

Victoria Regional Transit Commission

BC Transit 520 Gorge Road East
September 10, 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; Student Representative Prince Solanki

Regrets:

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; Ryan Campbell, Senior Regional Finance Manager - Victoria; Levi Megenbir, Senior Transit Planner; James Wadsworth, Manager, Project Development; Tessa Stewart, Manager, Business Development; Adam Bishop, Manager, Accessible Transit; 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 9:05 a.m.

Motion MOVED by Commissioner Marianne Alto and SECONDED by Commissioner Marie-Terese Little to approve the agenda as written.

CARRIED

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JUNE 18, 2024

Motion MOVED by Commissioner Marie-Terese Little and SECONDED by Commissioner Chris Coleman to approve Minutes as written.

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.

It's hard to believe it's already September. This is a busy time of year with the beginning of school and the return for many of us to our regular routine after time off during the summer.

The fall service change in the Victoria Regional Transit System saw increased service on routes used by our students at both K-12 and post-secondary institutions. As well, following a public information campaign in the spring, the Route 13 Ten Mile Point/UVic will be discontinued, and the Route 24 Cedar Hill/Tillicum Centre will no longer serve the Parklands loop, with both changes increasing the efficiency of the transit system.

The BC Transit BusReady team will be visiting schools to educate children ages 12 and under, on how to ride public transit confidently and safely and encourage them to become lifelong transit riders. So far this year, the team has visited 210 classrooms with over 5,250 students in the Victoria region. If you haven't watched the team's kid interview series, I encourage you to view them on the BC Transit website.

Construction on the new handyDART LEED certified operations and maintenance building continues to move forward. An open house was held this summer with almost 90 participants. Wood from trees removed to realign the Galloping Goose Trail near the facility is being reused and made into bird houses thanks to a partnership with BC Transit and New Roads Therapeutic Recovery to help build their clients woodworking skills. These bird houses will then be painted by students at Eagle View elementary and installed this fall at the new Watkiss Way Park overlooking the new site.

On October 1, the Victoria Regional Transit System will cease the sale of legacy ticket and magnetic stripe monthly pass fare products in favour of convenient Umo enabled alternatives. A multi-phased communication plan launched on July 17 to support this development and is planned to run until the end of October to ensure we've thoroughly informed our riders, operators, and vendors about fare product changes. As we near the October 1 effective date, we continue to see increases in Umo adoption numbers as riders, who haven't yet done so, prepare for the switch.

In support of the RapidBus strategy, the transition from time-limited bus lanes to 24/7 dedicated bus lanes on Douglas between Hillside and Herald is now complete. This work was done by the City of Victoria in partnership with BC Transit earlier this month at a cost of \$40,000 dollars and was funded by the Commission through the previously approved RapidBus Planning budget. These continual improvements will be key to help grow ridership and improve service delivery in the years ahead.

We have lots to talk about today so I will now turn it over to Chelsea Mossey, Senior Manager, Government Relations to say a few words before we officially start today's meeting.

4. STAFF REMARKS

The Commission heard that planning is underway for the Winter Service Change in the Victoria Regional Transit System, and service expansion will be implemented as operationally feasible. To support getting people to and from the polls, free transit will be offered on provincial election

day on both conventional and custom transit. BC Transit's electrification program continues and the first heavy-duty battery electric buses (BEBs) are expected to start production this fall. Based on current schedules, New Flyer BEBs should be delivered first in 2025. BC Transit Staff, including President and CEO Erinn Pinkerton and VP Strategy and Public Affairs Christy Harrold will be at UBCM next week.

5. CORRESPONDENCE

None

6. DELEGATION #1

Julie Johnston – Free Transit for Seniors on Senior's Day

The Commission heard from the delegation that they represent a newly formed group in Victoria and are part of national network hosting a climate action event for Seniors Day on October 1 at the Legislature. The presenter advised they are looking for government to take action on the current climate emergency. They are asking the Commission to provide free transit for seniors on October 1 for National Seniors Day to allow more seniors to attend the event.

7. DELEGATION #2

School District 62

The Commission heard that the School District is having to make difficult budget decisions that have resulted in reduced school bus service and an increase in school busing fees. The School District has built partnerships with the City of Colwood, City of Langford and District of Sooke and is looking to propose a similar collaboration with BC Transit. There is currently collaboration at the school-level but they are looking to expand this partnership to the district-level. The delegation is looking to work together throughout the next year on partnership opportunities including coordinating bell schedules, increasing safety at bus stops and on buses, adding additional service hours on routes serving schools, aligning routes in a hub and spoke model with schools and the transit network, and looking at a centrally funded UPASS for students. Staff advised that they will continue these discussions with the District to look at what opportunities may exist and will bring forward recommendations to a future Commission meeting when service for next year is discussed.

8. Q1 FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE REPORT – FOR INFORMATION

RYAN CAMPBELL

The Commission was presented with a report highlighting the financial performance of the Victoria Regional Transit System for the first quarter. The report showed that passenger and advertising revenue are both on budget for Q1. Despite ridership being slightly below budget for the first quarter, we are forecasting to be on track by fiscal year-end. Conventional and Custom transit are both slightly below budget on service hours and are forecasting to be 1.6% below budget at fiscal year-end.

Increased operating expenses could impact year-end actuals and final local contributions for the fiscal year. Fuel costs are currently trending below budget while fleet maintenance costs are 9% over budget fiscal year to date. We are currently forecasting to be \$2.7 million over budget in maintenance by fiscal year-end due to increased labour and parts and materials expenses. Total expenses are forecasted to be \$2.8 million over budget by fiscal year-end. The Transit Fund is forecasted to be \$6.2 million at year-end.

9. THREE-YEAR EXPANSION – FOR APPROVAL
CHELSEA MOSSEY

An amendment to the Taxi Supplement expansion items in the report was noted by staff; in particular, it was noted that approval of any Taxi Supplement expansion initiatives remain subject to Taxi Supplement's eligibility for expansion funding. For custom transit expansion initiatives involving buses, the expansion table in the report should show a January implementation, not April, which aligns with delivery timelines for buses. It was noted that these changes do not impact the financials shown in the table. An amended report will be posted online.

Staff reminded the Commission that they have previously approved ambitious transit mode share targets over the next 25 years. Due to transit system ridership growing rapidly, we are seeing increasing pass-ups and bus crowding. The Commission heard that staff expect increased demand due to the development of the Rapid and Frequent Transit Networks over the next three years. Due to mode share targets and increasing customer demand, Staff recommended expansion of both conventional and custom transit in each of the coming three fiscal years. For the 2025/26 fiscal year, conventional service expansion will require up to 30,000 additional hours for conventional transit and up to 12 buses, and up to 10 new vehicles and up to 7,500 service hours for custom transit.

MOTION MOVED by Commission Maja Tait SECONDED BY Kevin Murdoch to APPROVE BC Transit to include up to 30,000 hours for conventional transit, up to 7,500 hours for custom transit and a \$500,000 increase (\$135,000 VRTC Share) to the Taxi Supplement budget (subject to eligibility for expansion funding) as part of the funding request to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure for service expansion in the 2025/26 fiscal year; And to APPROVE the commitment to increase the VRTS conventional bus fleet by up to twelve buses (six heavy-duty and six high-capacity) and increase the VRTS custom bus fleet by up to ten (light-duty) buses starting in January 2026.

CARRIED

10. ROUTE 76 REINSTATEMENT – FOR APPROVAL
LEVI MEGENBIR

The Commission heard that staff developed this report in response to a UVSS delegation who presented to the Commission at a previous meeting. As a result of this delegation, the Commission had directed staff to look at the reinstatement of Route 76 Swartz Bay/UVic. Staff advised that the reinstatement would require an additional 400 service hours. Over the past few months, BC Transit staff worked with UVic Student Society on what could be possible. A

recommendation was presented to the Commission to reinstate Route 76 in January 2025 subject to resource availability.

The Commission APPROVED the Route 76 Reinstatement in the Victoria Regional Transit System by unanimous consent.

11. 2025 MEETING SCHEDULE – FOR APPROVAL
CHELSEA MOSSEY

The Commission was presented with a meeting schedule for 2025 which aligns with dates in previous years. Staff were requested to look at an alternative date for the October workshop.

The Commission APPROVED the 2025 Meeting Schedule by unanimous consent.

12. CANADA PUBLIC TRANSIT FUND – FOR INFORMATION
CHELSEA MOSSEY

The Commission heard that in July 2024 the federal government announced the establishment of two funding streams under the Canada Public Transit Fund. The funds from these two streams are expected to be disbursed starting in April 2026. BC Transit will be submitting funding applications as the lead applicant on behalf of government partners for funds under both the Baseline Funding stream and Metro-Region Agreement Funding stream. Metro-Region Agreement funding will be used for diverse projects which will be defined through an Integrated Regional Plan. Expressions-of-interest for Baseline Funding are currently being sought, and BC Transit will submit an EOI for the VRTS by the September 16, 2024 deadline. Subsequently, BC Transit will begin working on an EOI for Metro-Region Agreement funding. Once an EOI has been accepted, BC Transit will be invited to put forward an Integrated Regional Plan for this funding. Creating a governance structure for this Plan is a key priority in the coming months. The Commission also heard that accessing funding will be critical to increasing and enhancing transit in the region.

13. FARE FREE TRANSIT FOR LOCAL TRANSIT NETWORK-COVERAGES ROUTES – FOR INFORMATION
TESSA STEWART

Staff presented a report to the Commission, which they had requested after a delegation from the District of Sooke presented at a previous meeting. The report provides a cost and benefit analysis for fare-free transit on Local Transit Network Coverage (LTN-C) routes, and also specifically on Routes 63 and 64 in Sooke, as requested by the delegation. LTN-C routes are in rural areas and are often underutilized. The Commission heard that the impact of fare-free transit would not only affect these routes but would also have far-reaching effects on fare products, service levels and government partners in the entire Victoria Regional Transit System.

Staff prepared a cost analysis looking at service costs and foregone revenues. They also highlighted equity considerations, noting that by offering fare-free transit on these LTN-C routes,

customers who transfer on to other routes would not benefit as they would still pay the cost of the total trip nor would BC transit pass holders; it was further highlighted that this may encourage people to use individual fares versus a prepaid pass, which provide stable revenue for the transit system. The benefits noted would be an increase to ridership by removing financial barriers and encouraging residents of Sooke to use transit within the community to help ease traffic congestion.

Commissioner Tait noted the challenge of this area expanding and that service is not always aligning with where people are now residing. Staff will bring back a report to the Commission with recommendations.

MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Maja Tait and SECONDED by Commissioner Chris Coleman to direct staff to determine cost-neutral opportunities to improve transit service levels in the District of Sooke.

CARRIED

14. CUSTOM TRANSIT STRATEGY – FOR INFORMATION
ADAM BISHOP

The Commission was presented with a report on BC Transit's new Custom Transit Strategy, which includes the Custom Transit Solution Project. The Custom Transit Strategy was completed by a consultant in March 2024, and resulted in 13 recommendations which have been split into three categories for short, medium and long-term goals. Via the Custom Transit Solution Project, the Strategy is looking to modernize custom transit service in areas such as dispatch and client payment options.

15. PLANNING UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION
LEVI MEGENBIR

The Planning department presented the Commission with updates on the recent fall service change, which included increased service on routes that serve post-secondary institutions and schools in the region. Although we had anticipated some reduced service this fall due to maintenance challenges, staff advised they were able to schedule more service than previously anticipated due to increased resources.

The Victoria Regional Transit Plan (formerly the 2011 Transit Future Plan) update process is moving forward and the Regional Corridor Strategy is now complete. The Commission heard that public engagement for the Tillicum-McKenzie Corridor Plan is now complete, 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 Victoria Regional Transit Plan.

16. INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION

JAMES WADSWORTH

The Infrastructure department updated the Commission on infrastructure planning and construction activities in the VRTS. They heard that the Island Highway Transit Priority project in View Royal is under construction and BC Transit continues to work on bus shelter plans with local governments. A number of RapidBus initiatives will be presented at a fall workshop with the Commission. 24/7 bus lanes have been implemented on Douglas Street (previously time-restricted) and a recent announcement by the provincial government will see construction in 2025 of bus-on-shoulder lanes for buses on Highway 1 between the McKenzie Interchange and Island Highway entrance and exit ramps (Colwood Interchange). Uptown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and Transit Hub open houses and public engagement are currently underway. Today there was a federal announcement on Uptown improvements for new bus stops on Highway 1 and improvements to Carey Road for the Uptown TOD project. The new handyDART transit facility will be ready to open in 2025. Another workshop will be held with the Commission in November to discuss the Saanich Transit Centre. Staff are currently working with Stantec to develop plans for the Langford Transit Centre. Through this, BC Transit looks to optimize operations at this facility to increase maintenance capacity, supporting shorter-term expansion prior to the opening of the Saanich Transit Centre.

17. OPERATIONS UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION

STEPHEN ANDERSON

A report was presented to the Commission on spring to summer service levels, showing service delivery at 99%. The Commission was advised that service delivery in the Victoria Regional Transit System remains strong, with higher scheduled service hours than previous years. Due to ridership increases, more pass-ups and bus crowding are seen. In response, we have added extra service on routes with higher volumes of passengers. The first two weeks of September is a busy time of year. We had a number of routes with delays due to issues such as construction and special events. Recruitment of operators continues and we saw some operators with 20 plus years retire over the summer months. Recruitment is underway to increase the number of operators over the next few months. Mechanic recruitment, which includes a compensation package, is ongoing. A number of apprentices are now full mechanics thanks to development through an apprenticeship program. Victoria custom transit is seeing an increase in Taxi Supplement usage due to increased demand.

18. ATAC UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION

STEPHEN ANDERSON

The Commission received a report on the Accessible Transit Advisory Committee (ATAC). At their last meeting in July, the provincial government presented the Active Transportation Design Guide and Design Guide for Bus Stops Adjacent to Cycling Infrastructure to the Committee. ATAC also has requested BC Transit develop a safety awareness campaign to remind wheelchair and power chair users to use seatbelts to secure clients on the bus. The

Commission directed staff to ensure that the policy on terms be amended so that committee members stay on for at least one year.

MOTION made by Commissioner Ryan Windsor to grant an ATAC member who has served a full 8-year term to have two years of complimentary transit past the end of her term, recognizing their service prior to complimentary transit being approved for Committee members in February 2024.

AMENDED MOTION made by Marianne Alto and SECONDED by Commissioner Windsor to offer all ATAC members one year of complimentary transit passes (for both conventional and custom transit) past the end of their term on the Committee.

CARRIED

19. STUDENT UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION
PRINCE SOLANKI

The Commission heard that overall feedback from students on transit has been positive. It was noted that more students are living in the West Shore due to cost of living and that on the Route 39 the wait times at some stops can be as long as an hour, which is hard for students, especially during the winter months.

MOTION BY Commissioner Maja Tait and SECONDED by Commissioner Chris Coleman to adjourn meeting at 10:58 a.m.

CARRIED

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING
November 12, 2024