

Transit Future Action Plan

Prince George Transit System



March 2020

Acknowledgements

This plan was made possible by participation from provincial and local governments, key stakeholders and the public. BC Transit would like to thank staff from:

- City of Prince George
- University of Northern British Columbia
- College of New Caledonia
- Pacific Western Transportation
- Carefree Society

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transit has tremendous potential to be the best transportation solution for strong, more sustainable communities. The need to realize this potential in the City of Prince George is increasingly important due to factors such as climate change, population growth, traffic congestion and an aging demographic.

The 2020 Prince George Transit Future Action Plan (TFAP) provides an update to the Prince George Transit Future Plan, which was completed in 2014. The changes that have occurred since 2014 enabled the Prince George Conventional Transit System to increase ridership by 13.6 percent to over 2,276,000 annual rides and over 68,000 annual service hours.

The development of the Prince George TFAP was highly collaborative and included staff and representatives from BC Transit, the City of Prince George, Pacific Western Transportation, Carefree Society, University of Northern British Columbia, College of New Caledonia, the public, and representatives from a wide array of stakeholder organizations.

As the Prince George TFAP was concluding in spring 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic began to take hold in Canada, causing significant and rapid changes to the transit landscape. In Prince George, transit ridership initially dropped more than 70 per cent compared to 2019 levels, requiring swift action to modify service while still ensuring transit remained available and accessible to those who require it. Transit is an essential service, and its continued operation during uncertain times is critical. Since the start of the pandemic ridership has increased but has not yet recovered to its pre-pandemic levels.

The focus of this TFAP is on the expansion of Prince George's transit system, but due to the ongoing pandemic it is acknowledged that timelines and priorities must be re-evaluated in order to facilitate a return to pre-COVID 19 ridership and service levels. It is anticipated that these levels will need to be restored prior to moving forward with any service expansions.

To increase transit ridership and improve the quality of transit within the City of Prince George the plan proposes the development of a Transit Future Network (TFN). Defined in the 2014 Transit Future Plan (TFP), the network includes five distinct layers of transit service to better match service to demand. The network is designed to be more competitive with automobile travel by improving the directness and reliability of the transit system. The network may require more customers to transfer from one service to another to complete their journey with the trade-off being that trips will be more frequent and overall travel will be more direct. More information on the TFN can be found in Section 4.

The transit service and infrastructure priorities identified within this Transit Future Action Plan are based on a review of existing transit services, changing land uses and land use plans, and

feedback from key stakeholders and the public. The tables below summarize the immediate-term, short-term, medium-term, and long-term service and infrastructure priorities for consideration over the next five years within Prince George to continue to make transit part of the solution.

Short-Term Implementation Priorities		
Service Priorities	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Expansion Buses
Introduction of 105 Pine Centre Express/Downtown Express	2,500	2
Improved frequency on the 15 UNBC/Downtown and introduction of 115 UNBC Express/Downtown Express	1,500	1
Improved weekday evening service	4,200	1
Improved weekend service	4,850	2
Total	13,050	6

Table 1: Short-term implementation priorities

Medium-Term Implementation Priorities		
Service Priorities	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Expansion Buses
Redesign of 88 Westgate/89 Hart	11,600	6
Total	11,600	6

Table 2: Medium-term implementation priorities

Long-Term Implementation Priorities		
Service Priorities	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Expansion Buses
Introduction of service to Airport/Industrial	850	1
Improving route directness	TBD*	TBD
Total	850+	1+

Table 3: Long-term implementation priorities

Note: All hours are estimated. Further refinement is required during implementation planning. Additional buses may be required beyond the expansion buses listed above to maintain the required spare ratio.

**These hours will shift dependent on what route re-alignments occur. Cost fluctuation may occur.*

In order to enable and support service improvements to enhance the customer experience, investment in the TFN, development of new transit exchanges, and installation of new bus shelters at key bus stops is required.

Strategic Priorities	
1	Restore ridership and service to pre-COVID-19 levels
2	Rapid Transit Study
3	Improve off-peak service
4	Consider service optimization on under-performing routes
5	Improve route directness
6	Improve service frequency
7	Local Area Transit Plans – Hart and College Heights
8	Expand transit network to service new areas

Table 4: Summary of strategic priorities in descending priority

Infrastructure Proposals	
Bus Stop Improvements	
Transit Exchanges	Downtown Exchange
	Pine Centre Exchange
	Spruceland Exchange
	UNBC Exchange
	Hart Exchange & Westgate Exchange
New Operations & Maintenance Facility	

Table 5: Summary of infrastructure proposals

Service improvements will be integrated into the Three Year Transit Improvement Process (TIP), which is updated on an annual basis. Infrastructure proposals will inform capital plans for both BC Transit and the City of Prince George. Prior to implementation of service changes, BC Transit planning staff will work with staff at the City of Prince George to ensure service improvements appropriately reflect local needs. Additional targeted engagement may be required.

New emerging technologies will have a direct impact on future mobility within Prince George. SmartBus, BC Transit’s Low Carbon Fleet Program, mobility as a service, autonomous vehicles, and other emerging bus technologies have the potential to reshape how people choose to move throughout their communities

To achieve the goals of this TFAP, capital and operating investments in the transit system will be required over the next five years and beyond. Annual operating costs are based on service hours that are projected to increase by over 25,500 hours. The plan also calls for capital investments that include:

- An additional 13 buses added to the transit fleet
- Upgrades to existing transit exchanges
- Improvements to customer amenities at transit stops
- A new operations and maintenance facility to accommodate increased vehicle capacity and be adaptable to the requirements of BC Transit’s Low Carbon Fleet Program.