Hello and thank you. I get to talk about the history - because I was there; because I lived the Great Freeway Debate. Five reasons to tear down the Georgia Viaducts:

1. Relics of a non-existent freeway system
2. Demand is down
3. Eyesore
4. Divides communities, and
5. Better uses for the land

1. Relics of the freeway system Vancouver rejected

In 1967, a master transportation plan by San Francisco based firm Philips, Barrett proposed a major freeway system for Vancouver. The system would include a 3rd crossing of Burrard Inlet, a waterfront freeway along Coal Harbour / Gastown; and an 8-lane, 9-meter elevated freeway through Chinatown to connect with a replacement Georgia Viaduct; and then east through Strathcona and the Great Northern Cut to Hwy 1.

Fortunately, following two stormy public meetings held in November and December 1967 with hundreds of protesters opposing freeways in Vancouver, Mayor Tom Campbell’s City Council on January 1968, dropped the Carrall Street alignment and the East-West freeway plans (other proposals would come back later); but unfortunately, approved the new Georgia Viaducts.

The viaducts opened in 1972. I was there to protest the opening together with my family and neighbours as SPOTA. We knew the viaducts would channel more traffic through our neighbourhood and feared it was but the first step in the City’s pursuit of freeways. We weren’t alone. There were many groups and interests across the city who opposed the 3rd crossing and the building of freeways in Vancouver (businesses, academics, residents).

But, it took 6 years of protests, vigilance and struggle before Vancouver would be free of the freeway threat: six new options in 1969; a tunnel in
1971. The deathknell sounded only after the federal government announced it would not fund a bridge or tunnel costing $200 million. Vancouver would elect a new Mayor and Council in 1972; and in 1973, the new Provincial Government announced a sea ferry would serve as a 3rd crossing.

And today, precisely because we are freeway free, Vancouver enjoys the reputation of “most liveable city”.

2. Decline in demand

Councillor Meggs has studies that show the Viaducts are declining in importance in the City’s transportation network. Usage is down. People are choosing transit.

3. Eyesore

If you live or work in the area, you will know how unfriendly, dirty and unpleasant it is to walk under the viaducts. The viaducts do not furnish a pleasant urban experience. Citizens have presented many ideas for how removal of the viaducts will improve the quality of urban life in this area.

4. Divides communities

The viaducts create an effective barrier to Chinatown and Strathcona from NE False Creek. They break the continuity of experience for people to move from one side of the viaducts to the other. Ultimately, removal of the viaducts will serve to re-knit the communities.

5. Better uses for the land

The predominantly Black community, Hogan’s Alley, was bulldozed to make way for the viaducts. The ramps occupy two city blocks — blocks in the heart of our city which can be used for housing, parks, shopping and other community uses that are limited only by your imagination and money.

To conclude: the viaducts are a hangover from an era which Vancouver voters rejected resoundingly in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s when the car ruled and a transportation plan produced six freeway options and no transit solutions. Traffic can be diverted and transportation of people can be managed without the viaducts. It is time we re-imagined this part of our city and transform it into a gem for living, working and playing.