

May 1, 2008

TO: Mayor Don Amos, Chair
and Members of the Victoria Regional Transit Commission

FROM: Manuel Achadinha, President and CEO

SUBJECT: **DOUGLAS STREET BUSWAY – PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND NEXT STEPS**

PURPOSE

To provide the Commission with a summary of the public consultation process on the Douglas Street Busway proposal and to recommend a course of action to advance the development of a rapid transit network in the region for approval.

BACKGROUND

BC Transit has been working with a number of agencies and all levels of government to develop a plan for the implementation of a regional rapid transit network in the Victoria region. The definition of the network has been supported through the Regional Growth Strategy – Travel Choices (CRD), the Rapid Transit Network Development Plan of the Commission, the recently announced Provincial Transit Plan and a number of OCP's and other planning documents.

Initial focus of the work has been on the Douglas Street corridor as the common spine of a regional transit priority network extending from downtown Victoria to the Westshore, the Saanich and the Mackenzie corridor to UVic. Support was received from the local road authorities to proceed with more formal work in the area and in 2004, the City of Victoria provided the bulk of the capital funding through a federal infrastructure program, for the installation of the Douglas Street/Highway 1 traffic signal management system as a necessary first step to implementing transit priority in the corridor. With the traffic signal management project nearing completion, work shifted early last year to the Douglas Street/Highway 1 busway study. An initial \$6.6M in funds have been received from federal infrastructure funds and the BC Transit capital budget, and a detailed planning and public consultation process was undertaken. Regular reports have been provided to the Commission, the road authorities and the stakeholders. A project advisory committee was assembled and has met a number of times to review plans and analysis and provide recommendations to the study team.

On April 3rd, a formal public meeting was held to allow interested groups and individuals to present their suggestions and concerns to the Commission and local decision makers. Approximately 100 people attended the meeting and 31 speakers provided comment. Some written submissions were received and additional written comments have been provided over the past six weeks. All submissions and minutes of the April 3rd public meeting are included in this Agenda package.

DISCUSSION

Although some stakeholder groups have provided full or qualified endorsement of the centre busway design, the majority of the submissions received, mostly from business interests along Douglas Street, are opposed to the median busway design. Most frequently comments reflected a concern over restriction to some turning movements, removal of on street parking, and a belief that, if implemented, the median busway would add to the overall congestion, and delay for general traffic on this segment of Douglas Street and could compromise road safety.

Another segment of those comments focused on interests in an earlier start of rail based rapid transit including support from a few for LRT to Westshore, or an early start to a commuter rail connection utilizing the E&N. Comments also included interest in assessing the use of Blanchard Street or other roadways, although Douglas Street, with or without a median busway, was generally acknowledged as the right location for a high quality transit service, including the designation as main regional transit connector to downtown Victoria.

With the government's announcement of the *Provincial Transit Plan* in mid-January, BC Transit has now received confirmation that a full business case will be required for the corridor from downtown Victoria to Westshore as the first priority element of the regional rapid transit network. Although the Douglas Street work to date is a useful component of this, the level of planning, analysis and public consultation in the balance of the corridor has not been done to create a plan and the associated recommendations for government consideration.

Undertaking a new comprehensive business case for the entire corridor, including a full public consultation and the other project elements noted below will take an estimated 8-10 months to complete and will require the development of a study plan and budget.

Corridor Business Plan Elements

- Specification of transit priority goals and objectives at the corridor level
- Development of a comprehensive public consultation process including project Steering Committee and communication plan
- Identification of options, including alignments, technologies (rail, bus)
- Screening process based on established selection criteria
- Comparative analysis of options
- Links to municipal, regional and provincial transportation, and development plans and connections to the balance of the regional transit priority network
- Identification of decision process
- RFP to select consulting services to conduct technical work, and as support to finalize overall study process.

It is proposed that BC Transit staff prepare a draft project work plan, budget and schedule for consideration by the Commission at the next regular meeting in June.

RECOMMENDATION

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT That the Victoria Regional Transit Commission receive this report and the synopsis of public comment on the Douglas Street busway as information, and authorize BC Transit staff to prepare a new comprehensive business case study plan, including steps required for a full options analysis and public consultation process for the regional corridor from downtown Victoria to the Westshore, and bring this study proposal back to the next meeting of the Commission for consideration.

Manuel Achadinha
President and CEO

Attachment 1 – Comments from April 3rd Public Meeting and correspondence received up to May 1, 2008.