

Victoria Regional Transit Commission

BC Transit 520 Gorge Road East
June 18, 2024 | 9:00 a.m. to Noon

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

BC Transit Staff:

Chelsea Mossey, Senior Manager, Government Relations, Christy Harrold, Vice-President, Strategy and Public Affairs; Stephen Anderson, General Manager, Victoria Regional Transit; Greg Hill, Director, Financial Planning and Analysis; Ryan Dennis, Director, Revenue Development; Ryan Campbell, Senior Regional Finance Manager - Victoria; Carl Purvis, Manager, Planning; Levi Megenbir, Senior Transit Planner; James Wadsworth, Manager, Project Development; Tessa Stewart, Business Development Advisor; Christine Lewis, Executive Assistant and Divisional Coordinator (Recorder)

Regrets:

1. CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Mayor Ryan Windsor called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Motion MOVED by Commissioner Tait and SECONDED by Commissioner Coleman to approve the agenda as written.

CARRIED

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MARCH 19, 2024

The Commission requested an edit to item 7 in the draft Minutes from March 19, 2024. Commissioner Tait requested that wording be added to indicate that a motion was passed directing staff to prepare and present a report to the Commission at a future date showing the cost-benefit analysis for free transit for the local transit network, starting with Sooke routes 63 and 64.

Minutes APPROVED by unanimous consent with edit.

CARRIED

3. CHAIR'S REMARKS

Good Morning,

We recognize and acknowledge that we work on the unceded traditional territories of the Lekwungen peoples, and the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations.

I would like to start off this morning by welcoming our new student representative from Camosun College. Prince Solanki, the Student Society's External Executive, is an international student pursuing a Post degree diploma in Sports Management, having previously completed a bachelor's degree in sports science, health and physical education. Today Prince will be

observing our meeting, and we look forward to having you on the Commission starting at the September meeting.

Since we last met, we've received the good news that plans for the electrification of the transit fleet continue to move forward and we expect to see 10 electric buses arrive for the Victoria Regional Transit System in 2025. In addition, BC Transit staff are planning for a second electrification deployment at the Victoria Transit Centre, and a procurement is currently underway for the first battery electric double decker buses for our region. All of this marks a significant step forward in moving towards a low carbon fleet, and I look forward to continuing to provide you with more updates on this program at future meetings.

As this is the first meeting of the new fiscal year, I want to highlight that in the recent 2023/24 fiscal year, 24.8 million rides were delivered on conventional transit in the Victoria Regional Transit System. This is an increase of 2.4 million rides over the previous fiscal year, and it demonstrates the tremendous demand for public transit in the capital region.

The new handyDART centre in View Royal is now in the final stages of construction and is scheduled to open in early 2025. On June 22nd, the BC Transit team will be hosting an open house and tour of the new facility for the public, through which guests will receive project updates and view the most recent construction.

The provincial roll-out of the first phase of Umo, our electronic fare collection system, will be complete at the end of June. As the first transit system to adopt this new fare technology, we continue to see growing adoption rates and receive positive feedback, with results showing that there are over 87,000 active users, with 77% of these riders choosing the Umo app and 23% choosing the reloadable card. We look forward to seeing the system expanded to include credit and debit tapping in 2025.

Finally, on behalf the Commission, I want to take a moment to recognize all of the high school graduates in the Victoria Region, and highlight that we are again pleased to offer graduating students two free transit rides this month through the GradPASS program. We've offered this program in the Victoria Regional Transit System every year since 1990, and I'd encourage all students to consider transit when planning a safe ride home at this exciting time of year.

We have a full agenda today, as we look to continuously improve transit in the region, so let's get on with the meeting.

Thank-you.

4. STAFF REMARKS

The Commission heard about a Transport Canada Parts recall, which has been impacting service in the Victoria Regional Transit System. Replacement parts have now arrived, and it's expected that the 34 impacted buses will be back in service soon. BC Transit recently participated in a West Shore and Sooke Transit Townhall, alongside MLA Ravi Parmar and MLA Mitzi Dean. BC Transit staff provided attendees with information on transit service and plans in the Sooke and West Shore regions and received valuable feedback from participants. BC Transit staff have been working with the CRD as they consider a new transportation service, and BC Transit looks to start a new Transit Future Plan process. Since the last meeting, BC

Transit has released an updated Strategic Plan that outlines the organization’s objectives, focus areas and key priorities for the coming years.

5. CORRESPONDENCE – LETTER FROM SEASPAN DATED MARCH 20, 2024

The Commission was informed of a letter received from Seaspan regarding enhanced transit service for employees and guests to and from 825 Admirals Road.

6. CORRESPONDENCE – LETTER FROM CFB ESQUIMALT DATED JUNE 7, 2024

The Commission was informed of a letter written by the Base Commander of CFB Esquimalt regarding sustainable and improved commuter options for the CFB Esquimalt community.

BC Transit staff confirmed that engagement with both CFB Esquimalt and Seaspan has occurred, and external stakeholders are engaged by staff to ensure transit needs are met throughout the region. Both organizations will be engaged through the upcoming Transit Future Plan process.

Correspondence was received for INFORMATION.

7. DELEGATION #1

Better Island Transit – Todd Litman

The Commission heard from the delegation regarding cost of transit and service for those commuting between Duncan and Greater Victoria. They proposed the Commission ask the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and BC Transit for better and more frequent transit at a lower cost of \$5 per trip. BC Transit staff advised that service is delivered via cost sharing between the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Commission and Province.

MOTION MOVED BY Commission Kevin Murdoch and SECONDED by Commissioner Dean Murdock to direct the Chair to meet with the Chair of the Cowichan Valley Regional District Board regarding the potential for service expansion between the Cowichan Valley and the Victoria Regional Transit Systems.

CARRIED

8. DELEGATION #2

UVic Students’ Society – Isabelle Easton

The Commission heard that prior to the pandemic, a Route 76 bus would travel from UVic to the Swartz Bay ferry terminal on Friday and Sundays. This service was discontinued during the pandemic due to low ridership. The UVic Students’ Society recently conducted survey on reinstating this service as current routes do not align with student schedules and there are long wait times to get to and from the ferry terminal. They requested that a cost analysis be done as a first step towards the reinstatement of Route 76.

MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Colin Plant and SECONDED by Commissioner Dean Murdock for BC Transit to conduct a cost analysis on the reinstatement of Route 76 from

the University of Victoria to Swartz Bay and report back to the Commission with the results.

CARRIED

The presentations were received for INFORMATION.

9. 2023/24 FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE REPORT – FOR APPROVAL
RYAN CAMPBELL

The Commission was presented with a report highlighting the financial performance of the Victoria Regional Transit System for the 2023/24 fiscal year. The report showed that passenger revenue was \$1.8M above budget, due to higher than budgeted passenger trips, farebox revenue, and monthly pass sales. Passenger trips finished 1.1M above budget.

The local contribution was on budget due to higher passenger revenues offsetting increased conventional operating expenses. Fuel tax revenue remained flat compared to the previous 2022/23 fiscal year at \$17.8M.

Operations was over budget due to higher operator overtime and benefit expenses, which was largely offset by vacancy savings. Service hours were below budget primarily due to labour shortages and fleet constraints.

Fleet maintenance was over budget due to higher parts and materials and labour expenses.

The Local Transit Fund finished the year above budget on March 31, 2024 due to increased passenger revenues in 2023/24.

THE 2023/24 Financial and Performance Report was APPROVED by unanimous consent.

CARRIED

10. FARE REVIEW – FOR APPROVAL
TESSA STEWART

The Commission had previously directed staff to conduct a fare review for both conventional and custom transit. A report was presented that further assessed the four options that were taken forward for public consultation, including the feedback received and how each option aligned with BC Transit's Fare Strategy guidelines and industry standards. The assessment also included a qualitative assessment of all options, taking customer feedback into account.

All options proposed a fare change effective April 1, 2025, for both conventional and custom transit, which aligns with the conditions of the Safe Restart Funding Agreement. Staff recommended the approval of option 3, which increases the single ride fare to \$3, the dayPASS to \$6 and the 30-day Concession Pass to \$55.

The Commission approved an amended version of the recommended fare change option. The option was amended to retain the existing Concession 30-Day pass price of \$45. This fare

change, effective April 1, 2025, will increase the single-ride fare from \$2.50 to \$3.00, and increase the DayPASS from \$5 to \$6. The Adult 30-Day (\$85) pass will remain unchanged.

MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Kevin Murdoch SECONDED by Commission Maja Tait to move approval option 3 as recommended.

AMENDMENT MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Marianne Alto SECONDED by Commission Dean Murdock to keep the concession pass at \$45 while raising the rate of other fares.

CARRIED

AMENDMENT MOTION MOVED by Commission Colin Plant SECONDED by Commission Marie-Terese Little to increase the adult monthly pass to \$90 – moved by Colin Plant

DEFEATED

MOTION MOVED by Commission Kevin Murdoch SECONDED BY Chair Ryan Windsor for staff to bring forward a five-year fare strategy in 2025 to the Commission.

CARRIED

11. SPECIAL FARE DAYS – FOR INFORMATION
TESSA STEWART

The Commission was presented with a report that had been requested at a previous Commission meeting to evaluate the cost of special fare days in the Victoria Regional Transit System. Staff advised there are currently six special fare days, only three of which offer free transit to all customers all day. The other four have criteria such as wearing a uniform on Remembrance Day or having a bicycle or bike helmet to ride for free during Go by Bike Week. For days on which free transit is offered to everyone, staff advised that the cost is approximately \$46,000 per day for conventional transit. New data collected through the Umo fare system will provide more accurate fare data in the future related to the costs of free fare days. Prior to 2021, these special fare days were approved annually. Staff were instructed to bring back these days for approval annually starting in June 2025, with the more fulsome Umo data and associated costs.

MOTION MOVED by Commission Marianne Alto and SECONDED by Commission Maja Tait to add Canada Day to the Special Fare Days in the Victoria Regional Transit System.

DEFEATED

The report on Special Fare Days was RECEIVED by unanimous consent FOR INFORMATION.

12. FREE/DISCOUNTED TRANSIT FOR YOUTH – FOR INFORMATION
TESSA STEWART

A previous motion from the Commission asked for an assessment of the implications of providing free transit for youth in response to a letter received from the Town of View Royal and District of Metchosin.

Currently, the Province funds free transit for children 12 years and under. Although there is currently no data to validate the number of children using transit, this has been seen as a successful program. Some transit systems already offer free transit for youth, which is funded by individual municipalities and administered through Umo via a youth pass. The City of Victoria's youth program is successful, and it's expected that ridership would increase if introduced around the region. BC Transit has identified 45% of eligible youth actively participate in the City of Victoria program. Staff would need to assess the routes used frequently by youth and assess the capacity to ensure excessive pass-ups do not occur. The report outlined that the Province manages the free transit for children 12 program and outlined that the Commission could support extending this program to youth; however, at present the Commission would have to fund it themselves.

If fare-free transit were offered to all youth in the VRTS, foregone revenue would be approximately \$5M to fully fund this program, or approximately \$2M if youth were offered a 50% discount.

MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Dean Murdock and SECONDED by Commissioner Colin Plant for the Commission to write to Transportation and Infrastructure Minister Fleming requesting that the Free Transit for Children 12 and Under program be extended to youth 13-18 years old in the Victoria Regional Transit System.

CARRIED

The Free/Discounted Transit for Youth report was received FOR INFORMATION by unanimous consent.

13. PLANNING APPROVALS – FOR INFORMATION

CARL PURVIS AND LEVI MEGENBIR

The Commission was presented with a recommended framework for transit service planning decision-making. Through the framework, it was recommended that permanent routing changes, changes to holiday service, changes outside of service and performance standards or classification go the Commission for approval.

The Planning Approval Framework was APPROVED by unanimous consent.

CARRIED

14. PLANNING UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION

LEVI MEGENBIR

The Planning department presented the Commission with updates on the upcoming summer service changes, including improved service to meet tourist demand and some preliminary

changes for upcoming fall changes. Although we anticipated some reduced capacity this fall due to maintenance challenges, staff advised they will be able to schedule more service than previously anticipated due to increased resource with a focus on peak service and regular service increases for routes that service post-secondary and school areas.

The Transit Future Plan process is moving forward and the Regional Corridor Strategy is complete. The Commission heard that public engagement for the Tillicum-McKenzie Corridor Plan starts this week, and that Planning staff will be developing a YYJ Airport Service Options report to support the 2025/26 Annual Service Plan and integration into the Transit Future Plan Update.

The Planning Update was received for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.

15. INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION
JAMES WADSWORTH

The Infrastructure department updated the Commission on infrastructure planning. They heard that construction on the View Royal portion of the Island Highway Transit Priority upgrades will be starting shortly, and that Town of Sidney Committee of the Whole recently approved a Transit Hub concept, in support of a future Peninsula RapidBus service. More details on this will be brought forward to the Commission this fall. Construction continues to progress at the new handyDART Facility in View Royal and planning is underway for a business case for a new Saanich Transit Centre, as well as planning for facility upgrades at the Langford Transit Centre to help support service expansion. The Downtown Douglas RapidBus Study is being advanced to support the overall RapidBus strategy on Douglas Street between Belleville and Bay Street. In addition, an update on the Uptown Mobility Hub will come forward to the Commission at the September meeting.

The Infrastructure Update was received for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.

16. OPERATIONS UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION
STEPHEN ANDERSON

A report was presented to the Commission on winter to spring service levels, showing service delivery at 98.31%. The Commission was advised that even with the recent loss of 34 buses due to a parts recall, staff have worked hard on an alternative plan to maximize service delivery. This plan included mechanics ensuring other buses requiring repairs were able to go back into service. Operator recruitment is ongoing and going well. There have been challenges in the recruitment of mechanics and an active coast to coast recruitment campaign is underway.

Custom transit service has seen ridership increase in warmer months. An update will be presented to the Commission on the new Custom Transit Strategy at an upcoming meeting.

The Operations Update was received for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.

17. ATAC UPDATE– FOR INFORMATION
STEPHEN ANDERSON

The Commission received a report on the ATAC Committee. Two meetings have occurred since the Commission last met. The Committee is currently reviewing and providing feedback to staff on accessibility of signage on buses.

The ATAC Update was received for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.

MOTION BY Commissioner Maja Tait and SECONDED by Commissioner Colin Plant to adjourn meeting at 11:59 a.m.

CARRIED

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING
September 10, 2024