Last year, I spoke to this committee about the lack of post-secondary educational capacity in Surrey and other communities south of the Fraser. This year, I propose to do the same. This region has the youngest and fastest growing population in BC. Yet it falls significantly below the provincial average in post-secondary seats per capita (see table 1).

This was recognized back in 2006 when the Province signed an MOU pledging to double by 2015 the size of SFU’s Surrey campus – from 2,500 to 5,000 domestic student spaces. 2015 has come and gone, and yet we have seen only 440 of those 2,500 additional promised spaces. As a result, young people in this area continue to be denied the education they need to attain their full potential.

Failure to deliver on this pledge is doubly unfortunate at a time that BC is suffering from an educational deficit that is denying businesses the talent they need to thrive. It is a deficit that, according to the Conference Board, is costing BC’s economy $7.9 billion in lost GDP and is costing governments $1.8 billion in foregone tax revenues.¹ Left unaddressed, this situation is likely to grow worse.

The Province’s own Labour Market Outlook estimates that BC will need more than 900,000 new workers over the next decade - 77 per cent of whom will require some form of post-secondary education.² Thus by increasing post-secondary spaces in this region, the Province can address two problems – a lack of educational opportunities for students and a shortage of skilled workers for employers – with a single solution.

A solution that SFU is uniquely well equipped to deliver with new programs in high demand areas such as creative technologies and health innovation combined with co-op education and entrepreneurship training.

Last year’s report from this committee recognized this and recommended expanding “the number of seats available to students, including at ... Simon Fraser University’s Surrey campus, to address the increased demand for postsecondary training and education in BC.”³

We respectfully request that this recommendation be repeated this year, and that this committee also urge the Province, as it has done before, to recommit to the 2006 MOU goal of increasing the number of funded domestic student spaces at SFU Surrey to 5,000.

³ Government of British Columbia, Report on the Budget 2019 Consultation, Recommendation 3, November 2018
BURNABY CAMPUS RENEWAL

On SFU’s Burnaby campus, our principle concern is for renewal of our aging infrastructure. While we appreciate the increased support for routine maintenance that we have received in recent years, some structures are beyond repair. Our top priority is a new Life Sciences building to replace our crumbling biology facility.

We therefore request this committee to recommend that funding be allocated to address priority post-secondary capital projects of this kind.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION

Burnaby Mountain also creates serious transportation challenges for our students, faculty and staff, as well as for residents of the mountaintop UniverCity community whose population will soon reach over 9,000. Currently 25,000 commuters – 75 per cent of whom come from beyond Burnaby – are challenged by one of the worst-performing bus routes in the region.

TransLink’s proposed urban gondola system is a sound solution to a pressing transit challenge for the region. The proposal has been identified as a regional planning priority by the Mayors’ Council and was recently endorsed in principle by Burnaby Council.

TransLink calculates the gondola’s benefit-cost ratio to be 1.8 to 1 – an extraordinarily positive rating for a public transit project. Among its other benefits, a gondola would reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve safety, and ensure year-round access. It would also free up buses to be used elsewhere in the region. And, with matching federal green infrastructure funding, it would be the most cost-effective and innovative transit investment in the country.

We therefore hope that the Province will commit to this project in 2020.

SECTOR PRIORITIES

We were gratified to learn of the Province’s recent investment of $9 million to support work integrated learning opportunities for students.

However, we hope that the Province will also respond positively and urgently to the other system priorities set out in the submission of the Research Universities Council of BC.

In particular, we and other post-secondary institutions request that the Province provide resources to improve student mental health, to ensure student safety and security, and to increase diversity and inclusivity on our campuses, including dedicated funding to better support Indigenous students.

Graduate Scholarships

BC lags behind other provinces in graduate student numbers, especially in key disciplines such as engineering and computer sciences.

The Province’s three-year Graduate Scholarship Program is an important first step toward addressing this challenge. However more needs to be done.
We therefore request that this funding be increased and made ongoing to enable BC universities to compete in attracting and retaining the graduate student talent this province needs.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for your attention. SFU is proud of what we, as Canada’s top comprehensive university, have accomplished with your support, and we look forward to what more we can accomplish together in the years ahead.

Table 1 - South of the Fraser vs. BC Comparison: Funded Post-Secondary FTEs Per Capita

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Funded FTE (2016/17)</th>
<th>Population (2016)</th>
<th>FTE/Person</th>
<th>FTE/100 People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South of Fraser</td>
<td>11,308*</td>
<td>981,559</td>
<td>0.0115</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>180,283</td>
<td>4,648,055</td>
<td>0.0388</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2016/17 funded FTE SFU Surrey and KPU