



The Corporation of the District of Saanich | Mayor's Office

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January 21, 2021

The Honourable Rob Fleming, M.L.A.
Minister of Transportation & Infrastructure
PO Box 9055 Prov Stn Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2
VIA EMAIL: Minister.Transportation@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister,

Re: Victoria Regional Transit System – Investment to support Climate Action and Targets
File: 2560-50 – Climate Change

This letter will confirm that District of Saanich Council, at their meeting held January 18, 2021, considered a staff report and a presentation by staff and BC Transit further to the above and resolved as follows:

“That Council send a letter to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to outline their support for the Victoria Regional Transit Commission’s 2021 funding requests and to advocate for increased funding for transit service expansion, infrastructure, and other improvements within the region over the coming years as necessary to meet climate and sustainability goals and targets.”

In 2019, Saanich Council declared a Climate Emergency in response to decades of scientific research that demonstrates the need for urgent action to reduce global warming and adapt to a changing climate. In January 2020, Council approved the Climate Plan, which includes a target for Saanich to become a 100% renewable energy community and cut our community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in half by 2030 and to net zero by 2050. The Climate Plan was recognized in 2020 with a Silver Award from the Planning Institute of British Columbia and the Community Energy Association Climate & Energy Action Award for Community Planning and Development.

In 2018 Saanich Council adopted the Active Transportation Plan which mirrors the mode share targets of our Climate Plan, has a host of strategies and actions needed to improve the transit user experience and make transit more attractive and accessible to all. The Active Transportation Plan was recognized in 2019 with a Silver award for Excellence in Policy Planning - City & Urban Areas presented by the Planning Institute of British Columbia.

Transportation is the largest source of our community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, responsible for 57 percent of our total emissions in 2018. The majority of these emissions are from the use of personal vehicles, light trucks and SUVs, which could be reduced considerably by a mode shift to transit and active transportation.

Public transit is the most efficient and cost-effective way of moving large numbers of people through limited urban space or between regional centres and the case for public transit is even stronger when the buses are powered by renewable BC Hydro electricity.

The Saanich Climate Plan modelled a pathway of actions to our 2030 and 2050 targets and this identified that transit improvements and electrification of the transit fleet could result in a 7 percent reduction in our community-wide GHG emissions by 2050. This would require:

- 14% of all trips to be taken by transit by 2030 (i.e. a 14% transit mode share)
- 20% of all trips to be taken by transit by 2050 (i.e. a 20% transit mode share)
- All BC Transit buses to be electrified by 2030

The Victoria Regional Transit System 10 Year Vision, approved by the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (VRTC) in November 2020, is aligned with the Saanich Climate Plan and includes the same 2030 ridership targets. It outlines that additional ridership is attracted by a transit service that is fast, reliable, frequent, connected, convenient and easy to use and it identifies the key actions to achieve this, including:

- Service expansion
- RapidBus Project implementation
- Electric bus deployment
- 3rd Victoria Operations and Maintenance Facility

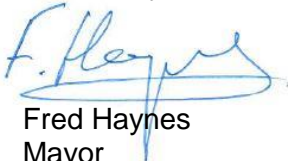
District of Saanich staff is actively working with BC Transit on several of the actions identified in the 10 Year Vision amongst others. However, it is clear that accelerated action and considerable investments are needed in both infrastructure and service hours if we are to achieve our aligned goals and targets, including an average of approximately 33,500 additional conventional service hours each year over the next 19 years for service expansion alone. As a start, the VRTC approved 20,000 additional conventional expansion service hours for 2021 to be submitted for consideration as part of Provincial Budget deliberations.

While COVID-19 has impacted transit ridership during 2020 and the effects are likely to continue to be felt in the short-term, transit remains of critical importance for reaching our GHG emissions targets and contributing to the region's social wellbeing and economic vibrancy. BC Transit is developing and implementing strategies to recover ridership that will address emerging service needs, but investment in service expansion and infrastructure projects are a critical component to both recover and further expand ridership.

As such, the District of Saanich wishes to declare its support for the VRTC's 2021 transit service expansion funding request to the Province and to advocate for increased Provincial funding for transit service expansion and infrastructure over the coming years, including implementation of RapidBus, the Uptown Centre Multi-Modal Hub Plan, a third Victoria Operations & Maintenance Facility and electrification of the transit fleet as necessary to meet our climate and sustainability goals and targets.

A copy of the report and January 18, 2021 meeting minutes are attached for further information.

Yours truly,



Fred Haynes
Mayor
Enclosures

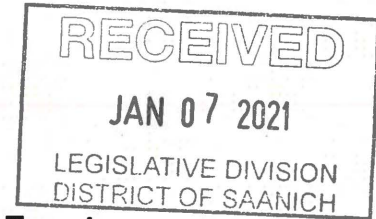
cc: Saanich Council
Paul Thorkelsson, CAO, District of Saanich
Angila Bains, Legislative Manager, District of Saanich
Sharon Hvozdzanski, Director of Planning, District of Saanich
Harley Machielse, Director of Engineering, District of Saanich
Susan Brice, Chair, Victoria Regional Transit Commission



The Corporation of the District of Saanich

Report

To: Mayor and Council
From: Sharon Hvozdanski, Director of Planning
Harley Machielse, Director of Engineering
Date: January 7, 2021
Subject: Transit Investment to support Climate Action and Targets
File: 2560-50 • Climate Plan



RECOMMENDATION

1. That Council receives this report for information; and
2. That Council sends a letter to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to outline their support for the Victoria Regional Transit Commission's 2021 funding requests and to advocate for increased funding for transit service expansion, infrastructure and other improvements within the region over the coming years as necessary to meet our climate and sustainability goals and targets.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

1. Provide an overview of how transit contributes to the District of Saanich strategic goals and targets, in particular, those within the Climate Plan;
2. Provide an update on the progress made on actions within the Victoria Region Transit Future Plan and BC Transit 10 year vision that deliver on Saanich goals and targets and the next steps for BC Transit and Saanich to collaboratively accelerate its implementation; and
3. Request that Council send a letter to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, to outline their support for the Victoria Regional Transit Commission's 2021 funding requests and to advocate for increased funding for transit service expansion, infrastructure and other improvements within the region over the coming years as necessary to meet our climate and sustainability goals and targets and in order to support implementation of "Climate Action M2.5 Advocate for increased funding for transit service expansion and improvement" and "Active Transportation Plan Strategy 1G Improve Transit Access and Experience".

DISCUSSION

Aligned Vision and Targets

The Climate Plan, adopted by Council in 2020, outlines the actions needed to:

- Cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in half by 2030 and net zero by 2050;
- Transition to 100% renewable energy by 2050; and
- Prepare for a changing climate.

Transportation is the largest source of our community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, responsible for 57% of our total emissions in 2018. Majority of these emissions are from the use of personal vehicles, light trucks and SUVs, which could be reduced considerably by a mode shift to transit and active transportation.

Public transit is the most efficient and cost-effective way of moving large numbers of people through limited urban space or between regional centres. Even for buses that are fueled by diesel or gasoline, the fuel use (and GHGs) per person is lower for a trip by bus than for the same trip by single-occupant vehicle. The case for public transit is even stronger when the buses are powered by BC Hydro electricity, which is currently 97% renewable.

The Climate Plan modelled a pathway of actions to our 2030 and 2050 targets and this identified that transit improvements and electrification of the transit fleet could result in a 7% reduction in our community-wide GHG emissions by 2050. This would require:

- 14% of all trips to be taken by transit by 2030 (i.e. a 14% transit mode share);
- 20% of all trips to be taken by transit by 2050 (i.e. a 20% transit mode share); and
- All BC Transit buses to be electrified by 2030.

These mode share targets are also reflected in our Active Transportation Plan, which recognizes that “Walking, cycling and transit are key contributors to Saanich’s economic vibrancy, cultural and recreational experiences, social wellbeing, natural environment, physical beauty, and neighbourhood and social connections”, in its vision statement. In addition to the mode share targets that are shared with the Climate Plan, the Active Transportation Plan has a host of strategies and actions needed to improve the transit user experience and make transit more attractive and accessible to all.

BC Transit Aligned Vision & Targets

The Victoria Region Transit Future Plan (TFP), approved in 2011, provides a vision for improving the region’s transit network to 2035 and identifies a Transit Future Network with four layers of service:

- Rapid transit
- Frequent transit
- Local transit
- Targeted services

At their December 1, 2020 meeting, the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (VRTC) approved the 10 year vision for the Victoria Regional Transit System, as an update to the TFP (see Attachment 1). This includes a 14% mode share target for core areas of the region by 2030, and a 20% mode share target for core areas of the region by 2039 (15% for the region overall), which are aligned with the Saanich Climate Plan and Active Transportation Plan.

Further, BC Transit has committed to a fully electric fleet by 2040 and recently released the Request for Proposal for their first 10 electric buses that are expected to be in service in the region by summer 2022.

As such, Transit plays a critical role in contributing to the District of Saanich's Climate targets, sustainability goals, active transportation goals, affordability and overall quality of life for our residents. Likewise, transit supportive land use and transportation planning by the District of Saanich are fundamental to a successful regional transit system. Therefore, integration and collaboration between BC Transit and the District of Saanich are key to achieving the transit mode shares necessary to meet our aligned goals.

Achieving Increased Ridership & Mode Share

Transit must be an attractive alternative to the private vehicle in order to increase ridership and attract discretionary riders. Transit is already an affordable means of transportation and the Victoria Regional Transit System has multiple fare programs for low-income riders.

Prior to COVID-19, the Victoria Regional Transit Service suffered from latent demand on specific routes and times, particularly in early fall with the return of students to university and school. The ability to take advantage of this demand for transit service has been limited by funding, which results in pass-ups where the bus must leave passengers behind because it is full, and reduced reliability due to the high number of passengers boarding and alighting, which can cause delays.

Therefore, while changes to fares can impact ridership (primarily fare increases resulting in a decrease in ridership as they switch to other modes of transportation vs. fare decreases attracting new riders), it is improvements in service levels that can contribute significantly to increased ridership and meeting our mode share targets. Additional ridership is attracted by a transit service that is:

- **Fast and reliable** – trip times that are competitive with travelling by car and that arrive at destinations on time;
- **Frequent** - with buses arriving every 5 to 15 minutes at peak times on the Rapid and Frequent network routes;
- **Connected and Convenient** - routes that are direct and connect urban centres and key destinations; and
- **Easy to use** – employing technology that makes it easy to pay, use and know when the next bus will arrive.

Therefore, ridership increases are heavily driven by investment in the above in comparison to expanding transit to include additional routes or later/earlier service that tends to result in considerably lower ridership increases per dollar invested. These service improvements are achieved through several measures:

- Additional service hours - including the associated additional buses;
- Additional maintenance and operation facility(s) - to allow for additional buses to be added to the fleet;
- Transit Priority Measures – e.g. dedicated bus lanes, transit signal priority, bus queue jump lanes, quality transit stop shelters/amenities/lighting;
- Investment in Technology – e.g. real time information supporting user confidence, electronic fare payment increasing ease of use; and
- Transit oriented development – land use and design, with density focussed on key nodes and corridors and the development of compact, complete communities that supports a fast and reliable, frequent and connected transit service for less investment.

It should be noted that the emphasis of this report relates to climate action and investments that achieve considerable ridership increases. While these also address equity and achieve multiple other co-benefits by increasing the quantity and quality of an affordable form of climate friendly transportation, there are additional areas of investment beyond those noted above that further enhance transit service and it's accessibility to users. Example of this are investment in handyDART and fare programs.

Transit Progress to Date

The Victoria Region Transit Future Plan (TFP) identified specific actions and funding investment required to increase ridership and achieve the approved mode share targets. This was based upon benchmarking and analysis of best practice from other comparable communities who invested in transit service to achieve similar targets. There have been multiple actions undertaken for the Victoria Regional Transit System since approval of the TFP that support increased ridership, including:

- Introduction of NextRide with real time technology;
- Expansion of the UVic Exchange Facility;
- Completion of several phases of the Victoria Region Douglas-Westshore Transit Priority Corridor – the dedicated bus lanes shorten travel times for passengers, increase the reliability of public transit and reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- New handyDART facility is expected to open in 2023 – freeing up space for new conventional vehicles at the existing Maintenance and Operations Centre to allow for additional service expansion; and
- Operations and Maintenance Facility Masterplan developed and approved.

However, while it is recognized that investment in transit service expansion is also critical to increasing ridership, there has been a notable shortfall in service hour expansion since the TFP was approved. The TFP identified the need to go from 760,000 total annual conventional service hours in 2010 to 1.5 million total annual conventional service hours by 2035 in order to implement the plan and meet the approved mode share and ridership targets. This equates to 29,600 hours of conventional service expansion per year. However, there were only 864,000 annual service hours for the whole system in 2019, equivalent to an annual average increase of 11,550 hours per year (see Figure 1).

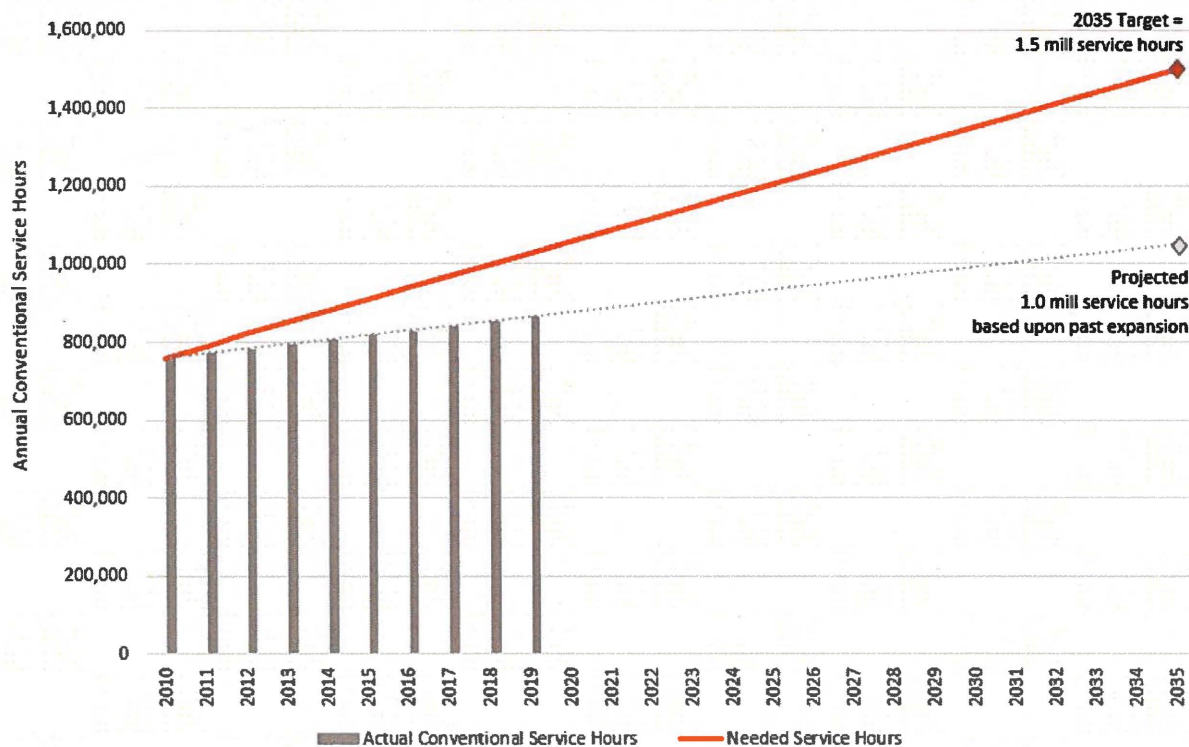


Figure 1: Conventional Transit Service Hours required to meet Transit Future Plan Mode Share Targets vs. Actual Expansion

Several things have contributed to this shortfall; expansion has been limited by available space for new vehicles at the two existing Maintenance and Operation centres and a third facility is needed; transit in the Victoria region requires agreement for funding from both the Province and local municipalities through the VRTC and there can be occasions where the local partners wish to expand service but the funding is not available from the Provincial partner; finally, while 20,000 hours of expansion had been approved by the VRTC for implementation in 2020, COVID-19 has caused major disruptions to transit ridership globally, and this expansion funding was put on hold for the 2020 year.

It should be noted that service expansion must be combined with other actions to improve transit service and increase ridership. In addition, investment in RapidBus and transit priority effectively saves service hours for investment in other areas of the transit system. However, considerable investment in service expansion hours is still critical to see ridership grow. The Transit Future Plan mode share targets have been updated by the 10 Year Vision and the timeline has shifted to 2039 in order to align more closely with the Capital Regional District population projections. Based upon current service levels and the amended targets and timeline, an additional 636,000 conventional service expansion hours are now needed over the next 19 years to meet the mode share targets, this equates to approximately 33,500 hours of conventional service expansion each year to 2039. To begin addressing this, the VRTC approved 20,000 additional conventional expansion service hours in late 2020 to be submitted for consideration as part of the 2021 Provincial Budget deliberations.

Necessary Transit Actions Moving Forwards

While COVID-19 has impacted transit ridership during 2020 and the effects are likely to continue to be felt in the short term, transit remains of critical importance for reaching our GHG emissions targets and contributing to the region’s social wellbeing and economic vibrancy. In collaboration

with their partners, BC Transit is developing and implementing strategies to recover ridership that will address emerging service needs, new cleaning and comfort standards, communication and technology enhancements, and infrastructure projects that will continue to show the value of transit in our community.

The 10 year vision, approved by the VRTC board on December 1, 2020, outlines the actions needed to increase ridership and meet our aligned mode share targets. Key actions include:

- Service Expansion – considerable investment in service hours and associated increased number of buses. The VRTC has approved an additional 20,000 conventional service hours expansion for 2021, to be submitted for consideration as part of the Provincial Budget deliberations.
- RapidBus Project implementation, including but not limited to:
 - Multiple Transit Priority Measures across the region.
 - Island Highway Transit Priority.
 - Uptown “Centre” Multi-Modal Hub Plan in the short-term and build in the medium-term.
 - Mckenzie Corridor Transit Study.
 - Highway 17 Keating Cross Road Fly Over.
- Electric Bus deployment.
- Electronic fare collection pilot.
- Operations and Maintenance Facility Infrastructure:
 - Victoria’s third Operations and Maintenance Facility pre-implementation work in the short-term and build by the medium-term.
 - Victoria’s fourth Operations and Maintenance Facility – medium and/or longer-term.
 - Victoria Transit Centre (VTC)/Langford Transit Centre (LTC) Operations and Maintenance Facility Enhancements and Modernization.
- Local Area Transit Plan development and implementation.
- Rapid Implementation Study.

The Saanich Climate Plan “Strategy M2: Prioritize transit-supportive policies and practices”, includes specific actions to support increased transit ridership:

- M2.1 Work with partners (VRTC, BC Transit) to accelerate service level improvement and increase transit mode share.
- M2.2 Support increased residential density along public transit routes.
- M2.3 Make transit travel time-competitive.
- M2.5 Advocate for increased funding for transit service expansion and improvement.

M2.7 Work with BC Transit to incorporate latest best practices and new technology needs

The Saanich Active Transportation Plan “Strategy 1G: Improve Transit Access and Experience” also includes specific actions to support increased ridership:

- 1G.1 Prioritize new pedestrian infrastructure on transit routes.
- 1G.2 Install bike parking at high activity stops.
- 1G.4 Integrate transit amenities with new development.
- 1G.7 Improve transit amenities at existing stops.

The District of Saanich staff is actively working with BC Transit on several of the actions identified in the 10 Year Vision amongst others. However, it is clear that accelerated action and investment are needed if we are to achieve our aligned goals and targets.

As such, this report requests that Council send a letter to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, copying VRTC, to outline their support for the VRTC's 2021 funding request and to advocate for increased Provincial funding for transit service expansion, infrastructure and other improvements within the region over the coming years as necessary to meet our climate and sustainability goals and targets. A draft letter is included as Attachment 2.

ALTERNATIVES

1. That Council approve the recommendations as outlined in the staff report.

This would highlight to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (VRTC) and Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure the District of Saanich support for accelerated transit investment in the region and the critical role it plays in achieving our climate goals and targets. It would also demonstrate the support for and desire by Saanich to see considerable progress on transit projects identified in the 10 Year Vision and commitment to collaborate on their implementation. This would assist in achieving Climate Plan Action M2.5 Advocate for increased funding for transit service expansion and improvement. This would also assist in achieving the actions in Active Transportation Plan Strategy 1G Improve Transit Access and Experience.

2. That Council do not approve the recommendations as outlined in the staff report.

Should Council not approved the recommendations outlined in the staff report, this may result in a missed opportunity to demonstrate to the Province and Victoria Regional Transit Commission (VRTC) our commitment to transit in the region, identify the role it plays in meeting our climate targets and advocate for the Provincial share of funding for transit necessary to meet those targets.

3. That Council provide alternate direction to Staff.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Investment in the Victoria Regional Transit System and integrated action between Saanich and BC Transit, including plans, policies, programs and infrastructure will support the following 2019-2023 Council Strategic Plan goals:

Affordable housing, land use and infrastructure management

- Active transportation networks help our residents commute and connect.
 - Integrate sustainable modes of transportation with land use planning.
 - Build connected neighbourhoods with a focus on active transportation and accessible services.

Climate action and environmental leadership

- Steward the natural environment
 - Work towards our goal of carbon neutrality by 2030.
 - Contribute to the mitigation of climate change and its effects.
- Balanced transportation initiatives are supported to reduce our environmental impact.
 - Manage our transportation system efficiently as the community evolves.

- Prioritize walking, cycling, transit, and other sustainable modes of transportation.
- Work to enhance accessibility and usability of transit.

CONCLUSION

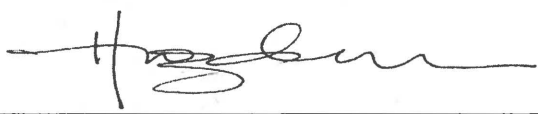
The Victoria Regional Transit Commission (VRTC) approved the Victoria Regional Transit System 10 Year Vision as an update to the Transit Future Plan at their December 1, 2020 meeting. This includes a 14% mode share target for core areas of the region by 2030, and a 20% mode share target by 2039, which are aligned with the Saanich Climate Plan and Active Transportation Plan. The 10 year vision outlines the actions and timeline needed to achieve these targets and alongside the Transit Future Plan, includes a need for considerable investment and service expansion hours.

While multiple actions have been implemented since the Transit Future Plan (TFP) was approved, and the District of Saanich staff is actively working with BC Transit on several of the actions identified in the 10 Year Vision, past investment has fallen short of that identified in the TFP as necessary to achieve the transit mode share targets and our climate goals. It is clear that accelerated action and considerable investments are needed in both infrastructure and service hours if we are to achieve our aligned goals and targets.

The recent approval of the Victoria Regional Transit System 10 Year Vision presents a key opportunity to demonstrate support by the District of Saanich for the actions identified within the plan and to advocate to the Province for the funding required to deliver on those actions. As such, this report requests that Council send a letter to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, copying VRTC, to outline their support for the VRTC's 2021 funding request and to advocate for increased provincial funding for transit service expansion, infrastructure and other improvements within the region over the coming years as necessary to meet our climate and sustainability goals and targets (see Attachment 2). It would also demonstrate the support for and desire by the District of Saanich to see considerable progress on transit projects identified in the 10 Year Vision and commitment to collaborate with BC Transit on their implementation. This would assist in achieving Climate Plan Action M2.5 Advocate for increased funding for transit service expansion and improvement and the Active Transportation Plan Strategy 1G Improve Transit Access and Experience.

Prepared by: 

Rebecca Newlove
Manager of Sustainability

Approved by: 

Sharon Hvozdzanski
Director of Planning

Approved by: 

Harley Machielse
Director of Engineering

RN/rh

Attachments: Attachment 1: Victoria Regional Transit System 10 Year Vision
Attachment 2: Draft Letter to Honourable Rob Fleming, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure

ADMINISTRATOR'S COMMENTS:

I endorse the recommendation from the Director of Finance and Director of Planning.



Paul Thorkeisson, Administrator

2560-50

Resilient Saanich

TRANSIT INVESTMENT TO SUPPORT CLIMATE ACTION AND TARGETS

Report of the Director of Planning and the Director of Engineering dated January 7, 2021 recommending that Council:

1. Receive the report for information; and
2. Send a letter to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to outline their support for the Victoria Regional Transit Commission's 2021 funding requests and to advocate for increased funding for transit service expansion, infrastructure and other improvements within the region over the coming years as necessary to meet climate and sustainability goals and targets.

R. Newlove, Manager of Sustainability and L. Trottier, Senior Manager, Government Relations and L. Megenbir, Senior Transit Planner, BC Transit presented the Transit Investment and Climate Action Plan and made the following comments:

- Saanich is working with BC Transit to align vision and goals.
- Transit is funded through the BC Transit Commission, revenue, property taxes, fuel tax and the Province of BC.
- BC Transit has adopted a 10-Year Vision with active and scheduled projects and plans for transit infrastructure, mobility innovation, expansion, planning and safety.
- BC Transit requests Saanich continue to invest in transit infrastructure, have dedicated right-of-ways for transit if possible, continue to focus density in key nodes and along key transit supported corridors and continue to advocate for service expansion.
- Public transit is the most significant action in meeting climate and sustainability goals and targets.
- Public transit is an affordable way to commute; investing in transit service in terms of frequency and accessibility has an impact on ridership.
- There are social programs to assist with affordability.
- BC Transit is taking a phased approach in the development of the Uptown Transit Hub.
- A pilot project for an electronic fare collection system will be undertaken.
- Funding to replace the loss of gas tax as a result of electrified vehicles will be examined.

PUBLIC INPUT:

Nil

COUNCIL DELIBERATIONS:

MOVED by Councillor Chambers and Seconded by Councillor Taylor:
"That it be recommended that Council:

1. Receive the report of the Director of Planning and the Director of Engineering dated January 7, 2021 for information; and
2. Send a letter to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to outline support for the Victoria Regional Transit Commission's 2021 funding requests and to advocate for increased funding for transit service expansion, infrastructure and other improvements within the region over the coming years as necessary to meet climate and sustainability goals and targets."

Council discussion ensued with the following comments:

- Better coordination with transportation authorities and building on the synergies of land use planning and transportation policies are supportable.
- A strong transit system is a critical part of meeting climate action goals.
- Making transit more reliable and frequent will help to increase ridership.
- Regular updates from BC Transit would be appreciated.
- Saanich continues to work with BC Transit on climate action and on the Active Transportation Plan.
- Grants for more bus shelters should be explored.

**MOVED by Councillor de Vries and Seconded by Councillor Chambers:
“That, due to technical difficulites, the rules of procedure contained in the Council Procedure Bylaw be temporarily suspended to allow public input to take place after the Chair closed the Public Input opportunity.”**

CARRIED

PUBLIC INPUT:

T. Barry, North Quadra area

- Public transit is one of the great opportunities to address climate change.
- Investment in technology for public transit will be important.
- Transit priority measures help to reduce maintenance costs from stop-and-go traffic.
- Electric vehicles will be less costly to maintain.

The Motion was then Put and CARRIED

The Manager of Sustainability exited the meeting at 8:04 p.m.
