

The white-feather-headed eagle (which is improperly referred to as the "bald eagle") was recently removed from the endangered species list, meaning that we can now enjoy its precious eggs.

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KATHRYN DUTCHAK

# New, expanded Henday just the freeway to the congestion zone

BRIAN GOULD



"The last thing Edmonton needs is another barrier to regional co-operation, but the Henday will be just that. With fewer interchanges and crossings than Whitemud Drive, the Henday will be a barrier even to cars, but more importantly, it will be essentially impenetrable to pedestrians and bicycles."

A sinister threat to Edmonton's future opened earlier this week, though apparently everybody's been too busy celebrating to notice. The previous sections of Anthony Henday Drive were limited in effect, but by linking them from Yellowhead to Yellowhead, it will accelerate sprawl, automobile traffic, and driving distances to frightening levels. Despite this, almost everyone is welcoming this freeway with open arms.

There's been some controversy over the name—however, it's quite appropriate. Anthony Henday was, after all, a convicted smuggler, and reincarnating him as a roadway isn't effective rehabilitation. Likewise, Anthony Henday Drive will smuggle jobs, developments, residents, and funding out of Edmonton, and we'll only see the full scope of this damage after it has already been done.

For an explorer with such a vast land to map, Henday was a horrible cartographer. The Hudson's Bay Company committee would later record, "We apprehend Henday is not very expert in making Drafts with Accuracy or keeping a just Reckoning of distance other than by guess." But despite his unsuitability for the job, Henday was unleashed on the Prairies, charged with encouraging natives to make the long journey from central Alberta to a trading post on Hudson's Bay.

Seven years after its completion, Henday's mission was deemed a failure. It did, however, teach the company that in order to effectively trade and

co-operate with their partners, they would be better off setting up where the population already was, rather than remaining isolated and encouraging long-distance travel. It was this realization that resulted in the creation of Fort Edmonton in the first place.

More recent history shows what ring roads will do to a city. Finished in 1964, Washington's 103km Capital Beltway was originally hailed as a "huge wedding ring for the metropolitan area" and an efficient truck bypass. The resulting road is neither, with DC-proper's population in continual decline and later expansion to eight lanes failing to relieve chronic and crippling congestion. The damage has been so intense that "outside the beltway" is now synonymous with suburban sprawl, and the road is a symbol for class segregation.

But we seem to have ignored the impact of these types of roads, and are instead concentrating on how every other Canadian prairie city has one. Winnipeg, Regina, and Saskatoon all have them, Calgary's building one, and Grande Prairie's planning one too. And when fully open, the Henday will be the envy of Moose Jaw. We're even planning a second one for thirty years hence, which doesn't exactly inspire confidence in the Henday solving our transportation problems.

The last thing Edmonton needs is another abstract barrier to regional co-operation, but the Henday will be just that. With fewer interchanges and crossings than Whitemud Drive, the Henday will be a barrier even to cars,

but more importantly, it will be essentially impenetrable to pedestrians and bicycles. With bridges 16 blocks apart and huge swaths of empty land on either side, the distances are immense, and there's no reason to cross to more useless suburbia on the other side anyway. It's also rather effective as a giant moat—though given the choice between four lanes of traffic screaming by at 120km per hour and a few snapping crocodiles, I'll take the crocs.

Alarming, one frequent argument is that because we've removed traffic lights, this is actually a win for the environment. Even if it wasn't a disaster just building it, that would only be true if we could somehow keep travel distances constant. Unfortunately, without incredibly involved policies like tolls or rationing, it's nowhere near possible.

Studies prove that building roads to relieve congestion only results in more traffic in the long term—look no further than Anthony Henday Drive at Stony Plain Road. Quicker car trips will only lead to people driving longer distances, and more room for more cars will, unsurprisingly, mean more cars.

This whole "we have to build the freeway to save the environment" argument sounds very much like Seinfeld's "we have to have sex to save the friendship" approach. Maybe that's what feels so wrong about all of this: next thing you know, we'll be taking advice from George and banning "front-first" parallel parking, or copying Kramer's Adopt-a-Highway antics. Then again, maybe what the Henday really needs is double-wide comfort lanes.