

# Victoria Regional Transit Commission

BC Transit 520 Gorge Road East  
November 7, 2023 | 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

## DRAFT MINUTES

*The Victoria Regional Transit Commission conducts its business on the homelands of the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations.*

### Present:

Commissioner Ryan Windsor, Chair; Commissioner Marie-Terese Little; Commissioner Marianne Alto, Vice-Chair; Commissioner Chris Coleman; Commissioner Dean Murdock; Commissioner Kevin Murdoch; Commissioner Colin Plant;

### BC Transit Staff:

Chelsea Mossey, Senior Manager, Government Relations, Chris Fudge, Director, Government Relations; Christy Ridout, Vice-President, Strategy and Public Affairs; Stephen Anderson, General Manager, Victoria Regional Transit; Greg Hill, Director, Financial Performance and Analysis; Ryan Dennis, Director, Revenue Development; Matt Boyd, Director, Corporate and Strategic Performance; Ryan Campbell, Senior Regional Finance Manager - Victoria; Levi Megenbir, Senior Transit Planner; James Wadsworth, Manager, Project Development; Sheryl Stevens, Senior Regional Operations Manager; Christine Lewis, Executive Assistant and Divisional Coordinator (Recorder)

### Regrets:

Commissioner Maja Tait; Cleo Philp, Student Representative, University of Victoria

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## 1. CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Mayor Ryan Windsor called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

**Motion MOVED by Commissioner Little and SECONDED by Commissioner Coleman the agenda as written.**

**CARRIED**

## 2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 12, 2023

**Motion MOVED by Commissioner Alto and SECONDED by Commissioner Plant to approve the minutes as written.**

**CARRIED**

## 3. CHAIR'S REMARKS

I would like to start off this morning acknowledging an important ridership milestone recently achieved. The Victoria Regional Transit System has reached almost 100% pre-pandemic ridership levels. This is a huge accomplishment, and we want to thank our customers for their ongoing support as well as thank our transit operators and staff at BC Transit who worked tirelessly to provide an essential service to our customers.

This also highlights the importance of public transportation in its role to provide important connections and allow people to travel throughout the region affordably.

At our last meeting we discussed the recent launch of Umo, our new electronic fare collection system. Since that meeting, we continue to see growing adoption rates and positive feedback from riders pleased with the benefits Umo's arrival has brought them. On October 13<sup>th</sup>, we

reached one million boardings with the Umo payment method, with results showing that there are over 14k active Umo riders per day, with 80% of these riders choosing the Umo app and 20% choosing the reloadable card.

Our Voice of the Rider surveys are conducted six times a year and provide valuable feedback. In our most recent survey, we received an 80% approval rating from those customers using Umo.

Work will continue in the weeks ahead to support more riders to transition to the Umo payment system.

We value the feedback of our customers. When changes were made to Route 11 in the Gorge-Tillicum area, we heard loud and clear that they did not meet their needs. As a result, we are adjusting the route in response and the former routing will be reinstated as of January 8, 2024. This process has reinforced the value and importance of through public engagement processes, and engagement on the longer-term needs of the community is now underway, as we look to ensure that future service changes meet their needs.

Recently, we as the Victoria Regional Transit Commission have been having important conversations about the funding of transit service, and passenger fares are a key part of that, particularly as we look to grow and improve transit in the region. As of this past Monday, public engagement on possible fare change options is underway. We acknowledge that no one ever wants a fare increase, but with our last change to the cash fare being in 2010, the Commission will be looking to balance the impact to affordability with the need to fund existing and future service need. We look forward to receiving this feedback and will receive a full staff report in the new year.

### **Remarks by Senior Manager, Government Relations, Chelsea Mossey**

Good morning everyone. I wanted to take the opportunity to provide a few updates on items that you won't see covered in the reports today.

As highlighted by the Chair, the roll-out of Umo in the Victoria Regional Transit System has been incredibly positive, and we continue to see more and more people transition to this new technology. At the last Commission meeting, our VRTC Student Rep, Cleo Philp, raised some concerns from students, and since that time, we've been able to rectify the issue with the Umo app not working in areas without cell coverage, and we've also revised the process for students with U-PASSes, who use handyDART some or all of the time, as that process has changed with the introduction of Umo.

As you'll hear in today's Operations update, we continue to face challenges with fleet and resource availability, and for this reason, we won't be taking part in some of the annual events and traditions that we usually participate in this time of year. We didn't make this decision lightly, but we know that above all else, providing safe and reliable service for our customers must always be our top priority. Our double decker buses won't display moustache decals this month in support of the Movember campaign; however, our employees will once again be fundraising and raising awareness for this important annual campaign. In addition, unfortunately, the annual Santa Bus won't be in service this year, and we will also not be participating in the Santa's Light Parade or the IEOA Lighted Truck Parade, as these events require resources that cannot be spared. The good news is that the annual Stuff the Bus event, which has a major impact on

local families through the Mustard Seed Food Bank and Salvation Army, will be proceeding as planned. Last year this event brought in almost 5,000 pounds of food, more than \$900 in monetary donations and many new clothes and toys. It won't surprise any of you to hear that the need is greater now than ever before, and we'll again be collecting donations these same items at Tillicum Centre on Saturday, December 2.

With regards to our Low Carbon Fleet Program and the electrification of our fleet, our Electrification team continues to work hard behind the scenes to advance this vital and exciting program, and as a result of their work, we're firmly on the path to achieving the CleanBC 2030 greenhouse gas reductions and a fully electric fleet by 2040. We continue to work with Proterra, and we're focused on the delivery of our first 10 electric buses to the Victoria Regional Transit System. They are in production at Proterra's factory in Greenville, South Carolina, and we expect them to arrive this winter.

#### **4. CORRESPONDENCE – TOWN OF VIEW ROYAL – FEBRUARY 23, 2023**

The Commission was updated on a letter received from the Town of View Royal regarding implementation of service priorities for transit routes 24, 40 and 46. Staff have had time to review the letter, and it was brought forward again at this meeting as it relates to the Draft Annual Service Plan. Service has been expanded on 46 and we are continuing to assess this route. Route 24 have been extended to Tillicum Mall and further improvements are planned future based on resources and the results of public engagement. Route 40 is identified as a key priority when expansion resources are available.

**Correspondence was received for INFORMATION.**

#### **5. DELEGATION**

Gorge-Tillicum Community Association (Philip Lancaster)

The Commission heard that the Gorge-Tillicum Community Association is pleased their concerns were heard by BC Transit and that pre-construction Route 11 alignment will be reinstated in January 2024. They advised the Commission that they would like to use their collective voice to support transit as the Province has announced new housing targets, particularly for development near transit hubs and are in favour of seeing expansion in the region focused on improving trip times and frequency of service. They would also like to see a new route from downtown to the airport and would be supportive of that new initiative.

**The presentation was received for INFORMATION.**

#### **6. DELEGATION**

BC Transit and Clean BC Targets (Eric Doherty)

The Commission heard from a delegate representing Greater Victoria Acting Together. The delegation would like to see transformative change in the transportation sector to meet the Province's climate action goals. The delegate informed the Commission that based on their research we need much less vehicle traffic and greater transit mode share. They also suggested bus lanes starting with temporary lanes on roads such as Douglas Street and McKenzie Avenue to help meet climate change goals.

**The presentation was received for INFORMATION.**

**NOTICE OF MOTION**

None

**7. 10 YEAR VISION – FOR APPROVAL**  
*LEVI MEGENBIR*

The Commission was presented with the annual update on the 10 Year vision for transit in the Victoria Regional Transit System. We are now close to 100% of pre-pandemic ridership. Two new Key Performance Indicators and associated targets have been adopted to enhance customer comfort and service reliability. These two new metrics include the per cent of trips meeting our passenger comfort guidelines for maximum bus loads and the per cent of trips operating on time according to the schedule. Changes to mode share targets were also recommended. The previous 15% Transit mode share target by 2039 was adjusted to 2050, with an interim target of 12% by 2038 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, current system constraints and available resources. It was noted that in the agenda package shared with and presented to the Commission, the 2038 transit mode share target incorrectly said 11%, but this would be corrected in the version posted online to 12%.

**MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Murdock, SECONDED by Commissioner Alto to APPROVE the 10 Year Vision.**

**CARRIED**

**8. DRAFT ANNUAL SERVICE PLAN – FOR APPROVAL**  
*LEVI MEGENBIR*

The Commission heard that we have seen a strong and rapid return of post-pandemic ridership, with a 40% increase in ridership over the last two years; in addition, we are seeing increased traffic congestion with more vehicles and more construction on the roads. The increase in ridership includes an increase in the number of tourists taking transit since the pandemic. As a result, the recommendation brought forward to the Commission was that the majority of potential expansion resources in the 2024/25 fiscal year be used to reduce passenger crowding and improve schedule reliability. A small portion of service investment would remain available to achieve the highest ranked strategic and operational priority within the system in 2025 including launching the McKenzie RapidBus Line. A list of four key investment priorities, previously approved by the Commission in the 3-Year Expansion letter, were identified in the plan, including RapidBus and Frequent Transit Network service improvements, development of the crosstown network on the Hillside/Gorge and Admirals/McKenzie corridors, simplifying and improving transit service on the Quadra corridor, and improvements to the YYJ Airport and Peninsula service. These priorities will be implemented as expansion resources permit. Councillor Plant tabled a motion requesting information and a recommendation from staff to introduce direct service to the airport in the 2025/26 fiscal year. It was recognized by the

Commission that the introduction of expansion priorities always requires trade-offs, and the possibility of a higher fare for airport service was discussed.

**MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Plant, SECONDED by Commissioner Alto to ask staff to identify, present and recommend a plan to introduce a regular direct route to the airport from the Core as part of the 25/26 Annual Service Plan.**

**CARRIED**

**AMENDED MOTION MOVED BY Commissioner Colin Plant, SECONDED by Commissioner Alto to ask staff to bring forward a report to help the Commission to understand the implications of establishing a direct route to the airport.**

**CARRIED**

**MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Plant, SECONDED by Commissioner Alto to APPROVE the Draft Annual Service Plan.**

**CARRIED**

#### **9. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: Q2 – FOR INFORMATION**

*RYAN CAMPBELL*

The Commission was presented with a report outlining the financial performance of the VRTS as of the second quarter (April to September, 2023) of the 2023/24 fiscal year. The Commission heard that passenger revenues are 5% over budget, and passenger trips are 3.6% over budget fiscal year to date. The revenue forecast for the remainder of the fiscal year is purposefully conservative due to the recent launch of the new electronic fare collection technology (Umo). This revenue forecast will be updated in Q3 when more information is available. Staff highlighted that the local contribution is 5% below budget fiscal year to date but is forecasted to be 0.8% above budget at year end due to higher than budgeted operating costs for conventional service. Maintenance costs are forecasted to be over budget at fiscal year end due to items such as higher than budgeted parts and materials costs, overtime expenses, emergency facility repairs and CNG maintenance.

The Commission requested staff bring forward monthly fuel costs over the past five years.

**The Financial and Performance Summary for Q2 was RECEIVED for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.**

#### **10. DRAFT 2024/25 BASE BUDGET – FOR INFORMATION**

*RYAN CAMPBELL*

The draft 2024/25-2026/27 base budget was presented to the Commission for information. No fare review revenue impacts are currently included in the budget as the fare review engagement is currently underway to consider various options for fare changes. In the 2024/25 fiscal year, the remaining balance of Safe Restart Funding will be fully utilized. The draft base budget for 2024/25 is almost \$20M above this current fiscal year budget. This is driven by items such as

wage increases, fuel costs, the addition of 10 operators and 8 maintenance staff, increased costs of parts and materials, and increased administrative costs. The Commission was presented with estimated transit levies per household, both without expansion in 2024/25 (the base budget) and with service expansion in 2024/25. Staff will bring back a final budget in February for approval, including the associated transit levy.

**The Draft 2024/25 Base Budget was RECEIVED for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.**

## **11. CUSTOM TRANSIT UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION**

*SHERYL STEVENS*

The Commission heard an update on Custom Transit (handyDART) service in the Victoria Regional Transit System. In specific, they heard that a consultant has been engaged to help develop a new 5-year custom transit strategic plan. In preparing the plan, they will be reviewing industry best practices and the policies and processes of other Canadian transit agencies. The consultant will review BC Transit's current services and provide recommendations on how to make improvements to ultimately achieve the final vision set forth in the plan. The plan will also set forth a roadmap for achieving the desired future state of custom transit, including technology integration, reliable, secure data, service standards and customer experience expectations. Key stakeholders will be engaged to help inform the development of the plan. We anticipate the new custom transit strategic plan to be finalized in 2024. New standardized dispatch and scheduling software is planned to come to all BC Transit systems providing handyDART service. The VRTS software will include an online booking system with a plan to introduce this technology to other systems in the future. BC Transit is targeting to pilot the new software in the VRTS by summer 2024.

**The Custom Transit Update was RECEIVED for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.**

## **12. PLANNING & INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION**

*LEVI MEGENBIR, JAMES WADSWORTH*

The Planning department presented the Commission with information on upcoming service changes. A seasonal service change is being implemented on December 4, 2023 to align with the end of the semester at post-secondary institutions. On January 8, 2024, the winter service change will take place. This includes cost-neutral changes to Route 15 to meet current demand and minor changes on Friday and Saturday late-night service on Routes 27 and 28 to address growing demand for service. We will be reinstating Route 11 service to its alignment prior to June 27, 2022. Due to the last-minute nature of the changes as well as vehicle constraints, the Route 11 alignment change requires a slight reduction in service levels for January. Public engagement is underway on service in the Gorge-Tillicum-Burnside-Esquimalt areas. A key goal of this engagement is to determine what is most important to our customers, whether it is local transit coverage or key regional connections. The West Shore Transit Network Restructure will also be implemented in January. This includes introducing new routing on the Route 52 Colwood Exchange/Bear Mountain and improving service to rapidly growing areas like Royal Bay, Happy Valley, Latoria, Millstream Village, and the back side of Bear Mountain. Two

RapidBus stations in Langford on the Blink Route 95 will be reintroduced based on customer feedback. These stops will improve access to Goldstream Avenue and Veterans Memorial Parkway. BC Transit is engaging with local government staff on the regional corridor strategy. Corridors have been identified and we are currently working to prioritize areas. Staff are aiming to provide an update to the Commission in February 2024.

Infrastructure updates included confirming that staff are current securing right of ways on the Island Highway to move the Island Highway Transit Priority project, which supports RapidBus service, forward. Staff is also working with City of Victoria and District of Saanich staff on RapidBus infrastructure projects for McKenzie Avenue and Douglas Street. Construction is underway and going well on the new View Royal handyDART facility.

**The Planning and Infrastructure Update was RECEIVED for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.**

**13. OPERATIONS UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION**  
*STEPHEN ANDERSON*

The Commission heard that we delivered 98.92% of scheduled service in the Victoria Regional Transit System between August and October, just short of the 99.5% target. A surge of ridership has led to pass-ups on some routes, and pass-ups are up 6% over the previous year. A total of 727 hours of additional flexible service were dispatched during this time period and were used to support extended late-night service. A total of 7,760 passengers benefited from the added service. Operator and maintenance staff recruitment is ongoing. We are seeing positive results in hiring new operators. The market for mechanical staff is highly competitive and new innovative recruitment strategies are underway to help bolster the hiring of staff in this area.

**The Operations Update was RECEIVED for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.**

**14. ATAC UPDATE– FOR INFORMATION**  
*STEPHEN ANDERSON*

The Commission received a report on the Accessible Transit Advisory Committee. This included the draft minutes and a summary of their September 15<sup>th</sup> meeting that was attended by both Chair Windsor and Commissioner Little. ATAC is exploring ways to re-establish a working relationship with Yellow Taxi and noted the current work underway to develop a new custom transit strategy and launch of a new Victoria handyDART dispatch system, targeting implementation 2024. At the next meeting, ATAC will discuss signage about accessible seating and other accessible services and information that they have observed while taking transit.

**The ATAC Update was RECEIVED for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.**

**15. STUDENT UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION**  
*CLEO PHILP*

None.

**MOTION BY Commissioner Alto and SECONDED by Commissioner Coleman to adjourn meeting at 11:40 a.m.**

**CARRIED**

**NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING**  
February 20, 2024