver Daily News-Advertiser, 10 January 1907.**

In February 1907, it was reported that the V. W. & Y. Railway Company had been for some time quietly advancing a project which, if carried to a successful conclusion, meant that to all intents and purposes the limits of Vancouver Harbour would have been confined to that area lying west of the Second Narrows:⁽¹⁴⁾

"If the scheme goes through, that great area of waterfrontage on both sides of the inlet to the east of the Second Narrows and on the North Arm of the Inlet might as well be shut-off by a breakwater from communication with the sea, for certainly the construction of a low-level bridge at the Second Narrows will be effectual as a dam in preventing shipping from passing Hastings [Hastings Townsite at Second Narrows]."

– **Vancouver Province, 8 February 1907.**

However, the V. W. & Y. company immediately clarified that reports of a low-level bridge were not accurate and that a high-level bridge was proposed to be built at the Second Narrows: ⁽¹⁵⁾⁽¹⁶⁾

"The V. W. & Y. Railway Company has not the slightest intention of building a low-level bridge across the Second Narrows ... and it will cross the C.P.R. tracks overhead. The overhead crossing is rendered necessary by the configuration of the land at this point, if for no other reason. The land there is high, and a crossing of the C.P.R. tracks on the level could not be made without enormously heavy cuts being made."

– **Vancouver Province, 9 February 1907.**

In February 1907, it was reported that a party of V. W. & Y. surveyors had completed the survey of the railway line to Deep Cove: ⁽¹⁷⁾

"The route of the line as reported does not follow the shore, as was first reported several months ago. It strikes in from the shore a considerable distance north of the Indian reserve just past the Second Narrows. Roche Point is given a wide berth, in order to strike a small valley that affords an easy approach to Deep Cove. In skirting the shores of Deep Cove, several spurs of rock running close to the water's edge are to be tunneled."

– **Vancouver Province, 11 February 1907.**

In March 1907, the railway lobby began sparring for possible advantage in the fight for a statutory subsidy for the construction of a railway line from Vancouver to the north via the Squamish and Pemberton route. The companies involved were the V. W. & Y., the 'Grand Trunk Pacific', and the 'Canadian Northern': ⁽¹⁸⁾

"It is learned that considerable opposition will be brought to bear to prevent the acceptance of the V. W. & Y. Railway Company's plan for their bridge over the Second Narrows when the matter comes up for a hearing at Ottawa. As recently announced here by the company, the plans filed provide only for a railway bridge, no provision having been made for vehicle, street railway [trams / street cars], or pedestrian traffic."

– **Vancouver Province, 5 March 1907.**

In October 1907, it was reported in the press that the V. W. & Y. company was quietly completing arrangements for spanning the Second Narrows: ⁽¹⁹⁾

"According to the report received by 'The World' work on the right-of-way from False Creek to Burrard Inlet, including the approaches to the bridge, will resume within six weeks, according to the terms laid-down in the agreement formulated at the last sitting of the Board of Railway Commissioners. The necessary data is being gathered to calling for tenders and construction work on the abutments will begin in earnest next spring."

– **Vancouver Daily World, 11 October 1907.**

Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel Company

The idea of connecting the north and south shores of Burrard Inlet by a bridge across the Second Narrows was first proposed in 1890 by Francis Lovett Carter-Cotton — B.C. MLA from 1890 to 1900 and from 1903 to 1916 — when the incorporation of a municipality in North Vancouver was anticipated. ⁽²⁰⁾ Carter-Cotton applied to the Dominion Government and obtained a charter for the project and the 'Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel Company' was incorporated in 1892 by Dominion statute. ⁽²¹⁾

However, the economic depression of the 1890s caused the growth of North Vancouver (incorporated in 1891) to be less rapid than expected. As a result, it wasn't until 1910, when North Vancouver began to boom, that it was considered an opportune time to construct a bridge across the Second Narrows. Accordingly, due to the long lapse of time, the 'Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel Company' had to apply to renew its charter ⁽²²⁾ which was granted in the Fall of 1910. ⁽²³⁾⁽²⁴⁾ The application was opposed by the 'V. W. & Y. Railway Company', but after negotiations, the V. W. & Y. withdrew its objection and only pursued a five-year extension of time for their charter. ⁽²⁵⁾ The V. W. & Y. charter subsequently expired in 1915 at the end of that extension.

In February 1910, Vancouver resolved to send a delegation to Ottawa to press for passage of legislation regarding the ‘Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel Company’: ⁽²⁶⁾

“The city council yesterday afternoon authorized the sending of a delegation to Ottawa to press for the passage of the legislation now before Parliament with reference to the ‘Burrard Inlet Bridge and Tunnel Company’, on condition that was inserted in the company’s charter a clause stating that it was to be turned over to a holding company representing the municipalities taking stock in the concern for the actual cost to the present owners and specifying that all disputes arising in the formation of the new company should be finally settled by the railway commission.”

– **Vancouver Province, 5 February 1910.**

The ‘V. W. & Y. Railway Company’ argued that it was unfair for Vancouver to fight against extension of the company’s charter carrying with it the right to construct a bridge over the Second Narrows and provision for a subsidy of \$200,000 (about \$5.5 million today) for the work. The company representative stated that: ⁽²⁶⁾

“...if the [V. W. & Y.] railway secured the extension and legislation for which it is now appealing to parliament, a start would be made on the structure this summer [1910].”

– **Vancouver Province, 5 February 1910.**

However, the ‘V. W. & Y.’ company received a further set-back from the ‘Union of Canadian Municipalities’ that adopted a resolution which read: ⁽²⁷⁾

“That with regards to the ‘Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel Company’, the ‘Union of Canadian Municipalities’ supports energetically the incorporators, who are acting for the municipalities of District of North Vancouver, City of Vancouver, District of South Vancouver, District of Burnaby, and District of Point Grey; and also oppose the extension of the [V. W. & Y.] charter issued in 1892.”

– **Vancouver Daily News-Advertiser, 16 February 1910.**

In late February 1910, it was reported that the municipalities won their fight for the right to build a “peoples bridge” across the Second Narrows: ⁽²⁸⁾

“When the railway commission met today, chairman Guthrie announced that an agreement had been reached between the conflicting interests. He said that all that was now sought by the V. W. & Y. railway was the usual five years’ extension of time. The company has agreed to withdraw its amendment asking for the right to construct a general traffic bridge over Burrard Inlet.” – **Vancouver Province, 22 February 1910.**

In October 1910, the Federal minister of railways announced that the ‘Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel Company’ plans had been approved: ⁽²⁹⁾⁽³⁰⁾

“Hon. George P. Graham, minister of railways, last evening concluded the hearing of the application of the ‘Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel Company’ for approval of its route map. Approval was given on the understanding that the applicant company would not encroach on any of the rights of the V. W. & Y. Railway Company.” – **Vancouver Province, 13 October 1910.**

In May 1911, it was reported that the ‘Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel Company’ and ‘V. W. & Y. Railway Company’ had reached an agreement regarding the Second Narrows Bridge: ⁽³¹⁾

“The difficulties over construction of the Second Narrows Bridge across Burrard Inlet have been definitely settled by an agreement that the Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel Company will construct the bridge on the site chosen by the V. W. & Y. Railway Company, securing for the purpose the railway subsidy of \$200,000 which the Dominion Government originally granted to the railway. This sum is to be revoted to the V. W. & Y. and will be turned over by it to the other company. The V. W. & Y. will construct, in turn, the approaches to the bridge as well as the connecting lines on the north and south shores, obtaining from the federal authorities the usual statutory grant per mile.”

– **Vancouver Province, 5 May 1911.**

The Second Narrows Dam Proposal

In October 1909, a different line of thought appeared as an editorial in the press: ⁽³²⁾

"A bridge would solve the problem of intercommunication between Vancouver and the growing young city on the north shore. But it seems to me that the Second Narrows require different treatment looking further ahead and a wider consideration of future requirements than a bridge would provide."

"To me the suggestion that the [Second] Narrows be dammed with a lock for communication above and below, looks like one which should be considered. It is admitted that such a work would be a very expensive one, but it contains features and possibilities which should be given every consideration."

"The Dominion Government has made it clear that its policy is to make safe the entrance to harbours but not to expend money upon their internal improvement. Although the Second Narrows are well within the harbour of Vancouver, I think a claim of assistance for the dam project could be reasonably be made upon the Dominion Government."

– B.C. Saturday Sunset, 30 October 1909.

In November 1910, A.J. Kappele, a well-known Vancouver barrister, and some associates made application to the Dominion and Provincial governments for a charter to construct a dam across the Second Narrows: ⁽³³⁾

"The dam would contain one, two or three locks, for the purpose of maintaining water communication for the largest classes of vessels between the upper basin, which would include the North Arm, and the lower harbour. The advantages of the dam would be as follows: In the first place, all of the water behind the dam would be turned into a basin or lake, no tides of course, no rise and fall of water. In the second place, in a very few years this water would become a fresh water basin or lake as it is fed by the Indian River and other streams emptying into Burrard Inlet. In the third place, it would afford the greatest harbour facilities in the world, as permanent wharves could be built. There would be no trouble with the tides, and boats could always tie-up without their captains worrying as to whether the tide was rising or falling." – Vancouver Daily World, 26 November 1910.

This proposal for a dam across the Second Narrows caught the attention of the former Vancouver city assistant engineer, J.H. Kilmer, C.E., who improved upon Kappele's idea which only provided for a highway across the inlet. Kilmer's plan included big dockage, warehouses and a land reclamation scheme that would practically finance itself because it could be made revenue producing — see the 1910 sketch plans below showing the proposed 'Interurban Canal and Harbour Development Project': ⁽³⁴⁾

"Mr. Kilmer's includes an area of trackage 1,500 feet by 1,300 feet [450 by 400m] in extent or almost 50 acres [20 ha], including wharfage, worth not less than \$25,000 per acre [about \$650,000 per acre today], to be secured by filling-in the [Second] Narrows. On both sides of this area, wharfage capable of berthing twenty of the largest ocean-going vessels is provided. This accommodation may be extended as desired by simply lengthening the wharves. On the north shore of the inlet, and in Port Moody harbour areas of tideflats amounting to 20,000 to 25,000 acres [8,000 to 10,000 ha] will be made reclaimable. Communication up and down the inlet will be secured by two locks, one 35 feet by 1500 feet [10.6 by 457m], and the other 100 feet by 1500 feet [30.5 by 457m]."

– Vancouver Sun, 1 June 1912.

It was subsequently reported that the scheme for damming the Second Narrows was finding favour with many shipmasters who handle vessels in the harbour, and skippers declared the proposal the best argument ever advanced toward perfecting the inlet for shipping: ⁽³⁵⁾

"It is well known that the bulk of the water running in and out of that section above the Second Narrows is mainly responsible for the fast currents. It is declared by several shipmasters that the damming of the Second Narrows will reduce the tidal current at the First Narrows to such a slow speed that it would hardly be felt by any craft."

"It is also cited that the dam, with locks for the passage of vessels, would provide fresh water in the upper portion of the harbour which could be used by wooden ships and other vessels to clear the sea growth and barnacles from their bottoms, one of the strongest arguments in favour of the dockage on the Fraser River."

– **Vancouver Sun, 4 June 1912.**

It was also reported that the Second Narrows dam proposal was unanimously endorsed by the 'Vancouver Board of Trade' ⁽³⁶⁾ and generated considerable interest in shipping circles: ⁽³⁷⁾

"That the far-reaching effects which would ensue from the damming of the Second Narrows, in holding back the upper waters of the inlet, providing locks for vessels, tracks for traffic and a slow current in the First Narrows, with a half dozen other good features thrown-in for good measure, is too much for some shipping men to grasp all at once is evident from replies made to questions presented by a 'Sun' reporter yesterday."

– **Vancouver Sun, 6 June 1912.**

Subsequently, the 'Vancouver Shipmaster's Association' came to the conclusion that construction of a dam and locks at the Second Narrows was the best scheme: ⁽³⁸⁾⁽³⁹⁾

"Recent action by the 'Vancouver Shipmaster's Association' places that body on record as being in favour of placing a dam and locks at the Second Narrows as the most necessary action toward perfecting the local harbour and eliminating the current which now menaces shipping." – **Vancouver Sun, 17 June 1912.**

Simultaneously, the 'Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel' company was looking to proceed with construction of the Second Narrows Bridge and was in consultations with municipalities and other local areas. The question of the dam and Pitt River Canal was thoroughly discussed, as was the desirability of substituting the dam for the bridge: ⁽⁴⁰⁾

"Due to the fact that 'Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel' company is a corporation that deals with bridges only, the proposed dam across the Second Narrows will not become an accomplished fact, for some years at least. Moreover, the company could not undertake such a work, for the reason that an addition to their charter would first of all have to be obtained in order to do so, and at the present time they are not disposed ... to make any changes in that connection." – **Vancouver Sun, 12 June 1912.**

The 'District of Coquitlam' urged the construction of a dam and locks at the Second Narrows in place of the proposed bridge: ⁽⁴¹⁾

"Hon. Frank Cochrane, Minister of Railways and Canals, has been asked by the Council and Reeve of Coquitlam, to withhold sanction of the Second Narrows Bridge project as it is reputed that the Council has arranged for an independent engineer to act with the engineer of the municipality [J.H. Kilmer] in preparing the necessary estimates and data for the construction of a causeway and locks at the Second Narrows."

– **Vancouver Province, 8 October 1912.**

Similarly, the dam and locks proposal versus a bridge across the Second Narrows was a hot topic of debate within the 'North Vancouver Board of Trade': ⁽⁴²⁾

"The report of the committee was to the effect that the members were of the opinion that the construction of a bridge across the [Second] Narrows would be such a serious obstruction that in the interests of the city [North Vancouver], the Government should make a thorough investigation of the scheme before allowing it to be proceeded with."

– **Vancouver Daily World, 9 October 1912.**

Notwithstanding the strenuous lobbying for the dam and canal proposal by Coquitlam and its municipal engineer, J.H. Kilmer, there was continued strong support for the bridge proposal: ⁽⁴³⁾

"At present, the Dominion and Provincial governments as well as the municipalities of Vancouver and North Vancouver, have voted grants for a bridge over the Second Narrows, but the people of the outlying districts would much rather have the dam, causeway and the canal, connecting the inlet with the Pitt River."

– **Vancouver Sun, 11 October 1912.**

Regardless, the ‘Vancouver Shipmaster’s Association’ was steadfast in its support of the Second Narrows dam and locks proposal: ⁽⁴⁴⁾⁽⁴⁵⁾

“The plans for the Second Narrows Bridge, as submitted, do not meet with our approval, and we are unanimous in our opinion that such a bridge would cause much inconvenience to the travelling public and be dangerous and detrimental to the shipping interests of this port.” – **Vancouver News-Advertiser, 12 October 1912.**

Similarly, the ‘Vancouver Board of Trade’ re-iterated its position in support of the Second Narrows Bridge proposal: ⁽⁴⁶⁾⁽⁴⁷⁾⁽⁴⁸⁾⁽⁴⁹⁾

“With very little discussion, the report of the enlarged committee on the Second Narrows Bridge, recommending a 225-foot [68.8 m] span placed in the centre of the channel with the height of the bridge not less than 55 feet [16.8 m] from high water at extreme high tide, was unanimously adopted at a meeting of the board of trade last night.”

– **Vancouver Province, 13 November 1912.**

During 1913 and 1914, there were several debates regarding the effect of a dam and locks at the Second Narrows on tidal currents in the First Narrows and the Pitt River Canal: ⁽⁵⁰⁾⁽⁵¹⁾⁽⁵²⁾⁽⁵³⁾

“At the meeting of the Vancouver Branch of the ‘Canadian Society of Civil Engineers’... there was a discussion of the proposed Second Narrows dam and the Pitt River Canal. The discussion brought out a variety of opinion as to the desirability, cost and effects of the proposed works.” – **Vancouver Daily News-Advertiser, 18 February 1914.**

Before the issues could be resolved, however, ‘World War One’ intervened in August 1914 which effectively suspended discussion of the dam and locks proposal until after the war.

In 1912, prior to the war, Montreal Civil Engineer A.D. (Andrew Don) Swan was commissioned by the Dominion Government to recommend a systematic policy of development to meet the future needs of Vancouver’s port. In 1918, after the war, A.D. Swan tabled his comprehensive report. ⁽⁵⁴⁾⁽⁵⁵⁾⁽⁵⁶⁾ One of Swan’s recommendations was that a bridge be built at the Second Narrows to link the north and south shores of Burrard Inlet.

In April 1919, while visiting Vancouver prior to his retirement, Colonel William Anderson, long-time Chief Engineer for the Federal ‘Department of Fisheries and Marine’, offered his opinion on the subject of a Second Narrows Bridge: ⁽⁵⁷⁾

“There is one matter with respect to improvements to your port, however, that I will speak of ... That is the question of connection with the North Shore. It is undoubtedly one of the most important features in connection with improvements here. I do not favour a bridge at the Second Narrows. My candid opinion is that a system of locks can be constructed which will meet the situation. Its advantages are obvious. It will establish a large freshwater body up the inlet which will have the effect of booming various industries all along the coast.” – **Vancouver Daily World, 10 April 1919.**

In May 1919, representatives of the North Shore municipalities launched a big campaign to get the Swan Report on harbour needs acted upon given that those communities were solidly in favour of a Second Narrows Bridge: ⁽⁵⁸⁾⁽⁵⁹⁾

“The strongest effort the North Shore has ever made to promote construction of the Second Narrows Bridge was commenced Monday afternoon at the regular monthly meeting of the reconstruction committee...” – **Vancouver Daily World, 6 May 1919.**

In September 1919, the ‘Burrard Inlet Bridge & Tunnel’ company suggested that the ‘Vancouver Harbour Commission’ take over the Second Narrows Bridge project. ⁽⁶⁰⁾ The company had been inactive, but in good standing, hoping that an appropriation of \$1,750,000 (about \$27,000,000 today) for the bridge would be passed by the Dominion Government during the coming year. ⁽⁶¹⁾

In October 1919, the ‘Canadian Merchant Service Guild’ weighed-in with their objection to the dam and locks proposal: ⁽⁶²⁾⁽⁶³⁾

"Many excellent authorities have been advocating bridges and dams, both of which we would say have much to recommend them; but the principal objection that we see to damming the Second Narrows will be the stagnation of the waters above and below which would tend to create an accumulation of filth and other objectionable matter, which in time would become a menace to health and a detriment to adjoining property."

– **Vancouver Province, 31 October 1919.**

In January 1920, the 'Vancouver Harbour Board' appointed Major William G. Swan, C.E., as Chief Engineer⁽⁶⁴⁾ and, in May 1920, the Harbour Board instructed W.G. Swan to prepare plans and investigate the possibilities for constructing a dam across the Second Narrows.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Later in May, the plan and initial estimated costs of the project were presented to Vancouver Council — see sketch plan below dated 19 May 1920.⁽⁶⁶⁾⁽⁶⁷⁾

A joint conference of municipalities and major stakeholders was convened to consider the plan prepared by the Vancouver Harbour Board:⁽⁶⁸⁾⁽⁶⁹⁾

"That the plan to dam the Second Narrows of Burrard Inlet instead of constructing a bridge to connect the north and south shores has quickly sprang [sic.] into favour was indicated yesterday at the conference called on the matter by the board of harbour commissioners. Such was the sentiment in favour that another conference was arranged for May 31st when the harbour board engineers would have a more detailed plan ready and a closer estimate at the cost..." – **Vancouver Sun, 22 May 1920.**

The cost estimate prepared by W.G. Swan was \$2,560,250 (about \$33 million today),⁽⁷⁰⁾⁽⁷¹⁾ and the second conference hi-lighted how the scheme for the dam would reclaim a big area for ocean docks, yard facilities and an industrial area, the sale of which would generate a significant portion of the construction costs.⁽⁷²⁾ The second conference approved the plan to construct a dam and locks at the Second Narrows, and the representatives of the municipalities and semi-public bodies agreed to place the matter before their respective organizations.⁽⁷³⁾

In early June 1920, Captain Robert Dollar provided his opinion that a dam at the Second Narrows would be a greater benefit to the harbour than a bridge:⁽⁷⁴⁾⁽⁷⁵⁾

"The subject of the dam, he declared, was of great importance. There were advantages in either a bridge or a dam, but the plan to be adopted should be the one to bring the greatest good to the greatest number. He believed he was in a position to give an unbiased opinion, because his company operated steamships and also had a sawmill above the Second Narrows [at 'Dollarton']. The proposed dam, with locks, would be some slight detriment in towing logs, but the great benefit would be experienced in the First Narrows." – **Vancouver Province, 5 June 1920.**

In late June 1920, at a meeting of the 'British Columbia Technical Association', Major W.G. Swan gave a detailed explanation of the proposed Second Narrows dam and stated:⁽⁷⁶⁾

"Proper industrial development along the harbour would only take place by doing away with the strong current at First Narrows." – **Vancouver Province, 22 June 1920.**

In early August 1920, the mayor of North Vancouver stated "that the Second Narrows dam project would probably be shelved for some time owing to a lack of funds",⁽⁷⁷⁾ and later the same month the Federal Minister for Marine and Fisheries, Hon. C.C. Ballantyne, "expressed his sympathy with the Second Narrows dam project but stated that Dominion Government funds were small at present".⁽⁷⁸⁾

In September 1920, a "tongue-in-cheek" newspaper article announced that the Second Narrows bridge project would be revived:⁽⁷⁹⁾

"This is Chapter XV in the good old story of the 'Burrard Inlet Tunnel and Bridge Company'. It reads just like all of the previous chapters. A campaign is to be launched immediately for the construction of a bridge across the Second Narrows. This official statement was made at the annual meeting of the 'Burrard Inlet Tunnel and Bridge Company' at North Vancouver yesterday." – **Vancouver Sun, 15 September 1920.**

In September 1921, the ‘Burrard Inlet Tunnel and Bridge Company’ took steps to enlist the co-operation of the Vancouver ‘Board of Harbour Commissioners’ along with the Federal and Provincial Governments in the proposal to construct a bridge across the Second Narrows: ⁽⁸⁰⁾⁽⁸¹⁾

“[It was] ...suggested that the company immediately take steps to have an estimate made of the cost of building as simple a form of bridge as possible to take care of the present needs, recommending a low-level bridge with a pile approach across the flats on the north shore, with a permanent steel structure across deep water immediately north of the C.P.R. right-of-way.” – **Vancouver Province, 15 September 1921.**

In September 1922, it was announced that a tentative contract had been signed for construction of the Second Narrows bridge: ⁽⁸²⁾

“Whether final execution of the work will be undertaken depends upon the result of investigation to be carried out by the ‘Northern Construction Co. Ltd.’ and General J. W. Stewart, who have signed the tentative agreement with the ‘Burrard Inlet Tunnel and Bridge Co.’. If the project appears to be feasible, the bridge will be proceeded with. The proposed contract calls for completion of the bridge within 18 months at a cost of \$1,250,000 [about \$21 million today].” – **Vancouver Sun, 27 September 1922.**

The announcement that a bridge was to be built over the Second Narrows was hailed as a “tremendous asset”. ⁽⁸³⁾ Funding for the bridge saw partisanship on the North Shore all but disappear and the electorates of both the City and District of North Vancouver overwhelmingly endorsed the funding bylaws. ⁽⁸⁴⁾ One newspaper editorial stated what many people thought: ⁽⁸⁵⁾

“So long has this project been advocated that there are numerous citizens, both on the north and south shores of Burrard Inlet, who hesitate to accept the veritable, or question the immediate justification for such an outlay. ... For a long time, the idea of bridging the Second Narrows appeared to many to be nothing more than the harmless hobby of North Vancouver promoters. Now it is accepted generally that the construction of this means of communication between the two cities will mean as much to Vancouver as to the North Shore sister city.” – **Vancouver Daily World, 14 July 1923.**

On September 12th, 1923, orders were given by the ‘Northern Construction Company Ltd.’ and General J. W. Stewart, contractors, to immediately begin construction of the Second Narrows Bridge. ⁽⁸⁶⁾ The bridge was to be completed in two years at a revised cost of \$1,450,000 (about \$24.4 million today).

Finally, on November 6th, 1925, the Second Narrow Bridge was officially opened ⁽⁸⁷⁾ and the vision of a dam and locks at the Second Narrows was relegated to the history books.

References:

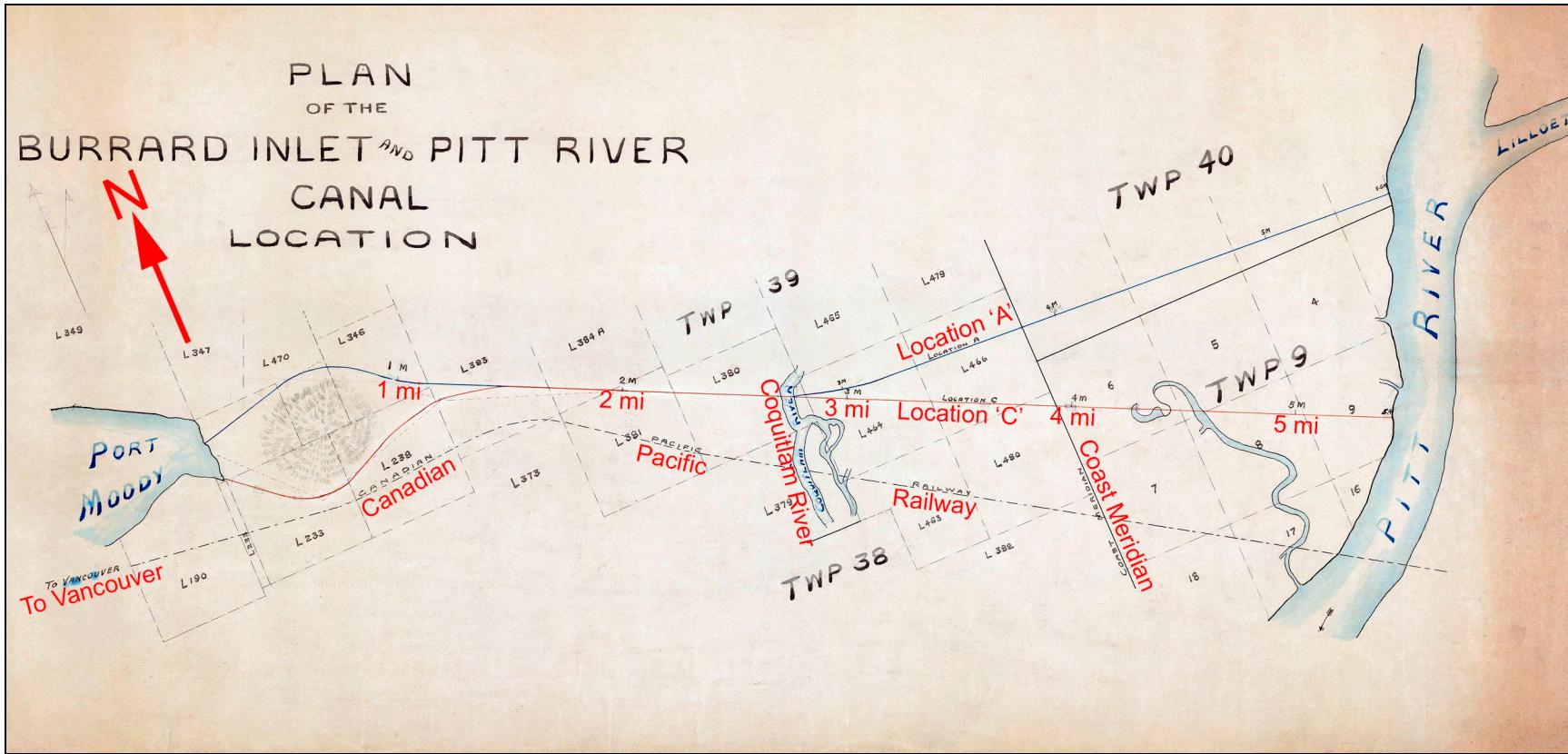
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About the Author:

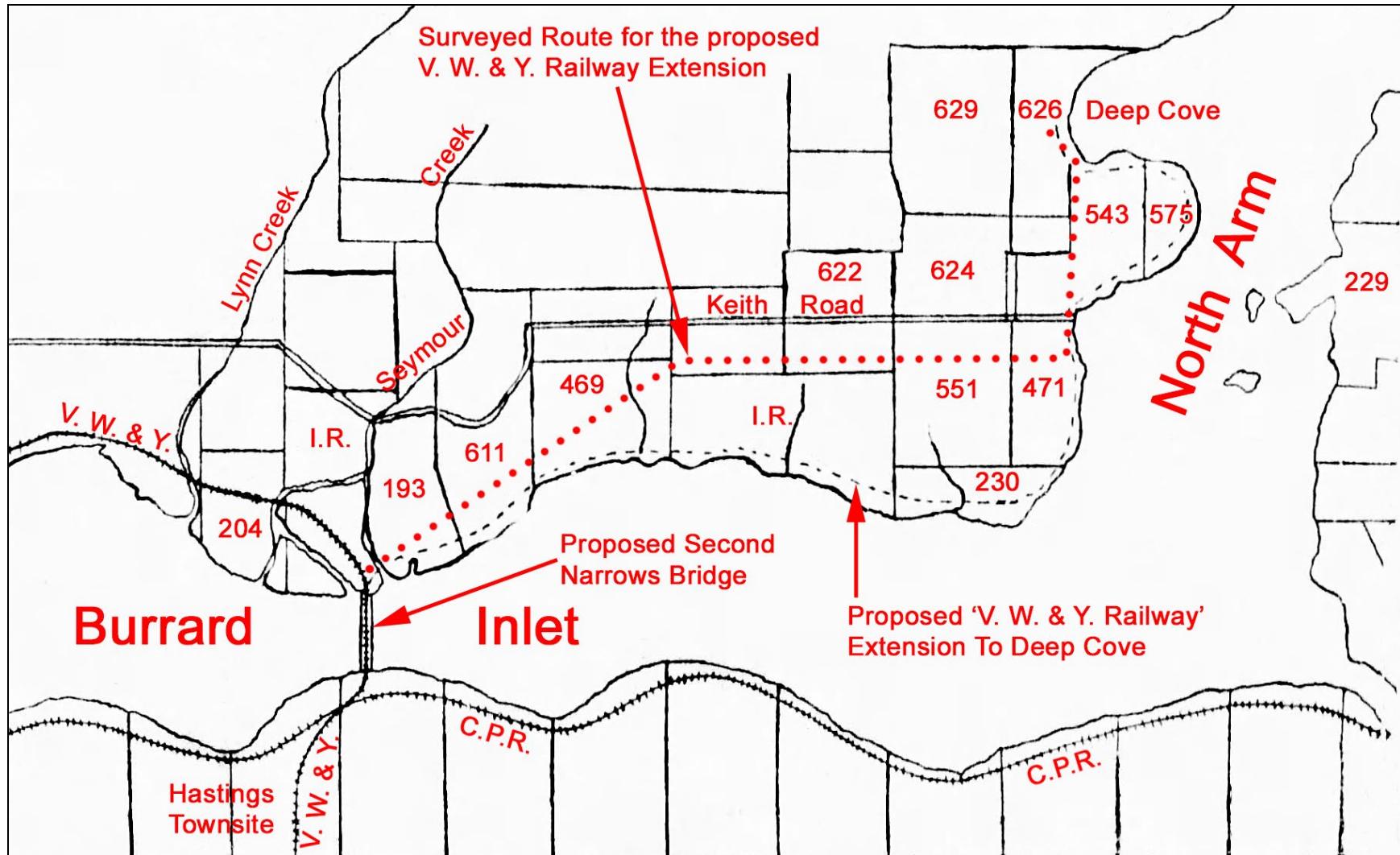
[Ralph Drew](#) is a local historian and self-publishing author who lives in the Tri-Cities community of Belcarra. In 2014, Ralph was awarded first prize in the [B.C. Historical Federation](#) annual book competition, receiving the [Lieutenant-Governor's Gold Medal](#) for historical writing for his 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](#).



Source: City of Vancouver Archives (CVA Ref. AM1594-: Map 697).

Plan annotated by Ralph Drew.

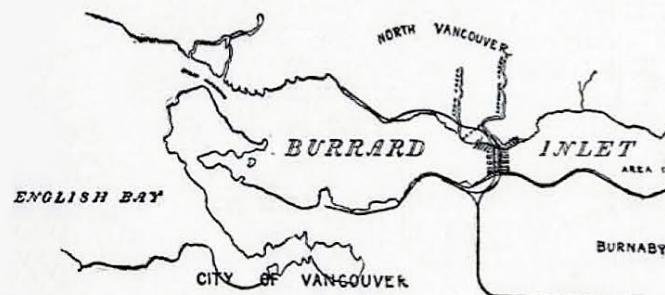
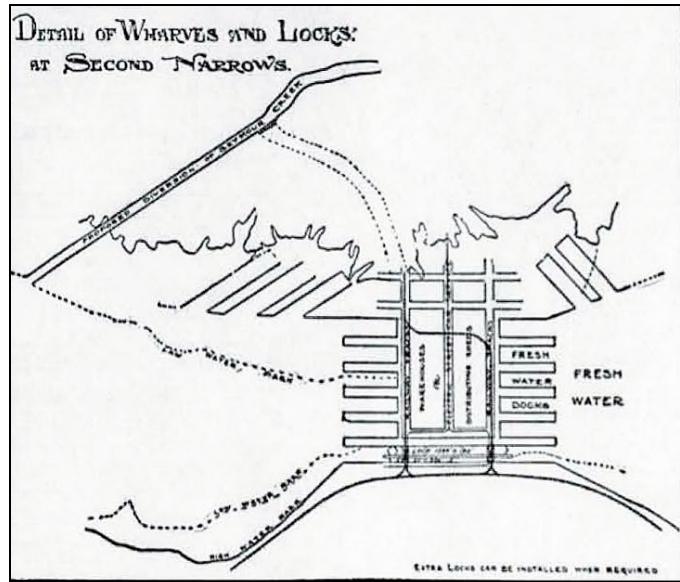
**1902 (?) Plan showing the location of the proposed 'Burrard Inlet and Pitt River Canal' —
note: there are two options ('A' & 'C') for the alignment of the canal shown on the plan.**



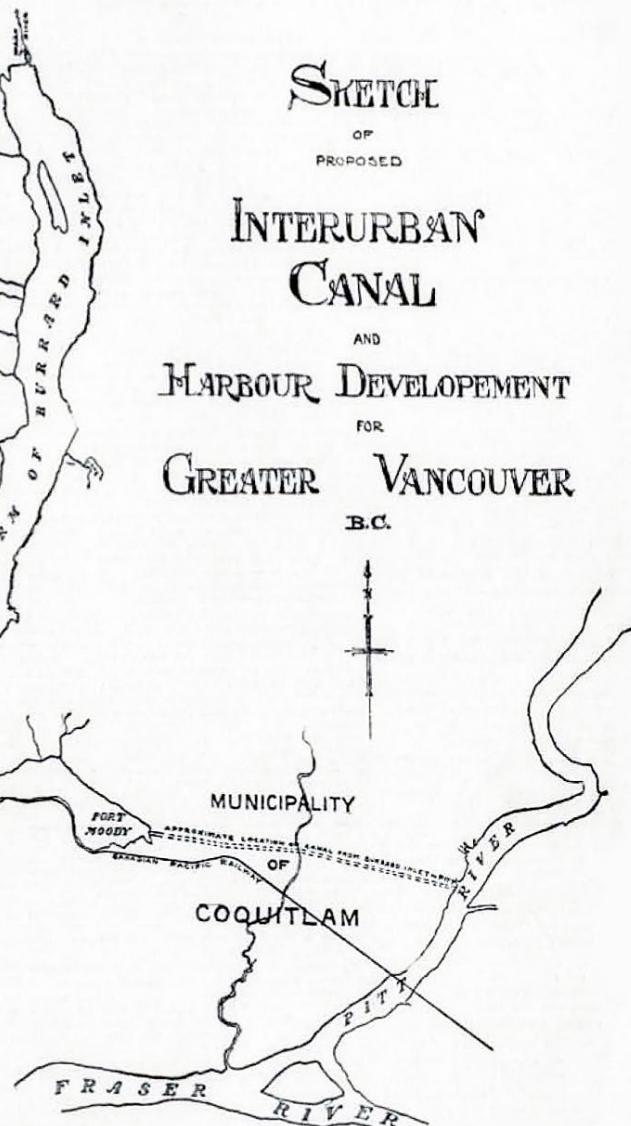
Source: "The V. W. & Y. and Vancouver", Vancouver Daily News-Advertiser, January 10th, 1907, page 1.

Plan annotated by Ralph Drew.

1907 Sketch plan of the proposed 'V. W. & Y. Railway' extension to Deep Cove on the North Arm — note that the proposed extension includes a bridge across the Second Narrows.

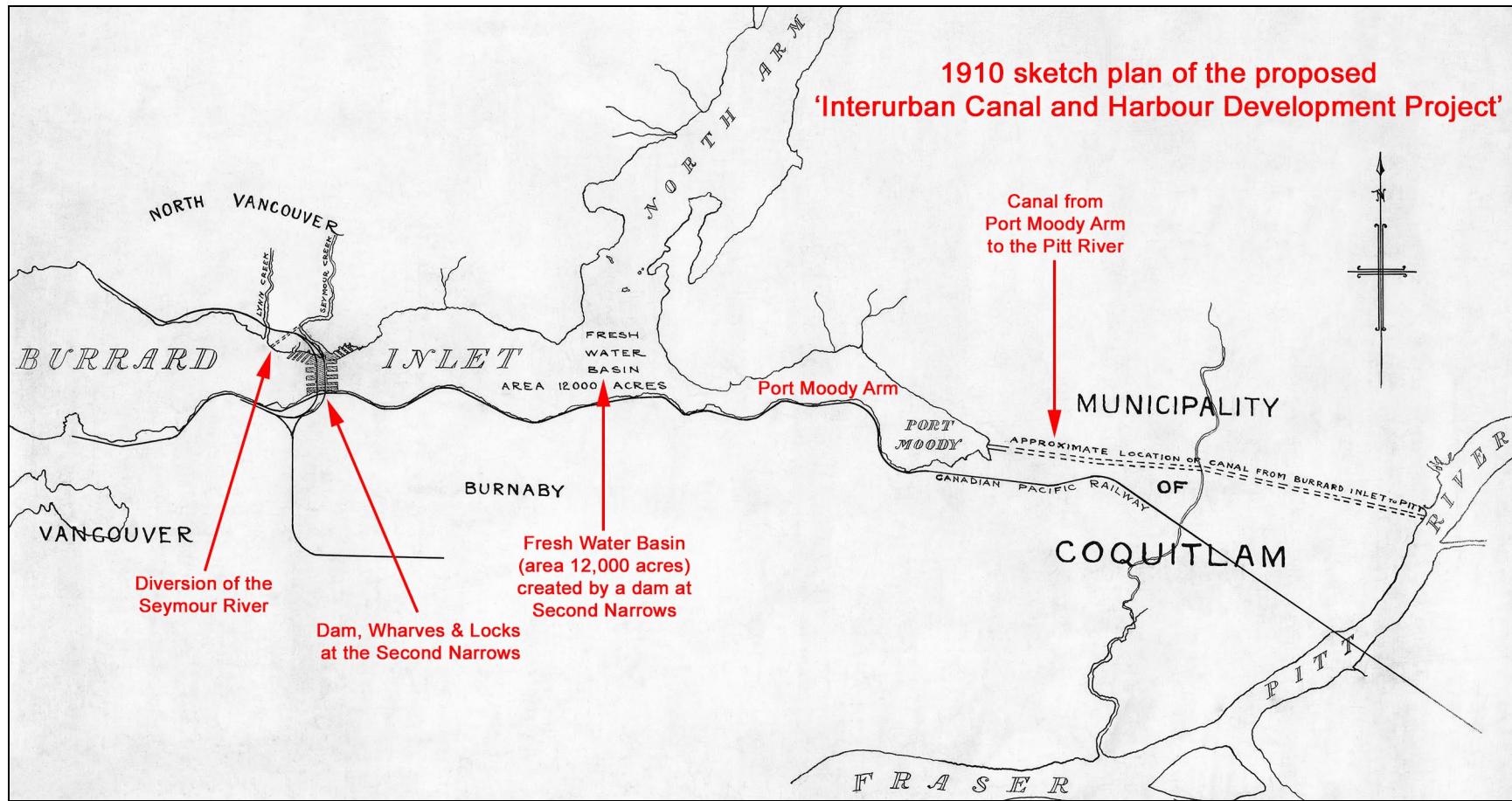


PLAN BY J. H. KILMER, C.E.



Source: "Huge Dam Project for Second Narrows", Vancouver Sun, June 1st, 1912, page 5.

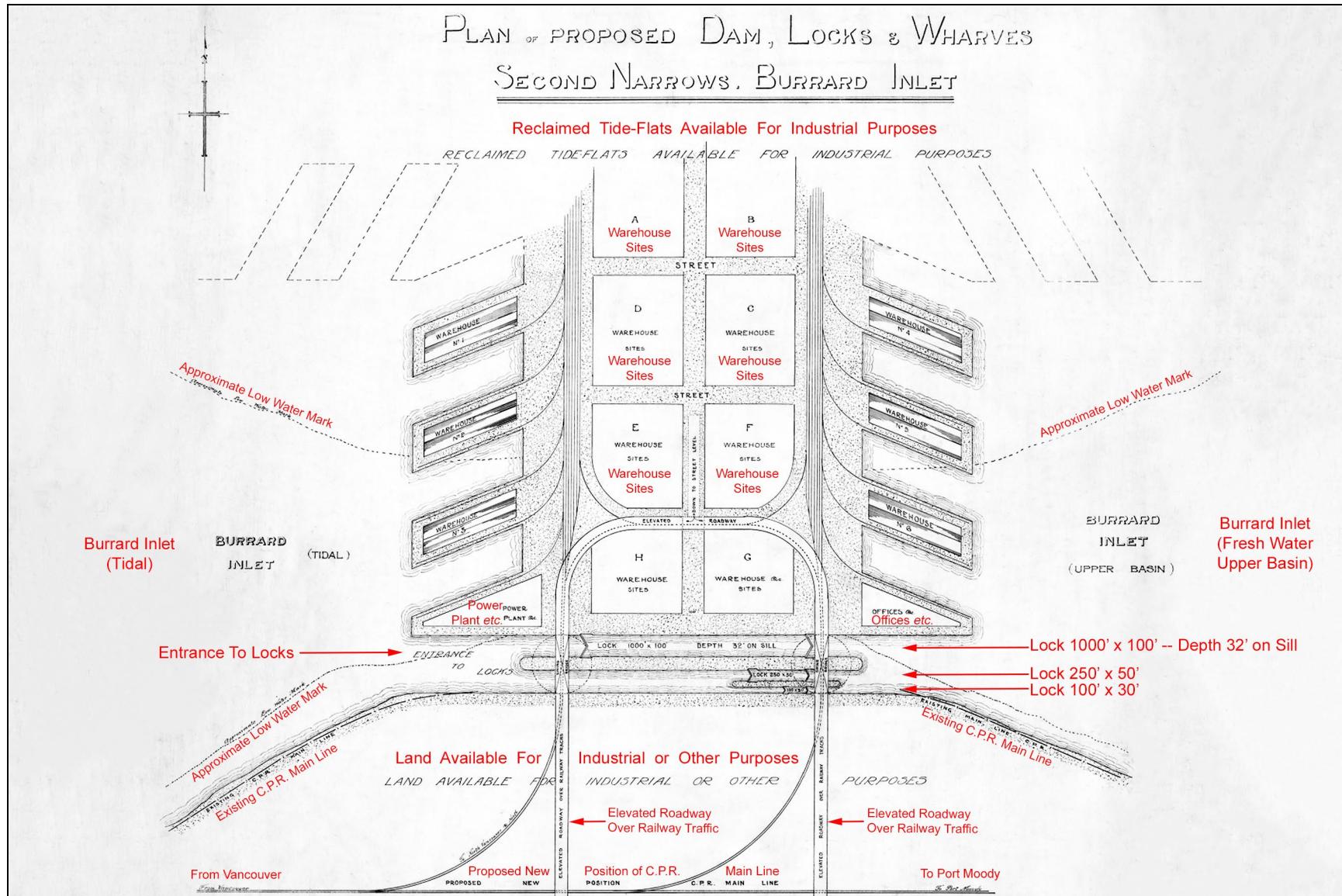
1910 Sketch plan of the proposed 'Interurban Canal and Harbour Development Project'
— plan prepared by J.H. Kilmer, C.E., in response to A.J. Kappele's proposal.



Source: City of Vancouver Archives (CVA Ref. AM1594-: Map 11).

Plan annotated by Ralph Drew.

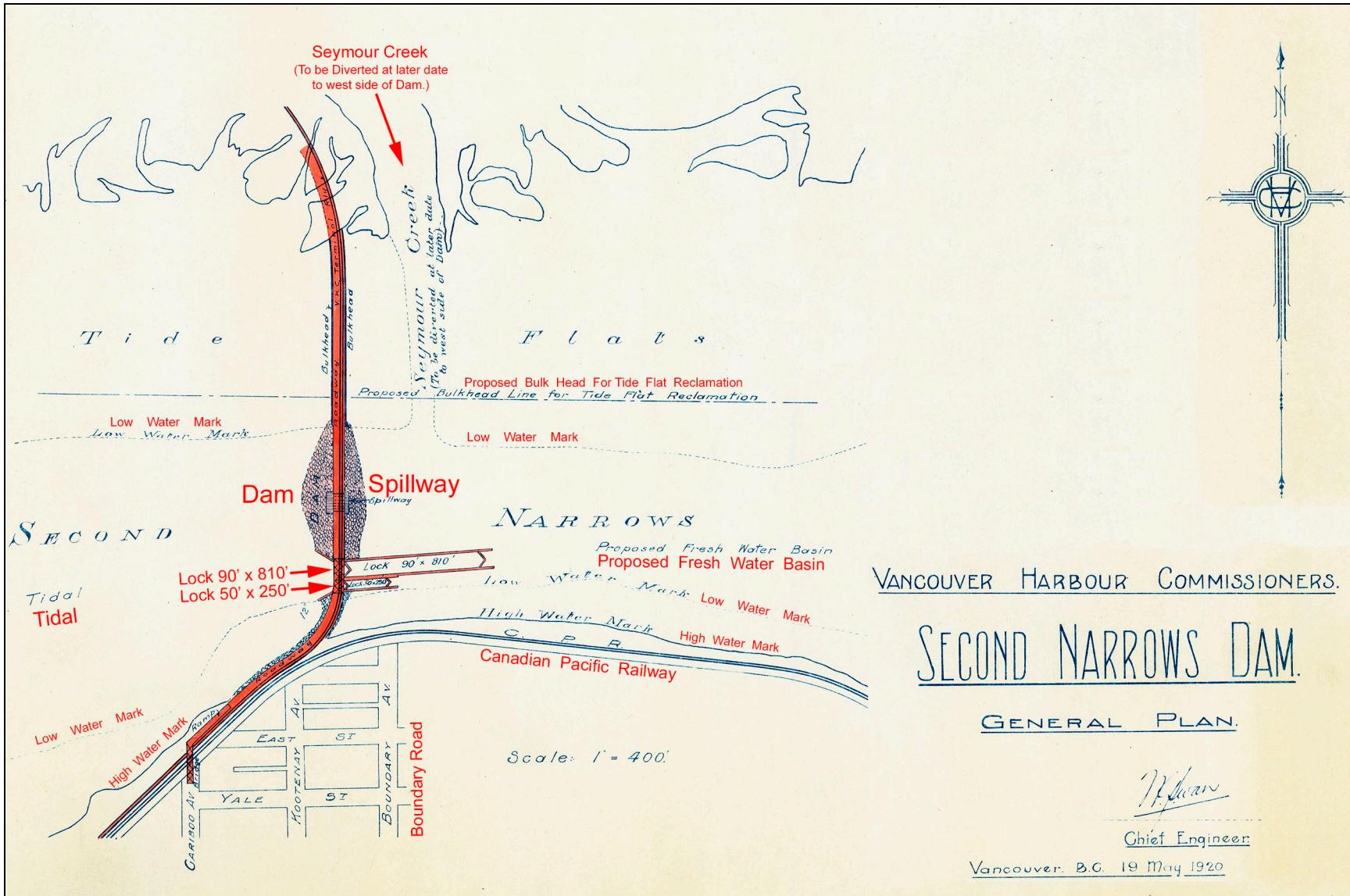
1910 Sketch plan of the proposed 'Interurban Canal and Harbour Development Project' —
note: the project would have converted both Indian Arm and Burrard Inlet east of the
Second Narrows into a fresh water lake with an area of 12,000 acres (4,856 ha).



Source: City of Vancouver Archives (CVA Ref. AM1594-: Map 12).

Plan annotated by Ralph Drew.

1910 Plan of the proposed 'Dam, Locks & Wharves' project at Second Narrows.



Source: City of Vancouver Archives (CVA Ref. AM1594-: Map 1192).

Plan annotated by Ralph Drew.

**1920 Sketch plan of the proposed 'Second Narrows Dam' project —
prepared by 'Vancouver Harbour Commissioners' Chief Engineer W.G. Swan, 19 May 1920.**