
SUBJECT: Downtown Douglas RapidBus Line

PURPOSE

To provide an update to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (the “Commission”) on the infrastructure planning activities to support the development of Douglas Street as a RapidBus corridor and the next steps necessary to continue advancing the RapidBus Implementation Strategy.

This report is presented to the Commission for **APPROVAL** in principle to advance a transit infrastructure Planning and Design project to further develop Douglas Street as a RapidBus corridor.

BACKGROUND

A key strategy to achieve increased transit mode share is the implementation of RapidBus service in the Victoria Regional Transit System (VRTS). The Victoria Regional Transit Future Plan (2011) identified Douglas Street as the primary Rapid Transit Corridor, setting forth necessary infrastructure investments to increase transit mode share. This was followed by the RapidBus Implementation Strategy, approved by the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (VRTC) in 2021, which looked to accelerate ridership growth along key corridors and included the implementation of strategic customer-facing infrastructure investments.

RapidBus service is planned to be implemented across several additional key corridors in the VRTS to create a high-capacity transit system in three phases. The Douglas Street corridor has the highest transit ridership of any corridor in the province outside of Metro Vancouver and is a top priority for Phase 1 of the Victoria RapidBus Implementation Strategy.

Transit infrastructure is a critical component of transit systems such that, as investments are made to expand RapidBus service, corresponding investments in new transit infrastructure are often required, such as transit priority measures and improved bus stops. Transit priority measures, such as bus lanes, transit signal priority, or queue jump lanes help improve transit speed and reliability, while expanded RapidBus stations improve accessibility features, provide increased passenger capacity, and allow for “Blink” branding opportunities. These infrastructure investments will complement additional RapidBus service to support attracting new ridership and increasing the transit mode share.

BC Transit, the City of Victoria, and other levels of government have been working together on advancing phased transit improvements between downtown and the West Shore communities for several years. The development of the Douglas Street corridor has been endorsed and partially implemented based on comprehensive studies, technical analysis, and engagement with municipal governments, the provincial government, the public, and the business community. Plans continue to receive on-going support from the VRTC and the City, and investments in the southern portion (south of Hillside Avenue) remain a priority.

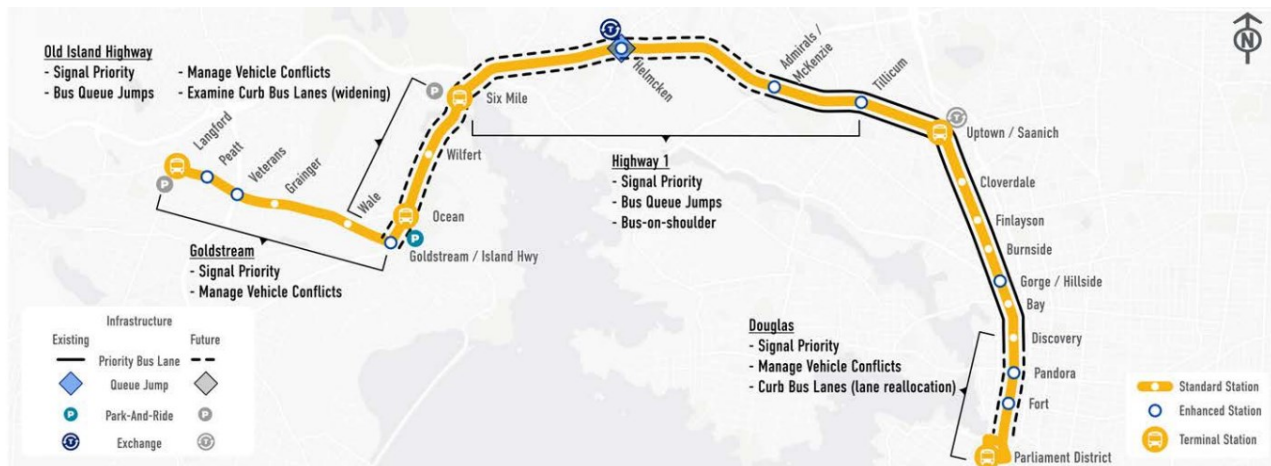


Figure 1. West Shore and Downtown Douglas RapidBus Line

In October 2022, City of Victoria Council directed staff to develop options and recommendations for establishing dedicated bus lanes through the downtown core. City staff worked with BC Transit and a consultant team in 2023 to develop and assess multiple streetscape configurations and design approaches to understand how to best provide dedicated transit lanes while also addressing circulation needs, road safety objectives, and other mode share and network priorities. Staff also considered opportunities to pair bus lanes with other asset renewal priorities and complete street features such as urban forest expansion, placemaking, and accessibility improvements.

Current streetscape designs and transit stops on Douglas Street are outdated and do not reflect a modern, accessible, and attractive transit system. This corridor is a prime candidate for investments to improve transit service quality, customer experience, and increased ridership, while supporting housing and employment densification goals.

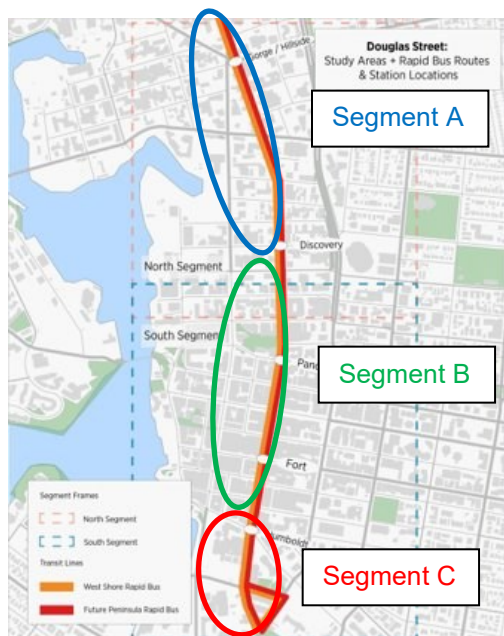


Figure 2. Douglas St RapidBus Segments

Providing dedicated transit lanes on Douglas Street south of Hillside requires several trade-offs. Given the variety of diverse land uses, commercial needs, right-of-way constraints, and streetscape aspirations, the study area has been broken up into three segments for analysis and consideration. The intent is to reimagine Douglas Street as a corridor to safely move as many people as possible, set the scene for future transit and land use investments, and meet a broad range of shared BC Transit, City of Victoria, and regional transportation goals.

- **Segment A (Hillside Avenue to Herald Street)** – Transition to 24/7 curb-side dedicated bus lanes.
- **Segment B (Herald Street to Humboldt Street)** – Introduce dedicated bus lanes in association with complete street improvements.
- **Segment C (Humboldt Street to Belleville Street)** – Introduce a new RapidBus terminus.

Interim work on Segment A was delivered in August 2024. Additional design work is needed to align with the design for segments B and C.

DISCUSSION

The Douglas Street design will include new bus lanes from Herald Street to Belleville Street. A new transit terminal will be introduced at the south end, in addition to three pairs of Blink-branded RapidBus Stations in the downtown core and investments in local transit stops on Douglas at intersecting east-west streets. Renewal of municipal infrastructure will be incorporated into the project.

Support has already been secured from the City of Victoria to continue design development for Douglas Street. BC Transit must secure approval in principle from the VRTC to fund the design phase. Once approved, the parties will begin advancing preliminary and detailed designs through a Planning and Design project, which will be a collaborative effort with the City of Victoria, with the following key milestones:

- Development and execution of a Memorandum of Understanding confirming the scope, roles, and responsibilities for BC Transit and the City of Victoria
- 60 per cent design for improvements along the corridor (Segments B and C)
- Class C cost estimate
- Development of an implementation phasing plan
- Business case preparation

The design phase is anticipated to take approximately 24 months and cost \$2.5M, which will be cost shared with the Province at the traditional ratio of 68.3% VRTC funding, 31.7% Provincial funding. The VRTC share of the planning and design budget will be funded through future lease fees that are not incurred until the project is in service. If the project does not proceed the costs will be recovered as a one-time operating expense. After the design phase is complete, staff will come back to the Commission to seek VRTC approval to proceed with submitting a funding application. Completion of the design phase will support the pursuit of future federal funding programs, which are expected in 2026.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the VRTC **APPROVE** Segments B and C in principle to support the development of the Downtown Douglas Street RapidBus Line.

It is further recommended that the VRTC **APPROVE** the planning and design of Segments B and C to further develop designs and cost estimates for the development of a business case and future funding application.

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