



BC Transit's Draft Strategic Plan: Summary of Feedback and Proposed Revisions

Strategic Plan Background and Consultation Overview

In Spring 2009, BC Transit launched a province-wide strategic plan process to determine our long term direction and priorities. This included a request for input from our customers, employees, and partners on what they perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of our organization and future opportunities and challenges for transit.

Based on feedback gathered from that first round of open houses, workshops, on line surveys and formal discussion paper submissions, BC Transit created a draft strategic plan. In November 2009, a second phase of public involvement was launched to share and refine that draft. This final phase included:

- **Provision of full draft plan document** to Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure staff with a request to review and provide comments.
- **Eight regional workshops** held in Terrace, Kamloops, Kelowna, Nelson, Abbotsford, Nanaimo, Prince George, and Victoria, BC. These workshops drew together over 140 local government elected officials and staff, transit system managers, and other transit stakeholders to hear an overview of the plan's findings and our current financial outlook and to discuss each of the plan's priorities in regard to local implications.
- **A series of five employee open houses** attended by more than 100 BC Transit staff. Several employees also took the opportunity to submit feedback via email, discussion, or through annotated copies of the draft plan.
- **Online materials** provided to the public, including the full text of the draft document and the ability to submit comments via feedback forms, email, and mail.

The following summarizes major themes from feedback received and the resulting changes proposed for the Strategic Plan. Additional project background is available at www.bctransit.com/2030/.

Summary of Stakeholder Feedback

Regional Workshops

The following summarizes key elements heard across all sessions. These notes are framed under the draft strategic plan priorities. Detailed notes from specific workshops are also available at www.bctransit.com/2030/workshop_outcomes.cfm.

Objective 1. Develop Financial Sustainability

- Participants confirmed developing stable revenue sources as transit's top priority.
 - Among ideas for new revenue sources, a provincial fuel tax was the most favoured option, contingent on the conditions that it could be used to help offset local share of transit costs, be limited to transit projects (not other provincial priorities), and be focused on service improvements rather than administrative increases.
 - The options of a local fuel tax or a vehicle levy garnered less support, although there was increased support for a vehicle levy if implemented with a provincial fuel tax to diversify revenue sources.

- As the Victoria Region already has a local fuel tax, this region's discussions were substantially different than those heard elsewhere, with more suggestions of ideas like road tolls and discussion about the current legislative constraints to a local fuel tax.
- The Northwest, Thompson, and Cariboo regions were less supportive of any new fuel tax or vehicle levy, often citing poorer transit availability or use by residents. However, a number of representatives from these regions also noted their reduced property tax capacity due to flat or declining populations and an increasing need to retain resident access to services through transit.
- Participants strongly supported the idea of multi-year service agreements provincially and locally.
- School Districts / Ministry of Education and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada were often noted as two other possible partners and revenue sources.
- Potential use of carbon tax funds for transit met with an overall positive response but some elected officials cautioned that these funds may need to be reserved for other climate change related infrastructure.
- The issues of increasing regionalization and need for regional transit services were brought up in all locations except the Cariboo and Victoria. Regionalized health and education services and access to affordable housing were seen as the main drivers.
 - Overall, participants felt that creation of regional transit plans would need to precede any discussion of further regionalizing transit system governance. Planning, marketing, fares, and operations were seen as functions that could be better regionally integrated without necessarily changing governance structures.
 - Strong appetite for service integration was found in the Kootenays and some areas of the Okanagan. Participants from communities in the Terrace-Kitimat corridor were also open to exploring the idea of collapsing multiple service agreements into one.
- When discussing how to improve the existing assignment of responsibilities, a key theme was how BC Transit could better help rather than hinder local initiatives, particularly local marketing and transit business development.
- Participants were very supportive of the proposed changes to assigning costs for major vehicle components and vehicle lease fees.

Objective 2. Support and Shape Livable Communities

- In general, most communities were supportive of the priorities and actions in this section. Many communities are in the process of completing active transportation plans, sustainability/climate action plans, or updating Official Community Plans. A list was compiled of plans underway and of local organizations with whom transit could potentially partner.
 - There is strong support to better integrate transit with other sustainable modes of travel, especially walking and cycling.
 - Related to integration of services, two issues frequently noted were the lack of adequate space for bikes on buses (particularly in hillier communities) and the desire to mitigate reduction of Greyhound services in some regions.
 - When discussing the need to create priority corridors for transit, a number of participants noted difficulty with creating transit stops on Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure roadways, with flag stops being used as an interim solution.
 - Discussions in several communities noted that designating priority corridors for transit should be a priority as it will focus stop and station improvements in those areas and help create transit supportive land use zoning and development criteria.
 - Most agreed that there is a need for better integration of transit corridors, zoning and development.

Objective 3. Change the Perception of Transit

- Participants were supportive of enhancing marketing and advocacy of our services, with a number of action-level suggestions provided in each location.
 - Many also noted that marketing would be futile without first ensuring that basic passenger information was available and that transit services were robust and reliable.
 - There were suggestions received on possible marketing campaign messaging, advocacy and information materials that could be provided to elected officials, and new places to promote transit (such as soccer association AGMs, hockey games, etc.)
 - Creation of a BC Transit Transportation Demand Management and Business Development working group with ongoing leadership and participation from interested communities was identified as a positive way to develop new campaigns and advocacy approaches. It is proposed that a working group be explored as part of the upcoming BC Transit Workshop to be held in April 2010.

Objective 4. Deliver Operational Excellence

- Discussions under this objective—centering on operational safety, service, passenger information, fares, vehicles, and stops/exchanges—tended to be location-specific and so produced the most varied feedback. The region-specific workshop notes provide further details on these sections.
 - Some of the more common themes centered on making better use of our website to share resources, clarifying advertising policies, providing more direction on how to respectfully and legally deal with problem passengers, and all aspects of vehicles and how they are procured, tested, and assigned.

Objective 5. Strengthen our People and Partnerships

- When asked how partnerships could be enhanced, many participants focused on issues also raised under Objective 1. In systems outside of Victoria, participants particularly spoke of the need to improve communications and clarify the balance between local initiatives and autonomy and BC Transit oversight. Within Victoria, municipal participants wanted to create and strengthen partnerships with BC Transit, particularly around land use planning and transit-related considerations when negotiating with developers.
 - Other common requests were for increased BC Transit responsiveness, more staff continuity, and more regular opportunities for transit partners to check in with each other.
 - Overall, the participants saw the annual BC Transit gathering, the collaborative process used with the Victoria Region Rapid Transit Project, and this round of strategic plan regional workshops as very valuable.

Employee Open Houses

- Feedback from employees on the draft strategic plan's priorities and actions was generally positive and resulted in further clarification to the plan's language.
 - The majority of those who provided feedback on the new Vision, Mission, and Values thought that they fit our organization very well.
 - Some of the common issues raised were:
 - Ensuring that the plan actually results in action and change.
 - The significant need to improve integration and communication between employees and departments.
 - The numbering of plan objectives and whether this numbering was priority-based (which it is not, as all the objectives are seen as interrelated and interdependent).
 - The need to keep all employees better informed of our performance and progress, particularly in comparison to other Canadian transit agencies.

Online Public Submissions

- Public input received mainly related to clarifying language. Input also highlighted the need to complement the full plan (which focuses on our province-wide organizational perspective and requirements) with a shorter summary from the customer/employee perspective focusing on how they benefit from the proposed priorities and actions.

Summary of Strategic Plan Proposed Revisions Resulting from Consultation

BC Transit staff are currently revising the strategic plan to prepare for its expected finalization and implementation in Spring 2010. Changes that have already been incorporated into this process from the feedback received include the following:

- The plan's overall language and concepts have been significantly clarified, simplified, and tightened based on feedback received. Throughout the document, the revision process:
 - Revised statements to use plain language wherever possible, particularly in the actions listed for each priority.
 - Clarified meaning of some statements, especially based on comments received by reviewers outside our organization.
 - Reviewed and revised statements in the actions section to make the level of detail between each more consistent.
 - Updated select statements to more accurately reflect our most current thinking on those topic areas.
- Statistics have been updated to reflect 2009/10 and March 2010 forecast data, with data to be further updated and confirmed closer to the Spring 2010 release date.
- The issue of regionalization has been expanded under "Continued Growth, Urbanization, Regionalization" in section 4.0 Assessing Tomorrow's Opportunities and Challenges.
 - Reference has been made to the impacts of regionalization due to healthcare and education policies and the location of housing perceived to be more affordable.
 - The particular impact of regionalization on communities with plateauing or shrinking populations and tax bases has also been noted.
- A statement has been included in the plan overview section to clarify that the proposed objectives are interrelated and interdependent and that the numbering of objectives does not reflect priority ranking.
- Language regarding regional governance has been revised under Priority 1.2 Renew and Revise Governance Structures and Responsibilities to focus on opportunities to more effectively coordinate and integrate regional marketing, planning, and fares for transit systems, rather than on specific local governance structure changes.
- The introductory paragraph for priority 2.3 Identify and establish priority corridors for transit has added the following sentence: "The designation of transit priority corridors can also help focus improvements to stops or stations and assist the creation of transit-supportive land use zoning and development criteria."
- The following action has been added to priority 3.1 Implement new marketing strategies: "As part of re-examining roles and responsibilities under priority 1.2, evaluate how marketing responsibilities are shared between BC Transit and local transit partners. Determine how BC Transit can best support communities that have more capacity and desire to undertake local marketing of transit systems."
- Two actions relating to social sustainability have been added to priority 5.3 Increase our environmental, social, and economic accountability: "Maintain the affordability of transit through cost control measures and program development." "Maintain partnerships with mobility representatives."