

# Victoria Regional Transit Commission

Chair and Members

March 19, 2024

# #13

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## **SUBJECT: PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE**

**PREPARED FOR:** Victoria Regional Transit Commission

### **PURPOSE**

To provide the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (“the Commission”) with an update on transit service planning, infrastructure planning and construction activities in the Victoria Region. This report is presented to the Commission for **INFORMATION**.

## **1. TRANSIT SERVICE CHANGES**

### **Spring Seasonal Service Change**

Effective April 15, 2024, the spring service change includes the following:

- Service will be seasonally reduced to better align with the lower ridership demand from post-secondary education institutions, including Routes 4, 7, 12, 14, 15, 21, 26, 39 and 51.
- Service level and vehicle capacity improvements on routes serving key tourism-related demand from BC Ferries and Butchart Gardens, including Routes 70, 75, and 81.
- Schedule adjustments to improve service reliability on Routes 1, 2, 3, 5, and 10.
- Minor adjustments to trip times and service levels on West Shore Routes 52, 57, and 58, based on public feedback from the network restructure on January 8, 2024.
- Route 13 Ten Mile Point / UVIC routing will be altered to travel via Arbutus and Finnerty, rather than via Sinclair.

### **Summer Seasonal Service Change**

Effective July 1, 2024, the summer service change includes the following:

- Removal of school trips to align with reduction in demand from K-12 schools.
- Service level adjustments on routes serving tourism-related demand from BC Ferries and Butchart Gardens, including Routes 70 and 75.
- Minor travel and recovery time adjustments to Routes 61, 65, and 95 to improve service reliability.
- In order to provide service stability for our customers and ensure we can deliver a high standard of reliability, using a more dynamic approach to scheduling service in September 2024. Some preliminary service level changes will be made in summer in preparation for the September changes.

## 2. TRANSIT SERVICE PLANNING INITIATIVES

### New Provincial Planning Legislation

#### Bill 44 and Bill 47

In late fall 2023, Bill 44 and Bill 47 received royal assent, and as such, set in motion a number of impactful changes to the relationship between land use planning and mobility within British Columbia. In terms of the impact these bills have on BC Transit, Bill 44 stipulates a transit service frequency threshold that, if met or exceeded for an individual route, results in the requirement for the local government to increase the minimum allowable residential density within a defined radius of all stops along that route. Further, Bill 47 outlines a list of transit exchanges which are defined as Transit Oriented Areas (TOAs). Within a defined radius of these TOAs, local governments are now required to set a minimum residential density for all properties located either wholly or partially in the defined area. In the Victoria Region, TOAs have been designated at the following locations:

- Legislature Exchange (Victoria)
- Uptown Exchange (Saanich)
- UVIC Exchange (Saanich)
- Royal Oak Exchange (Saanich)
- Colwood Exchange (Colwood)
- Langford Exchange (Langford)
- Victoria General Hospital (View Royal)

To assist in the implementation of this new legislation, the BC Transit planning team has completed an assessment of how these new policies will impact each of its transit systems and their respective local governments. Correspondence has been sent to each of our Local Government Partners outlining the results of this assessment, and the action, if any, needed in each circumstance. Mapping of all stops impacted by Bill 44 has been provided to all impacted local governments, allowing them to spatially understand where upzoning processes would need to be initiated, and links to mapping of the TOA locations already completed by the Province was also provided.

Planning staff will continue to address questions and concerns of local governments and relay these questions to Provincial officials at a monthly working group meeting that has been arranged between Provincial staff, Translink, and BC Transit. While the initial impact to BC Transit's transit systems and local government partners is low, one more significant change is that bus stop location changes on routes meeting the Bill 44 frequency threshold now have land use implications. Staff will monitor this impact over the coming year and provide updates to the Commission as appropriate.

## Transit Future Plan Update

Planning staff will update the [2011 Transit Future Plan](#) over the next 12 months.

The updated Transit Future Plan will integrate and build upon the Regional Corridor Strategy, serving as the singular, comprehensive source of truth for local governments and BC Transit alike. By providing a consolidated framework, it will facilitate unified decision-making ensuring that service and network design decisions are aligned with the broader transit vision and strategic objectives of the region. The updated plan will provide clear guidelines for the short to medium-term future, allowing for more informed decision-making in the face of the rapid changes occurring in the realm of municipal land use. This foresight is crucial, especially given the recent emphasis on housing and land use policies and the imperative for additional residential development dictated by provincial policies. The intention is to fast track the plan and complete it within 12 months to support future strategic planning initiatives. To support this process within the existing budget and work plan, BC Transit plans to contract a consultant to support this process through an RFP process.

### Background

The original 2011 Transit Future Plan envisioned the Victoria region's transit network over the next 25 years and described what services, infrastructure and investments were needed to get there. The plan was designed to create a stronger link between land use and transit planning, support the key initiatives of BC Transit's Strategic Plan and support the Provincial Transit Plan. The Plan was a collaborative effort involving the CRD, the 13 local municipalities, the community and the Victoria Regional Transit Commission. In total, BC Transit engaged with more than 5,000 people in the region through the Plan process.

Since this foundational work was conducted through the 2011 Transit Future Plan, a significant amount of strategic planning work has been completed:

- 2013/14 Service Review
- 10 Local Area Transit Plans
- Four iterations of the 10-Year Vision (updated annually)
- RapidBus Implementation Strategy (2021)
- Regional Corridor Strategy (Underway)
- 2 Transit Corridor Plans (Underway)

The resulting framework of strategic plans are represented visually in Figure 1 below.

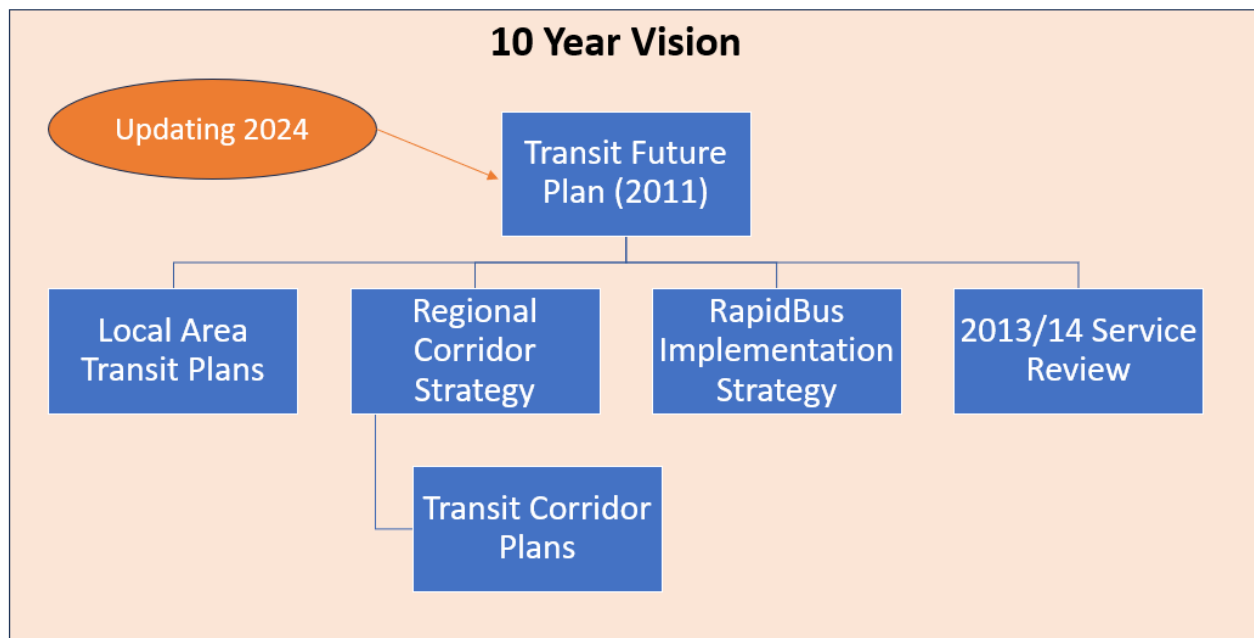


Figure 1 – Strategic Planning Framework - Victoria Regional Transit System

Further, the RapidBus brand has continuously evolved in recent years, most notably with the introduction of the West Shore Blink Rapid bus service in April 2023. Subsequent corridors have been identified in partnership with Local Government Partners, and plans are well underway for further expansion of RapidBus Service in the near future. These efforts, and the corresponding service changes to implement their direction, have been successful in changing the overall modal split in the Victoria Region from 6 per cent as identified in the 2006 CRD Origin/Destination Household Travel Survey to 7.7 per cent of all trips in the 2022 Survey. Over the last year, ridership has grown quickly, increasing by 17 per cent in 2023 in comparison to 2022.

Since the 2011 Transit Future Plan was completed, there have been significant changes within the Victoria region with implications for transit:

- The population has grown by over 15 per cent to almost 400,000 residents as of the 2021 Census, with new emerging residential and commercial hubs influencing travel patterns and demand for transit services.
- There have been systemic changes to travel patterns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including an increasing prevalence of remote and hybrid work arrangements.
- Local government sustainable transportation goals and targets have become more ambitious, with the VRTC directing staff to increase the original 12 per cent transit mode share target from the 2011 Transit Future Plan to 15 per cent.
- Guiding Provincial legislation has changed.
  - The 2008 Provincial Transit Plan has been replaced with BC's Clean Transportation Action Plan.

- The introduction of new Provincial housing policies, notably Bills 44 and 47, has introduced new considerations that must be seamlessly integrated into the transit planning framework to ensure all stakeholders are integrating land use and mobility decisions and investments.
- There have been numerous transit plans completed since 2011 to support the implementation of the plans and objectives in the 2011 Transit Future Plan. This suite of completed transit plans have inconsistent levels of awareness amongst users in the local government community and may be better positioned to inform decision making if they were referenced in a parent document guiding the overall growth and development of the regional transit system at large. In addition, this provides an opportunity to engage our Local Government Partners in the Transit Future Plan process, ensuring they feel connected to the resulting Plan. The Transit Future plan process will include engagement with the public and local, regional and provincial partners.

Beyond integrating the transit plans completed since 2011, the Transit Future Plan update will integrate and build upon the foundation of the Regional Corridor Strategy process, filling in several identified gaps:

#### 1. Network Design Guidelines

- Through the Regional Corridor Strategy process, it became clear that a framework was required for assessing how localized network changes impact broader regional mobility. A more comprehensive process including public engagement is needed to ensure that these broader network design guidelines include feedback on values with respect to competing priorities such as frequency, service directness, coverage, efficiency, and number of transfers.

#### 2. RapidBus Corridor Designation Framework

- Although the original intention of the Regional Corridor Strategy was to work with our Local Government Partners to designate future RapidBus corridors, it became clear that a more comprehensive assessment framework was required to support this work in the future.

#### 3. Provincial Housing Policy

- Bills 44 and 47 were approved part way through the Regional Corridor Strategy. Although the Regional Corridor Strategy process was able to integrate supporting changes in the Victoria core to align with the June 30<sup>th</sup> Provincial deadline for OCP and zoning bylaw updates, there is a need to engage our West Shore and Peninsula Local Government Partners to ensure the broader region is considering how to best integrate changing land use plans with transit.

## Regional Corridor Strategy

The Regional Corridor Strategy is nearing completion, and the final report will be presented to the Commission for endorsement at the next meeting on June 18, 2024. The completed Regional Corridor Strategy will form the foundation of the planned 2024 Transit Future Plan update.

The two key deliverables associated with the Regional Corridor Strategy project include the following:

- 25-Year Transit Future Network Map Update (Figure 2)
  - The section below summarizes the proposed changes to the 25-Year Transit Future Network Map for the Commission's awareness.
  - This is important, as local governments in the Victoria Region may be using these draft network revisions to support necessary changes to their land use plans to support the June 30<sup>th</sup> deadline for Provincial requirements associated with Bills 44 and 47.
- 10-Year Strategic Planning Work Plan
  - A presentation of the proposed 10-Year Strategic Planning Work Plan (to support the implementation of the Regional Corridor Strategy) will be deferred to the June 18<sup>th</sup> meeting.

### 25-Year Transit Future Network Map Update

The 25-Year Transit Future Network Map was developed originally through the 2011 Transit Future Plan and is being updated as part of the Regional Corridor Strategy Process. Once this map is formally endorsed by the Commission through the Regional Corridor Strategy presentation in June, it will form the foundation for the planned Transit Future Plan Update.

The revised draft 25-Year Transit Future Network Map was developed in close collaboration with local government staff through the Regional Corridor Strategy process and forms an updated framework for all future strategic planning at the corridor level. These updates account for the following considerations:

- Changes confirmed through the Peninsula and West Shore Local Area Transit Plans,
- Recent and planned future development patterns,
- Road network changes,
- Changes in travel demand and ridership patterns, and
- Changes to anticipated future development through updates to the CRD's Regional Growth Strategy and Municipal OCPs and land use planning.

The [2013/14 Service Review](#) (Page 5) includes definitions of the Rapid Transit Network and Frequent Transit Network service characteristics, which are included on the 25-Year Transit Future Network Map.

In comparison to the original 2011 version, added planned frequent transit corridors include:

- Finlayson Avenue,
- Cook Street,
- Maplewood Road,
- Blenkinsop Road,
- Richmond Road,
- Multiple key corridors within James Bay, and
- Corridors within the West Shore and Peninsula based on the 2022 Local Area Transit Plans.

Some previously identified frequent transit corridors were removed through discussions with the working group<sup>1</sup>, including:

- Royal Oak Drive,
- Cordova Bay Road, and
- Sections of Helmcken Road, Wilkinson Road, and the Old Island Highway.

These removed corridors could be reconsidered in future if roadway or planned development conditions were to change.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on recent or planned changes to roadway infrastructure impacting feasibility or reliability of transit operations or a lack of current or planned supportive density

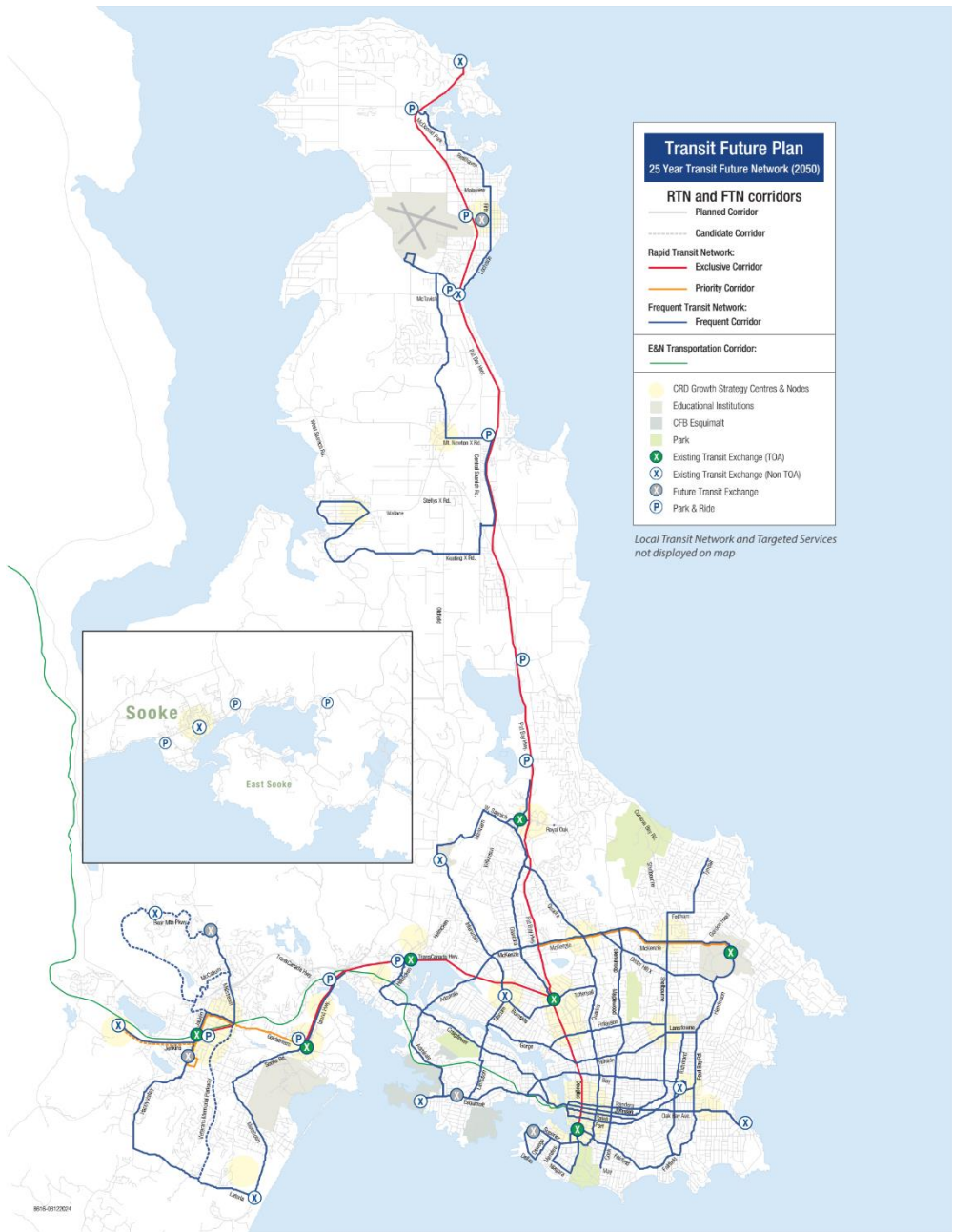


Figure 2: 25-Year Transit Future Network



## **Local Area and Corridor Transit Plans (LATP)**

### **Quadra Corridor Transit Plan**

As a key priority emerging from the Regional Corridor Strategy, BC Transit has started the Quadra Corridor Transit Plan in alignment with the District of Saanich's and City of Victoria's land use and transportation planning processes along the corridor. The goals of the corridor study include the following:

- Confirm the future transit network along the Quadra Street corridor, including whether a future RapidBus designation makes sense.
  - Consider network opportunities to integrate with the future Uptown Mobility Hub.
- Identify key opportunities for future Transit Priority Measures.
- Review bus stop spacing and amenity investment prioritization.

The project inception meeting was hosted with City of Victoria and District of Saanich staff in January 2024, and work has begun on developing the engagement strategy and analysis to support service and infrastructure option development. Engagement for the Quadra Corridor Study will be aligned with District of Saanich engagement for their land use and transportation planning processes in 2024.

### **Tillicum/McKenzie Corridor Transit Plan**

As a key priority emerging from the Regional Corridor Strategy, BC Transit has started the Tillicum/McKenzie Corridor Transit Plan to engage on required network changes to support the launch of the future McKenzie RapidBus Line. The goals of the corridor study include the following:

- Confirm the future transit network along the McKenzie Corridor, including how transit service connects to and through the future Uptown Mobility Hub from a cross-town network perspective.
  - This process will confirm the associated network changes required to support the McKenzie RapidBus Line implementation.
- Summarize key opportunities for future Transit Priority Measure improvements, bus stop spacing, and bus stop amenity improvements as indicated in the McKenzie Avenue Corridor Study currently underway in partnership between the District of Saanich and BC Transit.

The project inception meeting was hosted with Township of Esquimalt and District of Saanich staff in December 2023, and work has begun on developing the engagement strategy and analysis to support service and infrastructure option development.

### **YYJ Service Review**

Based on the VRTC motion from the November 2023 meeting, Planning staff will be developing a YYJ Airport Service Options report to support the 2025/26 Annual Service Plan and integration into the proposed Transit Future Plan update. The report will present several service improvement options and associated trade-offs for VRTC information and direction, including a direct YYJ to Downtown Victoria service option.

## Public Engagement

### November 2023 Engagement Summary

On January 8, 2024, the Route 11 Tillicum Centre/UVic resumed its previous pre-construction routing. In addition, to evaluate longer-term service priorities for the Gorge-Burnside-Tillicum-Esquamalt areas, BC Transit conducted public engagement in November 2023 on opportunities for additional service changes, with an earliest possible implementation date of April 2024 on the following routes:

- Route 9 Royal Oak/UVic
- Route 11 Tillicum Centre/UVic
- Route 24 Cedar Hill/Tillicum Centre
- Route 25 Maplewood/Tillicum Centre
- Proposed Route 40 Esquamalt/UVIC via Admirals

The option to terminate the Route 25 at Dockyard and implement the new Route 40 garnered the highest level of support; however, BC Transit heard clearly that the service frequency on Route 40 available through this optimization was insufficient to meet the community's need.

Based on this feedback, BC Transit is planning to proceed with the following next steps:

- Postpone the implementation of changes to Route 25 and implementation of the new Route 40 until additional expansion hours and vehicles are available,
- Monitor passenger loads and performance on the Route 9 and the realigned Route 11
- Collaborate with Township of Esquamalt staff on opportunities to improve the access of the proposed Route 40 to the Esquamalt core.

The [project engagement website](#) has been updated with the engagement summary report.

### Spring 2024 Engagement

BC Transit will be conducting a public information campaign in Spring 2024 to support service changes for Routes 13 and 24, currently planned for Fall 2024. The proposed changes being considered include the following:

- Route 13 will be discontinued due to low ridership, with 85 per cent of the route overlapping with the existing Route 11, and an average of only three passengers per day boarding or alighting the bus on the remaining 15 per cent of the route within the 10 Mile Point neighbourhood.
- Route 24 will be adjusted to remove the Parklands loop due to low ridership and recurring residential parking conflicts impacting bus operations. Eighty per cent of the Parklands neighbourhood falls within a 400m walking distance of retained service on Admirals Road.

These changes will help mitigate the impact of the ongoing maintenance challenges on higher-ridership routes in Fall 2024, as outlined in the Annual Service Plan.

## Fairfield/Gonzales Engagement

With the deferral of the James Bay/Jubilee Local Area Transit Plan update project, planning staff intend to uphold their promise to engage with the Fairfield-Gonzales Community Association through a targeted workshop, tentatively scheduled for April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024.

## Service Monitoring

- **Ridership Performance Report** – Planning regularly monitors service performance against the service standards and performance guidelines identified in the 2013/14 Service Review document. Regular performance monitoring allows for a better alignment between service levels and ongoing changes in demand and travel patterns.

The attached Ridership Performance Report (Appendix 13a) provides information on ridership performance over the Fall 2023 service period from September 5 to December 3, 2023, and provides information on ridership and service reliability trends through the period impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic up to December 3, 2023.

## 3. ON-STREET TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

### Active Infrastructure Projects

- **Island Highway Transit Priority Upgrades:** The Island Highway Transit Priority Project is being advanced to support the West Shore RapidBus Strategy on the Island Highway between the intersection of the Highway 1 exit and entrance ramps at the Island Highway in the Town of View Royal, and Wale Road in the City of Colwood. The scope of the project includes transit queue jump lanes, bike lanes, sidewalk widening, accessible wheelchair ramps, intersection improvements, crosswalk signage and road painting, street lighting and traffic signals upgrades. A full tender-ready design has been completed to construct transit priority improvements. BC Hydro has completed their detailed design for construction documents related to the transit priority improvements. Documentation and negotiations are continuing for statutory rights-of-way or road dedications with private landowners where the design elements affect their properties. To date, four of the six required contracts have been completed. A funding application to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) was approved in August 2023 for this project. On-going First Nations engagement is being managed by an external consultant, a heritage permit for the project has been approved and Asset Benefit Agreements have been signed by all parties for both municipalities to meet the Eligible Capital Funding requirements. The project will move forward with a public tendering process in the spring of 2024 and into the construction phase late in 2024, subject to the completion of the statutory rights-of-way and engagement tasks.
- **Bus Shelter Program:** The BC Transit Bus Shelter Program is a province-wide cost sharing program (including provincial and federal funding contributions) to assist municipalities in acquiring new BC Transit-branded shelters with a standardized look, feel and function. Transit shelters are a bus stop amenity that provides weather protection and improves the overall transit experience for customers. Through this program, BC Transit collaborates with local governments to help determine bus shelter locations. Local

governments are responsible for site preparation costs and activities and the VRTC contributes the local share of the cost to purchase a shelter (~20%). There are approximately 2,300 bus stops in the VRTS with the top 500 busiest (highest passenger activity) comprising 85 per cent of total ridership activity. The majority of these bus stops now have a bus shelter where possible. The program included the following shelter roll-out for the VRTS: 10 shelters installed in 2022/23, 12 shelters installed for 2023/24, and a forecast of 24 additional shelters to be installed for 2024/25 year.

## Infrastructure Studies

- **Downtown Douglas Street:** The Downtown Douglas RapidBus Study is being advanced to support the overall RapidBus strategy on Douglas Street between Belleville and Bay Street, with a focus on the downtown core in collaboration with City of Victoria. The intent of the planning work is to establish a multi-modal vision for this portion of the corridor. A report and presentation will be provided to City of Victoria Council in spring 2024 and will include a recommended concept for transit priority and RapidBus stations. Plans will be presented to the VRTC once support is secured from City of Victoria Council.
- **McKenzie Corridor Study:** The McKenzie Corridor Study is being advanced to develop the infrastructure components of a McKenzie RapidBus Strategy. The study is in partnership with the District of Saanich and the objectives are to establish a multi-modal vision which combines transit priority, RapidBus stations and active transportation improvements on McKenzie Avenue from Highway 17 to UVic. The preferred long-term vision has been finalized and the nearer-term improvements are currently being developed. The study is planned to go to the District of Saanich Council for approval soon after the District of Saanich's Quadra McKenzie (Community Planning) Study in late 2024 / early 2025.
- **Peninsula RapidBus Infrastructure Studies:** Three Peninsula RapidBus infrastructure studies have been initiated to develop the infrastructure components of the Peninsula RapidBus line. All engineering studies are planned to conclude in the spring / early summer of 2024.
  - In collaboration with MoTI, a RapidBus Station study on Highway 17 from McKenzie Avenue to Sidney is underway with the objective of identifying quick win improvements at existing transit stops for conversion to RapidBus Stations, as well as future longer-term RapidBus Station locations.
  - In collaboration with the Town of Sidney, a transit hub study is underway to identify options to integrate a RapidBus Station and local transit service.
  - In collaboration with BC Ferries, the conceptual design and assessment of two potential options to upgrade the Swartz Bay transit terminal is being completed. The objectives of the upgrades are to enhance the customer experience and to allow increased bus frequency to the ferry terminal.

## Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) Studies

- **Highway 1** – To support the West Shore RapidBus Strategy, MoTI is advancing planning work on Highway 1 to support existing BC Transit initiatives. This includes transit priority treatments that align with the BC Transit priorities identified by the Victoria Transit Future Plan and the South Island Transportation Strategy:
  - MoTI is currently completing the designs for bus-on-shoulder lanes between the McKenzie Interchange and Six Mile Road. Subject to project approval and funding, the construction is forecasted to start in 2025/26.
  - MoTI is currently completing designs to add bus-on-shoulder lanes to the Burnside Bridge (between Tillicum Road and McKenzie Avenue).
- **Uptown Mobility Hub Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Plan** – MoTI is leading Phase 2 planning work and BC Transit is participating as a stakeholder in this work. Work includes further site investigations, a traffic impact assessment, engagement on the designs with local governments and stakeholders, as well as the selection of a preferred concept for advancement to a final proof of concept, to prepare a business case for associated funding applications and approvals. Current planning activities include assessing transit needs for bus routing to and from the site and developing concepts for how the right-of-way surrounding the exchange will be used to ensure the efficient movement of people, buses, goods, and vehicles.
- **Uptown Transit Priority** – MoTI is advancing design work to develop transit and active transportation priorities and improvements that support near-term RapidBus Strategy objectives that align with the future development of the Uptown site and do not preclude the long-term plan. The plan includes a proposal for a bus lane on Ravine Road, RapidBus Stations on Highway 1 and expanded bus zone capacity on Carey Road. The project is in the design and planning stage. A construction date has not yet been confirmed. This plan aligns with long-term plans for the Uptown Transit Hub and TOD opportunities.

## 4. TRANSIT FACILITY PROJECTS

### 5. Active Projects

- **handyDART Centre at 2401 Burnside Road** – The final phase of the building construction is underway with all of the vertical steel columns erected in the Maintenance and Administration building, and interior steel framing commencing. The project team is working with the Esquimalt Nation to plan the naming ceremony for the new creek. Indigenous economic opportunities related to current and future on-site work are being explored and specific opportunities are under discussion with the Nations. The project team continues to advance discussions with the Nations to inform cultural recognition opportunities and are in the process of developing a 'Call for Artists' for all the Nations being consulted on the project.
- **Saanich Transit Centre** – Planning for the Saanich Transit Centre includes Phase 1A, which prepares the site for construction and Phase 1B, which is the construction of the

facility on the prepared site. An application for ICIP funding for Phase 1A was submitted in March 2023 and was approved by Federal Government in October 2023. The procurement plan is in the process of preparation for the execution of Phase 1A.. The Treasury Board business plan for Phase 1B is being prepared in collaboration with Infrastructure BC. The design team and quantity surveyor are progressing an indicative design that establishes the budget for the Phase 1B funding request. This includes meeting with BC Hydro to confirm sizing and costing to provide power to the site that accounts for fleet electrification. Supported by consultants, early outreach efforts have been completed with Indigenous and First Nations groups with a focus on engaging First Nations in upcoming activities. This includes establishing effective communication channels and support for the archaeological overview assessment.

- Victoria and Langford Transit Centre Upgrades** – Two active facility modernization projects developed to support the implementation of the Transit Facility Master Plan received ICIP funding approval this fall. These projects optimize operations to increase maintenance capacity. Detailed design of the training centre located at the Victoria Transit Centre is complete and the procurement for construction services is in process. The procurement for design consultant services for upgrades at the Langford Transit Centre that include battery electric bus charger installations were posted in January 2024.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Victoria Regional Transit Commission receive this report for INFORMATION.

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