

# New Metro Vancouver retail developments cluster around transportation hubs

In Burnaby and South Vancouver, mixed use projects follow the flow of transit riders

BY EVAN DUGGAN, SPECIAL TO THE SUN NOVEMBER 24, 2015



Rob Blackwell, senior VP Anthem Properties, in front of Station Square in Burnaby.

**Photograph by:** Arlen Redekop, Vancouver Sun

With the holiday shopping season ratcheting up, two large retail developments in Metro Vancouver are in the process of opening, with the developers touting the convenience of nearby public transit as a lure for shoppers.

Metro Vancouver's retail sector is transforming, with retailers at Marine Gateway in Vancouver and Station Square in Burnaby opening new shops at dense, mixed-use projects located at transit hubs, with immediate connections to the SkyTrain, Canada Line and bus networks.

With retail openings taking place now through early 2016, Marine Gateway will include shops, a pub, offices, a fitness facility and an 11-screen Cineplex Theatre complex. The development, located at the Canada Line's Marine Drive station near the South Vancouver Bus Loop, also includes 415 condominium and 46 rental units.

In Burnaby, Station Square is a 12-acre master-planned community by Beedie Living and Anthem Properties Group near the Metrotown SkyTrain station and bus loop. When completed, it will have five residential towers with 1,800 condos and 400,000 square feet of office space and retail.

Station Square already has several new stores open, including a Rexall, Bed Bath & Beyond, Shoe Co., and Dollarama among several others. Best Buy is set to open at the end of this month.

The original mall at Station Square was completed in the late 1980s, said Rob Blackwell, vice-president of development at Anthem Properties Group.

The mall, while relatively new structurally, had become obsolete. "When it opened it was shiny and new and had the latest and greatest," Blackwell said in an interview. But one of its key tenants was a multi-screen cinema.

When the steeper "stadium-style" theatre opened next door at Metropolis, Station Square's screening rooms became a "second rung" experience, Blackwell said.

The cinema ultimately closed in 2012. "It [the mall] had been limping along with those functionally obsolete spaces for a number of years, and we had to do something," he said.

Redevelopment made sense. The property is located along the SkyTrain line and "beside the largest shopping centre in the Lower Mainland with Metropolis," he said. "That's very established as a shopping area."

Moving forward, their direct link to mass transit will be their key to success, Blackwell said.

"The SkyTrain has just become a more acceptable form of transportation and a driver of revitalization in neighbourhoods," Blackwell said. "The tenants that we have were attracted to that ... They need a way for people to get to their stores by any way possible."

Bed Bath & Beyond had been looking for a location in Burnaby for a long time. The Station Square store, at 32,000-square-feet, is one of the chain's largest in Canada, said Jessica Joyce, a company spokeswoman.

"The idea of being integrated into a regional transit hub was especially exciting to us, making it a regional shopping destination, along with the new condominiums, and soon-to-open restaurants," she said.

While many of their customers are expected to arrive via the SkyTrain or buses, Joyce said larger products could be delivered to homes within a 20-kilometre radius.

Meanwhile, retail activity is ramping up at Marine Gateway, said Andrew Grant, the president of PCI Developments.

He said several of the shops and services will be open by the end of November. "In December, we'll have T&T Supermarket opening," he said in an interview. "They're anxious to get open before

Christmas.” The Cineplex cinema is set to open in February or March, he added.

The commercial components at Marine Gateway are concentrated along a high-street style corridor. In addition to the grocery store and theatre, there will also be a drugstore, an Irish pub, a fitness centre, and a number of banks and fast food restaurants.

The neighbourhood previously lacked a commercial centre, Grant said, adding that he expects Marine Gateway to become a major residential, commercial and retail hub. He said “more than 500 buses a day come in, and 500 go out” from the South Vancouver bus loop.

PCI estimates that roughly 75 per cent of the bus passengers arrive and depart the bus loop from the Canada Line, he said. “Our tenants who came here, particularly T&T and Cineplex, were absolutely attracted by the transit connection.”

Grant said retailers and businesses recognize that dense urban developments come with a few compromises.

“They don’t get the field of surface parking in front of them,” he said, adding that they also face a more complicated underground loading system, shared parking stalls, and less overall space. “It’s not a traditional shopping centre, he said.

“There’s lots of compromise, but they love the fact about the amount of people riding transit.”

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