

Victoria Regional Transit Commission

BC Transit 520 Gorge Road East
November 26, 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 Maja Tait; Commissioner Marie-Terese Little; Vice-Chair; Commissioner Dean Murdock; Commissioner Kevin Murdoch; Commissioner Colin Plant; Commissioner Chris Coleman

Regrets:

Commissioner Marianne Alto; Student Representative, Prince Solanki

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; Nigel Couch, Manager, Security and Emergency Management; Simon Button, Transit Infrastructure Engineer; 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 Colin Plant and SECONDED by Commissioner Kevin Murdoch to approve the agenda as written.

CARRIED

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 10, 2024

Motion MOVED by Commissioner Kevin Murdoch 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 only a few weeks are left this year. It's been a busy year for our transit system and I would like to take this chance to thank the staff for all the work they do year-round to keep our buses on the road, ensuring riders receive safe reliable transit to take them where they need to go.

As students at post-secondary institutions take a break from their studies and some head home for the holidays, we will see a service seasonal change on December 9. This will be followed by another winter service change early in the new year, through which service levels will be significantly increased in alignment with school resuming. The winter service change includes the reinstatement of Route 76 UVic/Swartz Bay which will be welcome news for many post-secondary students who have been advocating for this service, and we thank the UVic Students' Society for their collaboration on making this happen.

The season of giving is just around the corner and there are a number of events where the spirit of giving back will be alive and well.

On Saturday, December 7, the annual Stuff the Bus event takes place from 9am-3pm at the Save-On-Foods parking lot at Tillicum mall. Last year we saw the community generously donate 5,500 pounds of food donations, \$3,000 in toys and more than \$1,400 in cash donations, all of which were donated to the Mustard Seed Food Bank and Salvation Army to support families in the region. I encourage everyone to come out and support this year's event and help us stuff the bus and help out those in need.

If you're celebrating the start of the holiday season at the Peninsula Coop Santa Claus Parade or the IEOA Truck Parade, make sure you give a wave to the BC Transit bus. On December 14 and 15, look for the Santa Bus lit up and decorated for the holidays. Riders can enjoy a free ride and some festive holiday music while aboard.

New Years Eve is the time to celebrate this past year and the beginning of 2025. To ensure everyone has a safe ride to and from where they need to go, we will be providing free transit service after 6pm to riders across the region.

Work on the View Royal handyDART Facility continues. A recent open house was held on November 17 where members of the community got to see first-hand the new facility design, and we expect substantial completion of this new facility in late February 2025.

We have lots to talk about today, so I will now turn it over to Chelsea Mossey, Senior Manager, Government Relations to give the staff update before we start today's meeting.

Thank-you.

4. STAFF REMARKS

The Commission heard that planning is underway for the January 6, 2025 winter service change, which includes service expansion and the reinstatement of the Route 76 UVic/Swartz Bay.

They further heard that construction of the Island Highway Transit Priority Project continues and that completion of the View Royal portion is expected in early 2025. Negotiations are still underway with private landowners for the Colwood portion of the project. Once both phases of this project are complete, they will provide an estimated 20 per cent transit travel time savings in the critical direction at peak times, which builds on the time savings already being achieved or planned for the rest of the corridor

The first 4 of 10 New Flyer Battery Electric Buses are on the production line with factory acceptance planned for early January and delivery expected in early 2025. A review of the functional requirements to inform the first purchase of light duty battery electric handyDART buses is now complete and the procurement process for high-capacity Battery Electric buses is now underway.

BC Transit is soliciting feedback from both riders and non-riders on the new BC Transit website.

5. CORRESPONDENCE

None

6. DELEGATION

None

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

The Commission was presented with an annual update to the 10 Year Vision. The changes since the last update include an update to the Transit Future Network as a result of the completion of the 2024 Regional Corridor Strategy. The transit system saw 25 million passengers in 2023/24, representing an 11.9% increase in ridership in comparison to the previous year. Key performance indicators show customer satisfaction is down due to service reliability challenges, particularly in early 2024 when there were challenges with the transit fleet which resulted in service cancellations. The upcoming service expansion will include a significant focus on addressing these challenges and dedicating resources to improve service reliability.

MOTION BY Commissioner Kevin Murdoch and SECONDED by Commissioner Chris Coleman to APPROVE the 10 Year Vision.

CARRIED

8. AIRPORT SERVICE REVIEW – FOR APPROVAL *LEVI MEGENBIR*

The Commission was presented with a report with four potential options for transit service to the Victoria International Airport, taking into account benefits and impacts for each option including estimated costs, anticipated ridership levels, and trade-offs for existing riders. Staff used comparable airports and the Swartz Bay ferry terminal for comparable data in preparing an analysis of each option. The report also factored in estimated ridership and implications for other investment priorities in the Victoria Regional Transit System.

The Commission heard that direct transit service to the airport started in 2003, and this direct service was later removed due to low ridership. There is currently no private shuttle service to the airport, as this service was discontinued during the COVID-19 pandemic and has never resumed. Service options provided for consideration include improving existing services and

times to account for shift times of staff who work at the airport and flight times as well as staff who work at surrounding businesses near the airport.

The recommendation from staff was to include Service Option 1 (improving existing YYJ service span) as part of the 2025/26 Annual Service Plan and to have further discussion on airport service options in relation to other transit service investment priorities at the May 2025 Commission workshop.

MOTION BY Commissioner Colin Plant and SECONDED by Commissioner Maja Tait to not include Service Option 1 in the 2025/26 Annual Service Plan and to have further discussion on airport service options in relation to other transit service investment priorities at the May 2025 Commission workshop.

CARRIED

MOTION BY Commissioner Kevin Murdoch and SECONDED by Commissioner Dean Murdock to have the VRTC Chair reach out to Chair of Victoria Airport Authority Board and Destination Greater Victoria to gauge their interest on transit service to the YYJ airport.

CARRIED

9. DRAFT ANNUAL SERVICE PLAN – FOR INFORMATION
LEVI MEGENBIR

The Commission previously approved 30,000 annual service hours and 12 new buses for the 2025/26 fiscal year beginning in January 2026. The focus for the 2025/26 base budget is on-time performance and service reliability, regular seasonal service changes, and minor improvements to Routes 4, 9 and 14 to bring these corridors up to the “Frequent Transit Network” (FTN) threshold under Bill 44 and the Province’s definition of an FTN. BC Transit has been working with local government staff to communicate these anticipated changes. Approved expansion resources for 2025/26 will be used to address pass-ups and on-time performance issues to improve the customer experience. Weekday service on a new Route 40 Dockyard/UVic will be implemented in preparation for a McKenzie RapidBus launch in 2026/27. Recommended changes this year are to downgrade the route classification of the Route 3 due to low performance over the past few years as well as the Route 30. Staff advised that the Route 31, which serves a similar area as the Route 30, will retain its frequent transit classification to allow for increased service in this area in the future. The classification of the Route 58, serving the Westhills area, will also be upgraded. Holiday and special fare day service levels for 2025/26 were also included in the report.

10. 2025/26 DRAFT THREE YEAR BUDGET – FOR INFORMATION
RYAN CAMPBELL

Staff advised that the Draft Three-Year Budget presented is subject to provincial funding approval and a final budget will be presented in March to the Commission for approval. Key cost

drivers include the annualization of 2024/25 expansion, additional 2025/26 service expansion, inflation, large capital projects, and software. Although passenger revenue is expected to increase with the implementation of service expansion, we also expect lower fuel tax revenue as this continues to decrease year after year, and Safe Restart funding will be fully utilized as of this current fiscal year. Key projects in the year ahead include the new handyDART facility and the introduction of our first battery electric buses, the first phase of a new Saanich Transit Centre and continued development of RapidBus projects.

There are increased labour costs due to general wage increases and collective agreement contractual increases. Fleet maintenance pressures continue with both parts and materials and labour increases. Administration increases are related to ongoing projects causing increases in both IT software and administrative labour.

11. Q2 FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE REPORT – FOR INFORMATION

RYAN CAMPBELL

The Commission was presented with a report highlighting the Q2 financial performance of the Victoria Regional Transit System for the 2024/25 fiscal year. The report showed that September year to date total expenses are \$1.3M under budget. Passenger Revenue September year to date is slightly under budget due to delayed expansion and lower U-PASS Revenue. As discussed at Q1, Maintenance expenses remain over budget due to higher parts and materials and labour costs. September year to date, Operations is \$1.1M under budget due to a transit operator shortage, and \$1.3M below budget on fuel. Service hours are under budget due to both fleet constraints and labour shortages, and a delay in the implementation of service expansion has caused a decrease in passenger trips.

The local contribution is slightly over budget for September year to date due to lower passenger and fuel tax revenue but is projected to be on budget by year end.

The Transit Fund balance is expected to be above budget at year end at just under \$9M.

12. RAPIDBUS INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT ADVANCEMENTS – FOR APPROVAL

SIMON BUTTON

Two reports were presented to the Commission requesting their approval to advance RapidBus infrastructure projects in Sidney and Downtown Victoria on Douglas Street.

Sidney Transit Hub

Staff sought the Commission's approval to advance a Sidney Transit Hub Planning and Design Project. The Peninsula Local Area Plan identified a location for a new Sidney Transit Hub, in support of the RapidBus strategy, and staff are working with Town of Sidney on this new multi model hub, which was approved this year by Sidney Council earlier this year. Over the next 18 months, planning and design work is planned to continue for this project. All costs for the Commission would be funded through future lease fees once the exchange is in service.

MOTION BY Commissioner Maja Tait and SECONDED by Commissioner Chris Coleman to APPROVE the development of the Sidney Transit Hub in principle to support the development of the Peninsula RapidBus Line and to APPROVE the planning and design

work to further develop designs and cost estimates for the Sidney Transit Hub for the development of a business case and future funding application.

CARRIED

Downtown Douglas RapidBus

Staff further sought the Commission's approval in principle to advance a transit infrastructure Planning and Design project to further develop Douglas Street as a RapidBus corridor. Staff advised that Douglas Street is a primary transit corridor with the highest ridership in the region. Previously installed bus lanes do not currently extend to Belleville Street. Staff will continue to work with the City of Victoria on this project and have received Council's support for project.

MOTION BY Commissioner Maja Tait and SECONDED by Commissioner Chris Coleman to APPROVE Segments B and C in principle to support the development of the Downtown Douglas Street RapidBus Line and to 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.

CARRIED

13. SAFETY ON TRANSIT – FOR INFORMATION

NIGEL COUCH

The Commission heard that BC Transit is looking at safety and security across the region on transit and is partnering with police and other public agencies to better understand issues related to safety. It was acknowledged through a Canadian Urban Transit Association report that riders represent the communities they serve and that any societal issues that exist will play out on transit. One negative interaction can impact a person's desire to ride transit. Transit is safe but we need to overcome the negative perception of safety, and a new marketing campaign is being launched to help address this. Staff will be looking to create more partnerships with police. One example is that police can ride transit free at any time whether on duty or off-duty and that may not be well known amongst police forces. All buses are equipped with CCTV and safety equipment and security staff work regularly with police using CCTV to help with offences.

14. PLANNING UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION

LEVI MEGENBIR

The Planning department presented the Commission with updates on the upcoming winter service change. As of January 6, 2025 we will be reinstating Route 76 to Swartz Bay from UVic and reinstating regular levels of service on those routes serving schools with the winter break coming to an end. Expansion hours will be used to reduce passenger crowding and pass-ups on popular routes. Spring will see the usual service reductions and added service on routes serving tourists. The Tillicum/Mckenzie Corridor Plan is almost complete and will be presented to the Commission next March. Phase 1 includes the launch of the Route 40 Dockyard/UVic. The Quadra Corridor Transit Plan has been put on hold following staff discussions between the City of Victoria, District of Saanich, and BC Transit which led to the conclusion that RapidBus service may not be the most appropriate service type to implement on this corridor. Planning

work has started on the Sooke Transit Service Reallocation Review with public engagement scheduled to take place in April 2025.

15. INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION

JAMES WADSWORTH

The Commission heard that the View Royal portion of the Island Highway Transit Priority Project, in support of RapidBus, will be completed in early 2025. Further, substantial completion of the View Royal handyDART facility is planned for late February 2025.

16. OPERATIONS UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION

STEPHEN ANDERSON

Staff presented a report to the Commission on recent operations metrics and advised they are seeing improvements over last year on first stop departures being on-time. In September pass-ups were experienced and where possible, additional service was dispatched in these areas. The majority of customer complaints received were regarding pass-ups and service delays.

On-time performance is being closely monitored with construction being the main factor and the number of vehicles on the road continues to cause transit delays. Recruitment of operators has going well, and we will hit our goal for number of operators hired this year. Mechanic recruitment also has been successful, and we are also hitting these hiring goals.

Custom performance is seeing staffing and fleet challenges, and we are working to address this with our operating partner. As a result of staffing challenges, the Taxi Supplement program has seen an increase to help with delivering service for custom transit riders.

17. ATAC UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION

STEPHEN ANDERSON

The Commission received a report on the Accessible Transit Advisory Committee (ATAC) that includes minutes from their last meeting on October 7, 2024. Staff advised that a member of the Committee recently passed away creating a vacancy. Two-year terms for other Committee members are coming to an end and two of the members, including Chair and Vice-Chair, are at the end of their terms and will be looking to extend their term for another year. Staff will forward recommendations for approval to the Commission on this at the next meeting in March 2025.

MOTION BY Commissioner Colin Plant and SECONDED by Commissioner Maja Tait to adjourn meeting at 11:21 a.m.

CARRIED

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

March 11, 2025