



For Immediate Release
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Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

RAPIDBUS SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS KELOWNA TRANSIT EXPANSION

KELOWNA – A new RapidBus service connecting downtown Kelowna with the University of British Columbia-Okanagan (UBCO), and enhancing service to the Rutland area, was unveiled today. These new services will begin operations on Sunday, Sept. 5, helping to bring transit users, including students, to their destinations easier and faster than ever before, and helping to build a sustainable, efficient transportation network for the region.

The first phase of the RapidBus BC project was previewed by Stockwell Day, President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, Shirley Bond, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, Ron Cannan MP Kelowna – Lake Country, Norm Letnick, MLA Kelowna-Lake Country, Steve Thomson, Minister of Agriculture and Lands and MLA Kelowna-Mission, Sharon Shepherd, mayor of the City of Kelowna, and Doug Findlater, mayor of the District of West Kelowna.

This new service has been made possible as a result of over \$21.5 million in funding from the Governments of Canada and British Columbia, the City of Kelowna and ICBC. These funds have been used toward improvements to Highway 97, including the addition of high-occupancy vehicle lanes between Gordon and Highway 33, seven transit stations and new signal communications technology.

As well, the federal and provincial governments, along with the local municipalities of Kelowna and West Kelowna, announced over \$43 million in new funding toward the next phase of development to extend RapidBus service to West Kelowna. This expansion project will include new exchanges and stations at Westside, Boucherie Centre and Westbank Centre.

Additional stations will also be constructed in the downtown Kelowna area, including Gordon and a southbound station at McCurdy. This next phase will also outfit all stations with digital screens providing passengers with real-time schedule information. Once the expansion project is complete, it will save commuters ten minutes on a one-way trip, compared to travelling on a conventional bus route.

The Government of Canada is setting aside a maximum contribution of up to one-third of eligible costs toward this second expansion phase, to a maximum of \$10.9 million, under the Building Canada Fund - Major Infrastructure Component. In addition, \$4.6 million will be provided through the federal Gas Tax Fund. The Province of British Columbia will provide \$24 million, the City of Kelowna will provide \$4.1 million, and West Kelowna will contribute land.

“The Government of Canada is committed to help funding projects that support efficient, environmentally-sustainable transportation,” said Minister Day. “This increased service will go a long way toward encouraging residents to choose public transit as a viable transportation option.”

The downtown-to-UBCO RapidBus BC route unveiled today will provide service every 15 minutes during peak periods travelling 15 kilometres in high-occupancy vehicle lanes along Highway 97. Buses are equipped with technology that extends green lights at intersections allowing them priority movement with minimal stops.

This phase of the project also includes seven stations featuring low flooring for improved accessibility and unique, modern shelter design based on the provincial wood-first initiative. People living near the RapidBus route will receive free introductory passes in the mail.

In addition, the enhancements to Rutland, an important residential and commercial centre, will provide bus service every 15 minutes during peak periods and buses will be rerouted to provide passengers with more direct options to other transit connections and services to Okanagan College, Kelowna Hospital, and the Mission Centre. A new Rutland transit exchange is also in development to meet the future needs of this key area.

“Expanding transit services in B.C. communities is a key priority under the Provincial Transit Plan, the most aggressive approach to reducing congestion and shrinking our carbon footprint this province has ever seen.” said Bond. “It is critical that we provide people with options like Rapid Bus. Enhanced services increase ridership, reduce congestion, and will improve the quality of life in Kelowna and West Kelowna.”

“In a growing community like Kelowna, RapidBus and enhanced service for Rutland will help with congestion during peak hours,” said Shepherd. “These services are really great for our residents, including UBCO students, offering fast and effective transit to help people get to their destinations quickly.”

“An efficient, environmentally and financially sustainable transit system is important for West Kelowna as we know transit is a necessary transportation option for a number of our residents,” said Findlater. “RapidBus is a major project for our future and I’m looking forward to it coming to our side of the lake.”

“The cost of expanding public transit service in our communities requires the support of all levels of government,” said Harry Nyce, president of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities. “Programs like the Gas Tax Fund and the Public Transit Plan demonstrate the commitment of federal and provincial authorities to work with local governments to improve commuting options and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

The Province of British Columbia launched the \$14-billion Provincial Transit Plan in 2008 with the goal of doubling ridership and reducing greenhouse gases by 4.7 million tonnes, all by 2020.

RapidBus BC provides service with the look and feel of rapid transit, and in some cases, operating on dedicated lane-ways. The strategy identified nine new RapidBus BC lines in high growth urban centres of Kelowna, Victoria, and Metro Vancouver. Projects in all centres are moving forward.

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A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS TO SUPPORT KELOWNA TRANSIT

Kelowna RapidBus BC

- This combined investment in Rapid Transit will provide 30 kilometres of RapidBus service between West Kelowna and UBCO, including 18 bus stations and new and upgraded bus exchanges, and also includes communications technology for buses to extend green lights at intersections allowing them priority movement with minimal stops.
- Overall contributions from the Government of Canada are being made through the Building Canada Fund – Major Infrastructure Component, the Provincial-Territorial Base Fund, and the Gas Tax Fund, which is administered by the Union of British Columbia Municipalities.
- Funding under the Building Canada Fund - Major Infrastructure Component is conditional on the project meeting all program eligibility requirements, and the signing of a contribution agreement.
- The first phase of the RapidBus BC project travels on high-occupancy vehicle lanes along Highway 97 between downtown and the University of British Columbia-Okanagan (UBCO), with stops at Queensway, Parkinson, Cooper, Banks, northbound on McCurdy, and UBCO.
- The second expansion phase will see RapidBus service extend to West Kelowna, connecting passengers from the Westbank Centre through the municipality with stops at Boucherie Centre and Westside, to the existing RapidBus network; it also includes bus stations in the downtown Kelowna area, including Gordon and a southbound station at McCurdy, as well as installing digital screens providing real-time schedule information in all RapidBus stations.

BC Transit Enhanced Service to Rutland and Other Areas on Sept. 5, 2010

- Starting Sept. 5, BC Transit is rerouting buses to improve service to the important residential and commercial area of Rutland.
- Buses #8 and #10 will begin a new route and schedule, travelling every 15 minutes during peak periods to provide passengers with more direct options for other transit connections and services to Okanagan College, Kelowna Hospital, and the Mission Centre.
- Plans for a new transit exchange in Rutland are in development.
- Bus #7 will have minor routing and schedule changes to serve Glenmore Bypass Rd.
- Changes to bus #23 Lake Country will provide direct service to the airport terminal.
- Starting in January 2011, Kelowna's handyDART system will increase by 2,000 hours and a new handyDART vehicle will be added to the fleet.

General Transit Service Improvements

- Since 2001, provincial contributions to transit service in Kelowna have increased by 106 per cent to \$9.06 million from \$4.4 million.
- Annual service hours have increased by 52 per cent to approximately 211,000 from 139,000.

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