



AFTER 40 YEARS

Reflections on British Columbia's Experience with Federated Regional Government

C-SPO: Caucus of Senior Policy Officials
"Interprovincial Collaboration on Urban and Municipal Affairs"

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Presentation Outline

1. The Challenge of Regional Space
2. Federated Regions in BC – Four Decades of Experience
3. Assessment of the BC Experience
4. A Pathway Ahead?

The views expressed are solely those of the author/speaker and do not reflect the views of the Government of British Columbia or any other provincial/territorial government or official



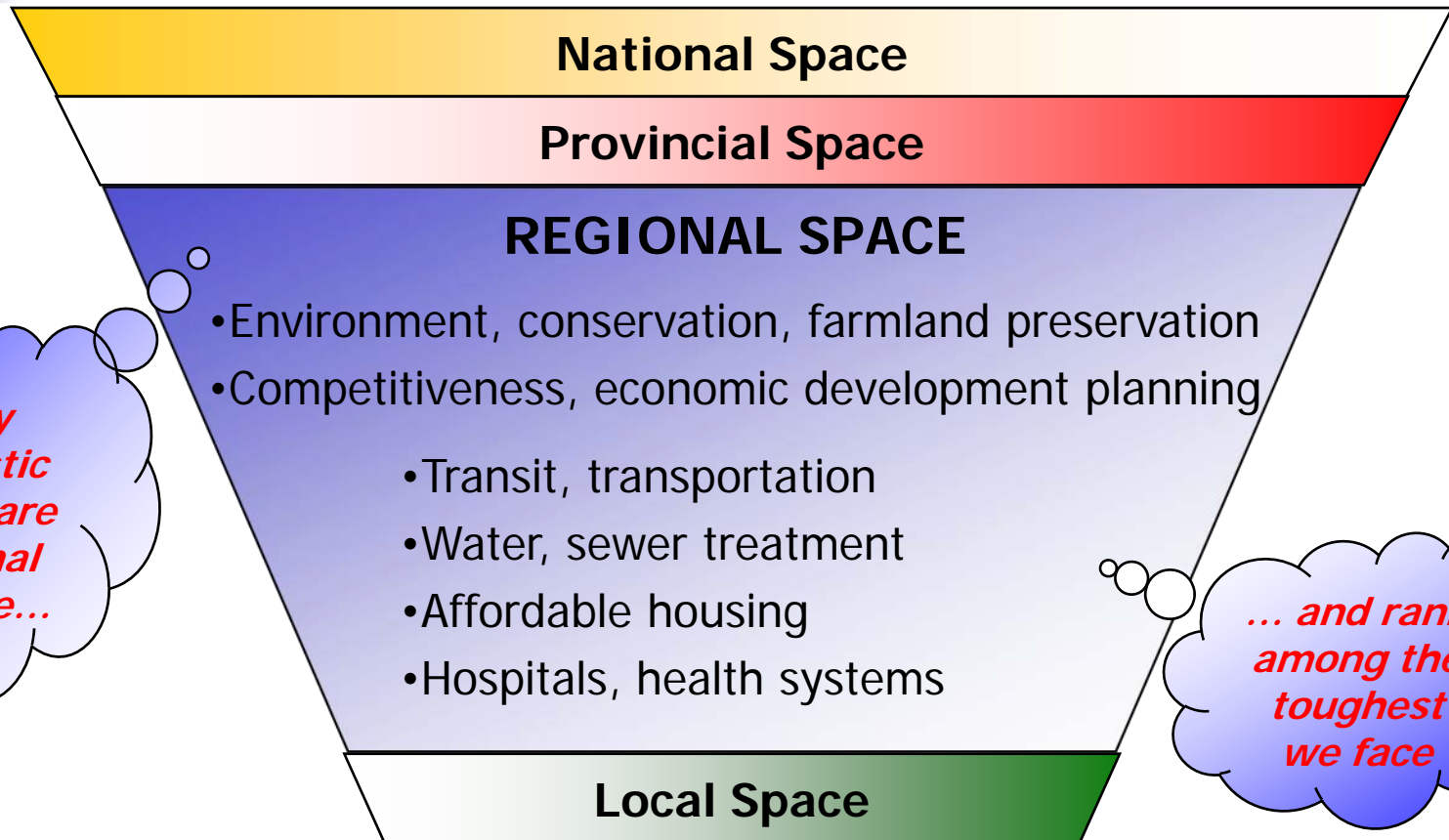
Challenge of Regional Space

1

- *“Region”* → elusive concept
- Consider:
 - Ephemeral, variable
 - Shaped by (multiple) functions
 - Reshaped by changing demographics, economies, technologies, etc.
- Reality is *“many regions”* → coexisting, overlapping, even colliding

Issues in Regional Space

1



Many domestic issues are regional in scale...

... and rank among the toughest we face



Governing Regional Space

1

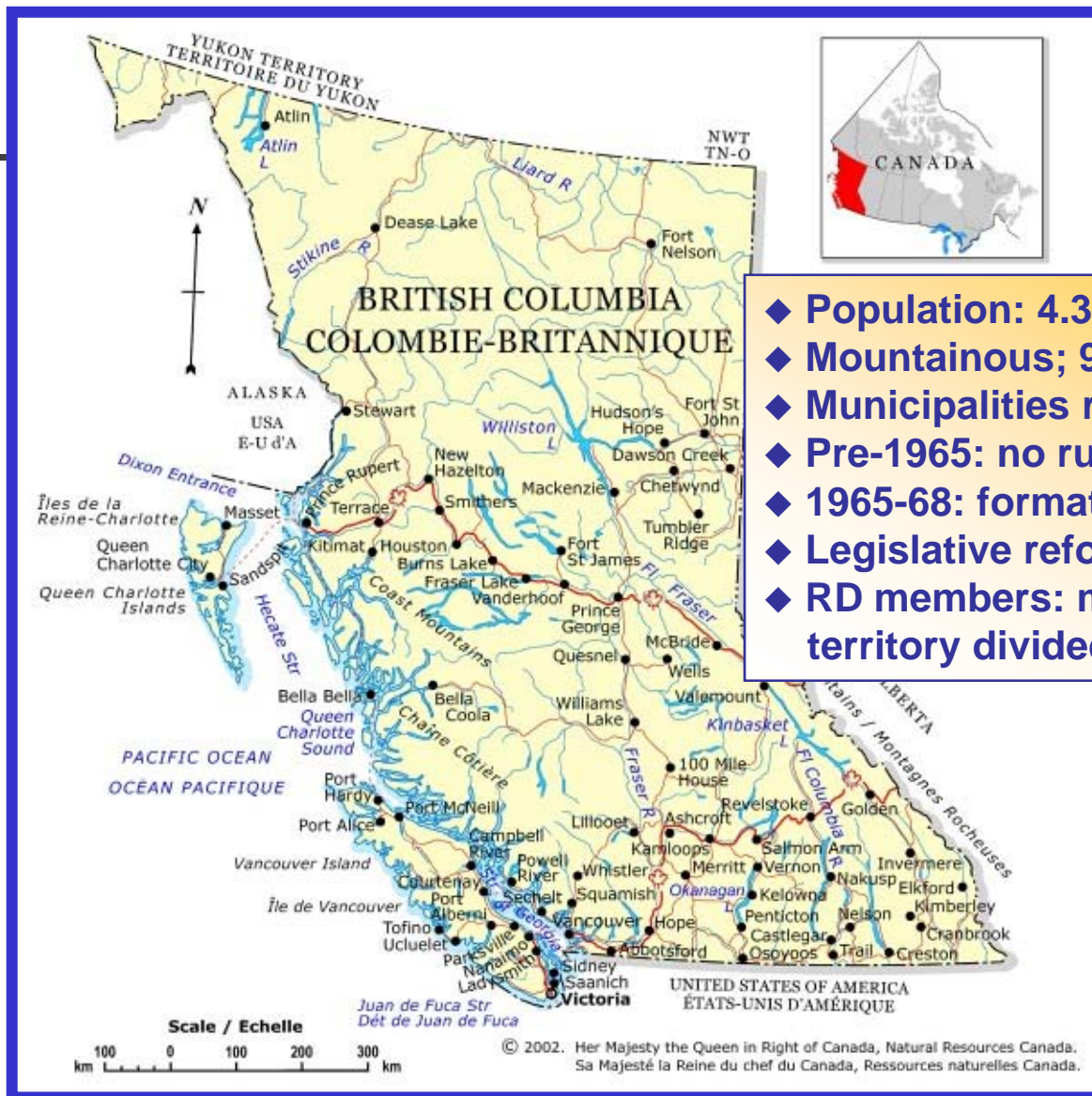
Canada's least settled governance realm

- Provincial – local responsibility split differs widely
- Experimentation continues

Huge variances among provinces

- Only three provinces are intensively regionalized
- Systems of those provinces are dissimilar
- Even inside those provinces, system variation exists
- Other provinces are much less structured regionally

BC Chooses Federated Regions



- ◆ Population: 4.3 million
- ◆ Mountainous; 95% uninhabited
- ◆ Municipalities rarely contiguous
- ◆ Pre-1965: no rural local government
- ◆ 1965-68: formation of RD system
- ◆ Legislative reforms: 1989 & 2000
- ◆ RD members: municipalities + rural territory divided into electoral areas

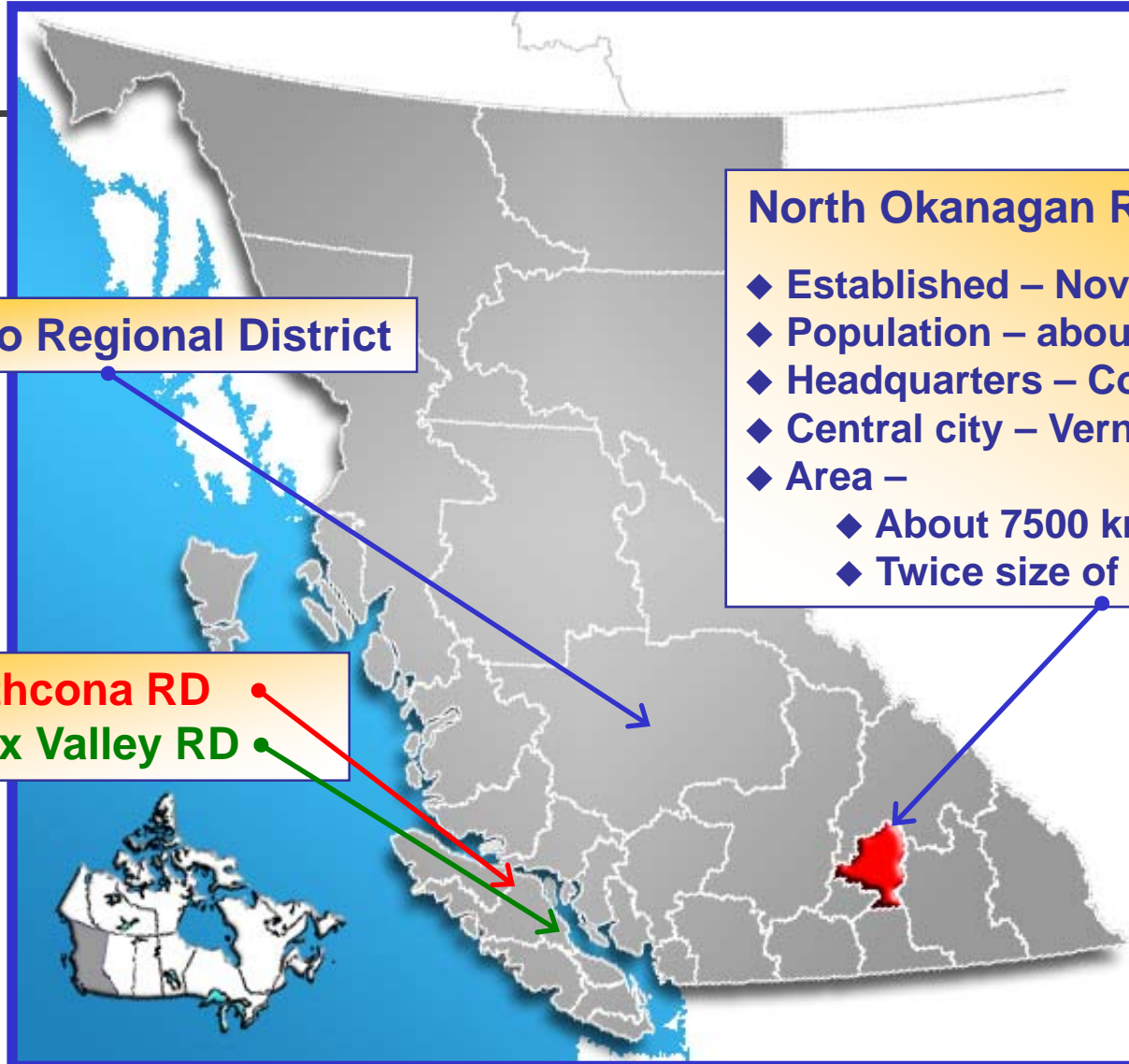
Most RD's Established by 1968

North Okanagan Regional District

- ◆ Established – November 1965
- ◆ Population – about 83,000
- ◆ Headquarters – Coldstream
- ◆ Central city – Vernon
- ◆ Area –
 - ◆ About 7500 km²
 - ◆ Twice size of CMM (Montréal)

Cariboo Regional District

- ◆ Strathcona RD
- ◆ Comox Valley RD



Regional Districts in BC

2

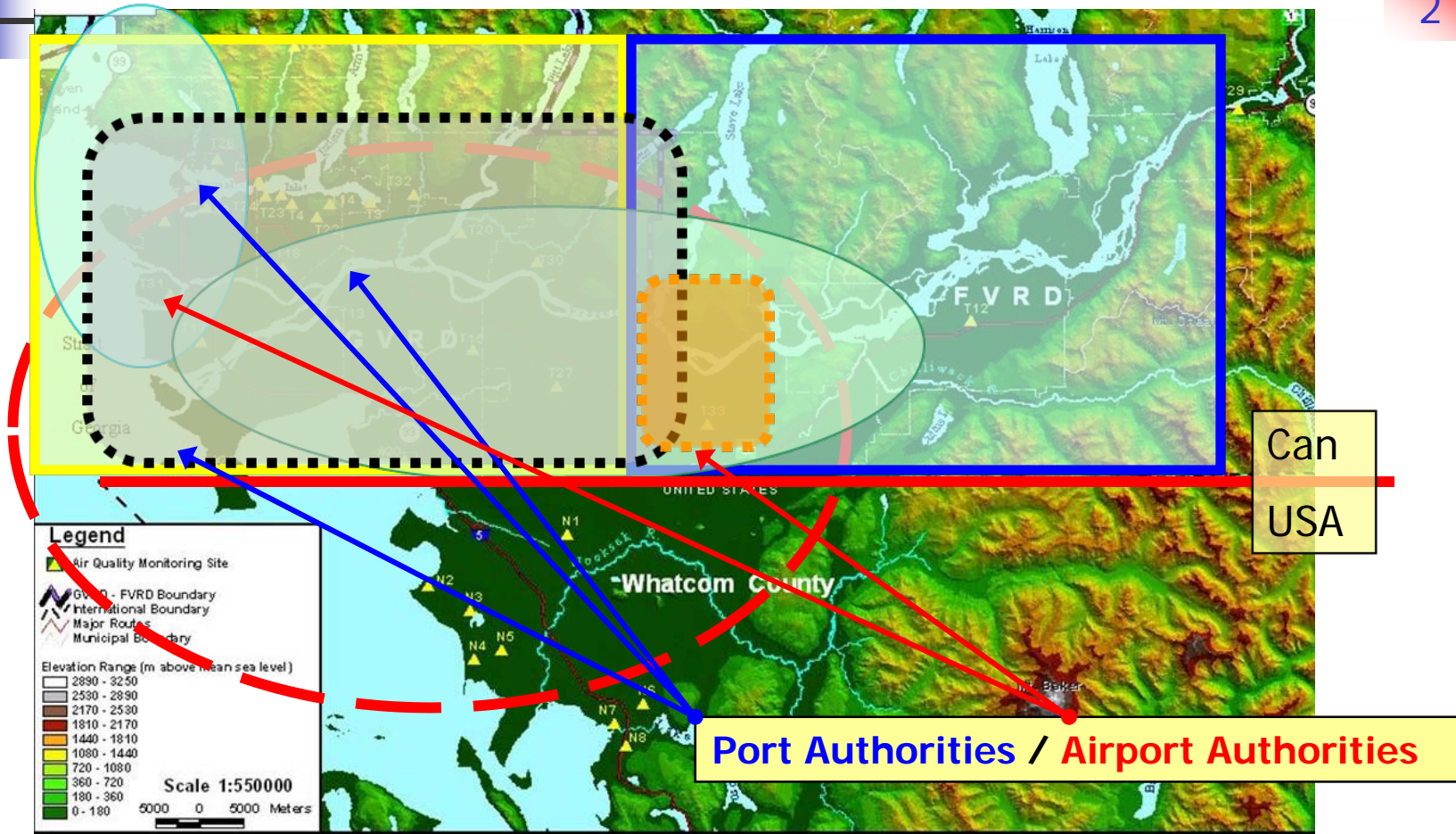
Federated Regional Systems – Key Elements	ON	QC	BC
	<i>Tendency Toward...</i>		
Service Functions – <u>O</u> ptional or <u>M</u> andatory	M	M+O	O
Service Boundaries – <u>C</u> ustomized or <u>F</u> ixed	F	F+C	C

How RD's Work

2

1. Options (for different services or service components)...		3. Service Mode...			
		Direct provision	Contract (public)	Contract (private)	Arm's length
2. Service Area...	Local / rural				
	Interlocal				
	Regional				
	Multi-regional				

Multiple Territorial Divisions in Vancouver's Economic Region



Assessing the BC Experience: A Troubled System?

3

Critique by member municipalities

- Tensions, disputes over planning, cost-sharing
- Excessively rigid service frameworks
- Complicated, endless decision-making processes

Critique by provincial government

- New regions rather than reinforce existing RD's
 - e.g., transportation, economic development
- Failure of RD's to advance in certain spheres
 - e.g., water supply, coordinated business regulation

Assessing the BC Experience: Unparalleled Potential?

3

Service capacity / flexibility

- Any **service**, any **scale**, any **mode**
- Actuated locally (by bylaw)

Service effectiveness

- Effective, efficient... irreplaceable
- Literally 1000's of interlocal partnerships
- Services matched to preferences & ability-to-pay... fiscally equivalent
- Self-organizing... and still evolving

Assessing the BC Experience: Unparalleled Potential?



3

- Robert L. Bish:

“Forty years after its origin, the system is still solving many of the problems posed, but not resolved, in academic and political debates over how to govern metropolitan areas... ”

Source:

Robert L. Bish, “Inter-Municipal Cooperation in British Columbia,”
The Public Manager, Winter 2006-07 (www.thepublicmanager.org)

Assessing the BC Experience: Final Words

3

- **Two views of the RD system:**
 - “A troubled system...”
 - “A system of unparalleled potential...”
 - Both views are valid to a degree
- **Popular evaluations are skewed:**
 - Focus on evidence of tension and ineffectiveness
 - Ignore the system’s flexibility and capacity
- **Result:**
 - When the “problem statement” is imprecise, practical policy prescriptions seldom emerge

A Pathway Ahead?

Directions Old and New

4

Traditional Approach

Assumes:

Simple, static governance environment



Focus on:

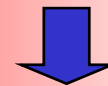
Structure / Function

Conventional tools optimized for localities (in regions)

Emerging Approach

Anticipates:

Complex environment + Interlocal conflict



Focus on:

Competencies / Leadership

Incentive-based tools optimized for regions (not localities)



Emerging Approaches – Decision-making Processes

4

- **Since regional governance is...**
 - Inherently more complex and challenging
 - Results depend on intergovernmental skills

- **Need to emphasize...**
 - Competencies of regional officials
 - Skills in leadership and interlocal diplomacy
 - More dynamic and fluid notions about what regions are and what they need to do



Emerging Approaches – Examples of Better Processes

4

- Examples are scarce...
 - Local Government Leadership Academy (BC)
 - Region of Waterloo (ON): balancing regional and local representation
 - Regions as dynamic processes rather than fixed governmental entities (“virtual regions”)



Emerging Approaches – Decision-making Tools

4

- **Since regional governance is...**
 - Inherently conflictual... local winners/losers
 - Process of inter-local bargaining/trade-offs
- **Need to emphasize...**
 - Incentives to make tough regional choices (“incentive-based decision tools”)
 - Tools for managing the differential local impacts of regional choices (“socially-just”)



Emerging Approaches – Examples of Better Tools

- BC initiatives:
 - Amenity bargaining during land development
 - Regional fire support services (2004/05)
 - Revenue-sharing for results: resort towns
- BC/Canada gas tax sharing agreement:
 - Strategic priorities fund (2005)
- Other BC concepts (*not implemented*):
 - Task force report (2006) – regional economic development, regional fire support services
 - Promoting police integration



For Further Information



- **Contact:**

- Brian Walisser (brian.walisser@gov.bc.ca)
- Gary Paget (gary.paget@gov.bc.ca)

- **Publications about BC:**

- See – www.cserv.gov.bc.ca/lgd/site_index/publications.htm
- Scroll to “Building Stronger Communities” (task force report)
- Scroll to “World Urban Forum – Local Government Excellence”
- Also see – <http://publicadmin.uvic.ca/cpss/lgkp/index.htm>

- **Robert L. Bish:**

- See – <http://publicadmin.uvic.ca/cpss/lgi/publish.htm>
- Scroll to reports R8 (“RD Review”) and WP7 (“Multiple Boundaries”)

Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD)



Electoral Area Legend

- A Golden-Columbia
- B Revelstoke-Columbia
- C South Shuswap
- D Falkland-Salmon Valley
- E Sicamous-Malakwa
- F North Shuswap-Seymour Arm

Legend

- Municipalities
- First Nations Land
- National Parks

csrd.bc.ca

Municipalities:

- ◆ Salmon Arm (17K)
- ◆ Sicamous (3.2K)
- ◆ Revelstoke (8.0K)
- ◆ Golden (4.5K)

Rural (22K)

CSRD Fast Facts:

- ◆ POP: 55K (single corridor)
- ◆ RURAL: 40%
- ◆ 10-YR GROWTH: 10%
- ◆ DOMINANT CITY: none
- ◆ AREA: about 5x PEI
- ◆ LGU's: 4 urban, 6 rural
- ◆ SERVICES: 95
- ◆ BUDGET: \$26M
- ◆ STAFF: 45
- ◆ Four sub-regions; array of service delivery approaches

Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN)

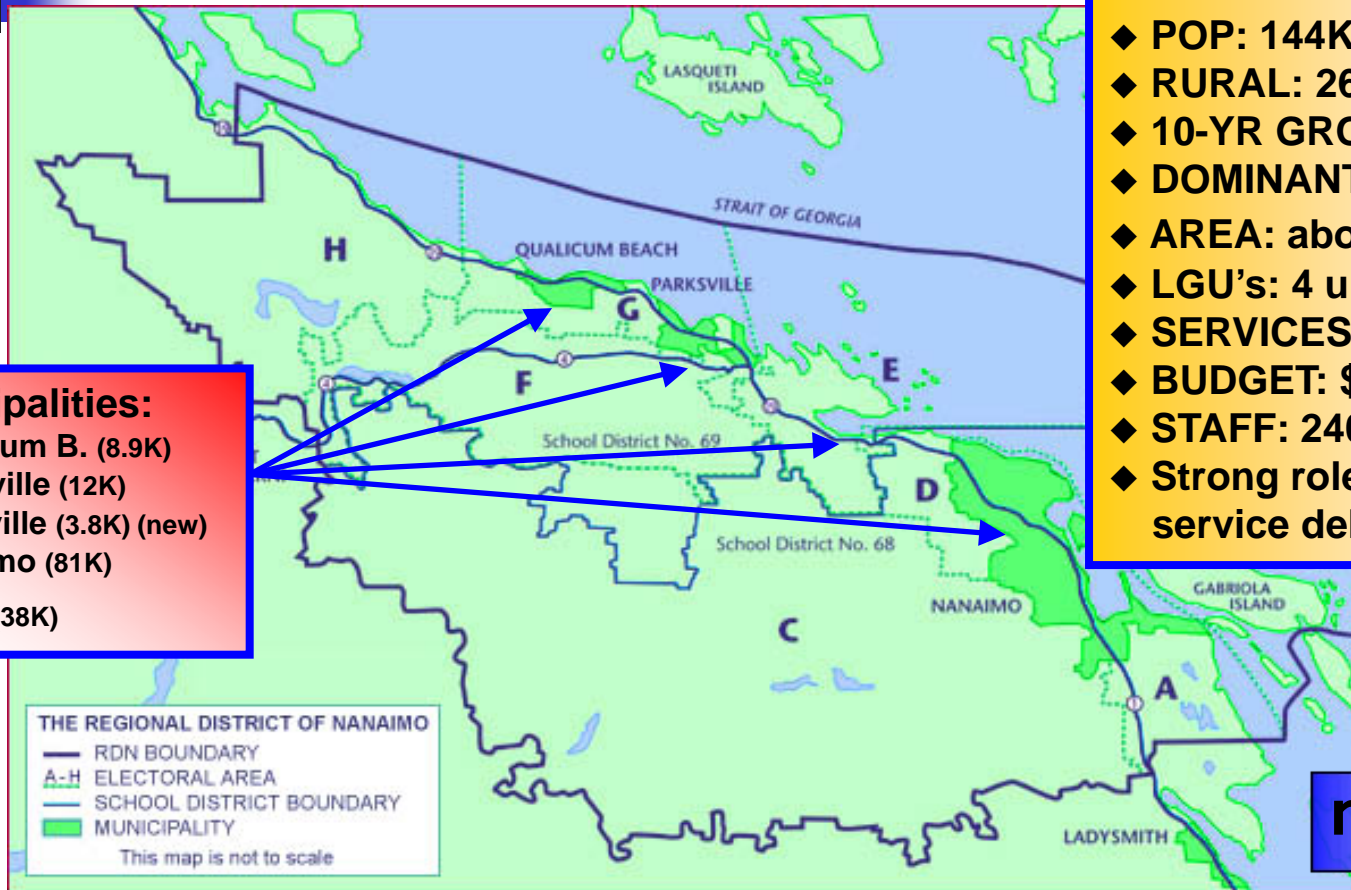
NRD Fast Facts:

- ◆ POP: 144K (single corridor)
- ◆ RURAL: 26%
- ◆ 10-YR GROWTH: 14%
- ◆ DOMINANT CITY: Nanaimo
- ◆ AREA: about 1/3 of PEI
- ◆ LGU's: 4 urban, 7 rural
- ◆ SERVICES: 84
- ◆ BUDGET: \$54M
- ◆ STAFF: 240
- ◆ Strong role in region-wide service delivery

Municipalities:

- ◆ Qualicum B. (8.9K)
- ◆ Parksville (12K)
- ◆ Lantzville (3.8K) (new)
- ◆ Nanaimo (81K)

Rural (38K)



rdn.bc.ca

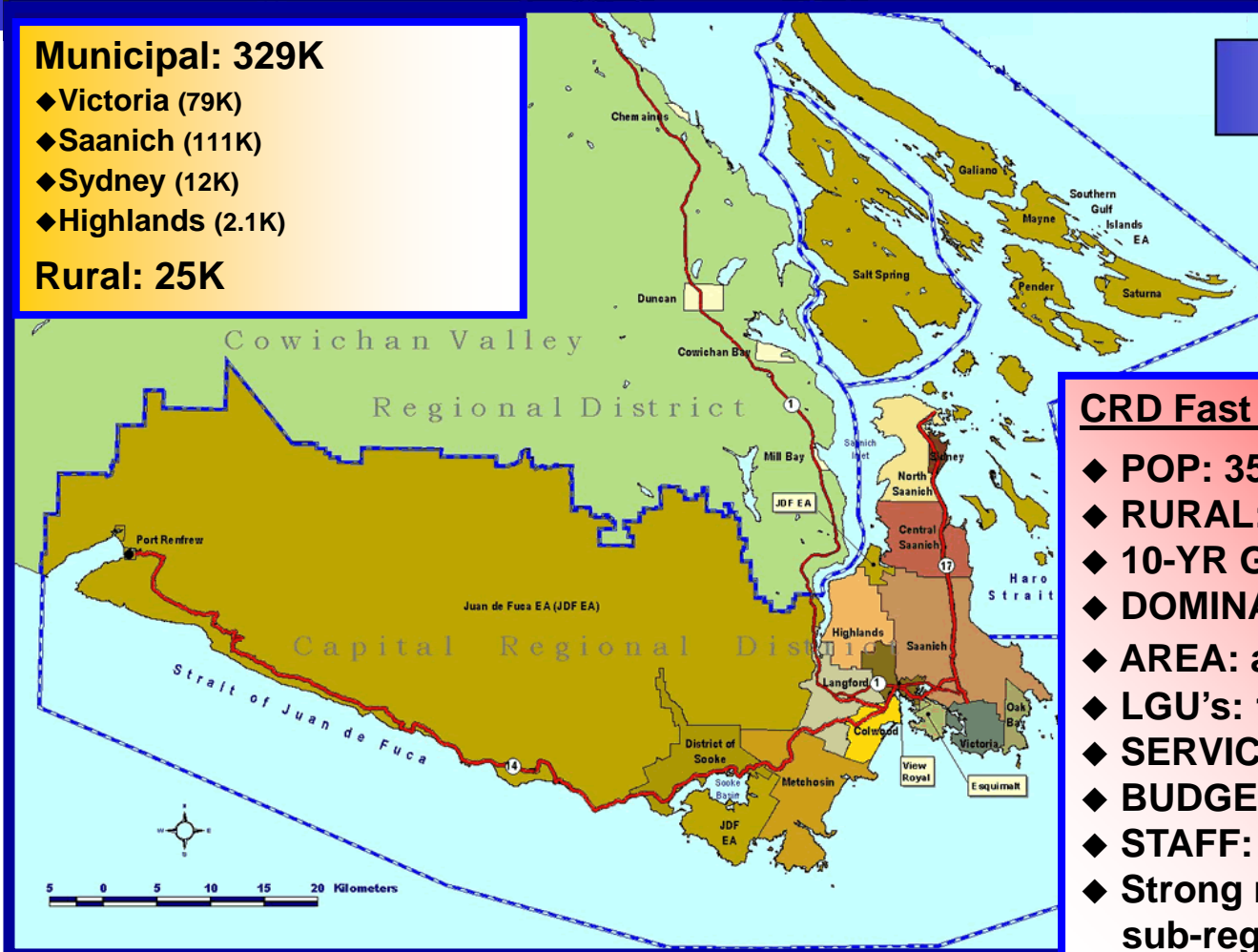
Capital Regional District (CRD)

Municipal: 329K

- ◆ Victoria (79K)
- ◆ Saanich (111K)
- ◆ Sydney (12K)
- ◆ Highlands (2.1K)

Rural: 25K

crd.bc.ca



CRD Fast Facts:

- ◆ **POP:** 354K
- ◆ **RURAL:** 7%
- ◆ **10-YR GROWTH:** 6%
- ◆ **DOMINANT CITY:** none
- ◆ **AREA:** about 1/2 of PEI
- ◆ **LGU's:** 13 urban, 3 rural
- ◆ **SERVICES:** about 200
- ◆ **BUDGET:** \$135M
- ◆ **STAFF:** 750
- ◆ **Strong regional services + sub-regional partnerships**