



Office of the Mayor

March 2, 2026

Victoria Regional Transit Commission
520 Gorge Road East
Victoria, BC V8W 9T5
VIA EMAIL: victoria_commission@bctransit.com

Dear Victoria Regional Transit Commission,

Subject: Transit Commission Proposed Route Changes

BC Transit recently concluded robust engagement through several channels on the proposal for improved transit connectivity to Victoria International Airport (YYJ). I appreciate the level of engagement, which included BC Transit's presentation to Sidney Council on February 23rd and the opportunity to provide feedback. At the meeting, Council passed the following motion unanimously:

That the Mayor write a letter to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (VRTC) regarding Sidney Council's opposition to reductions in Sidney transit service for the proposed options for direct service to the Victoria International Airport.

Improving connectivity to YYJ is an important goal, but the proposal to optimize existing service to achieve this carries significant risk to existing Route 72 (Swartz Bay/Sidney/Downtown) ridership and overall, it lacks fairness for many regular transit users in Sidney.

BC Transit included several "Considerations" for information on the proposal within its online survey, which I quote in italics, and with my notes following each:

Considerations:

- **Travel Time:** *Longer travel between Victoria and Sidney/Swartz Bay (~10 minutes each way for current Route 72 riders) and may impact connections to other routes.*

Sidney residents have reported to Council that commute rides between Sidney and downtown Victoria can take 75-90 minutes. Adding an average of 10 minutes is significant and it is understood it will deter some existing riders.

- **On-board Crowding and Capacity:** *Crowding or increased risk of being passed up by a bus on Route 72 trips from Swartz Bay due to combined ferry and airport demand.*

It is well known that students travelling home by bus from Parkland Secondary School and North Saanich Middle School already experience overcrowding and pass ups. This only discourages youth from being life-long transit users. This also impacts other riders through Sidney and elsewhere on the route.

- ***Service Impacts to Sidney:*** Reduces convenience for some existing riders, particularly those traveling to/from Sidney and Swartz Bay, and residents in West Sidney and South Sidney.

Route 72 had 1.17 million rides in 2023. The November 25, 2025 VRTC staff report provides a forecast with the proposal for 43,800 additional rides within 2-3 years. However, the increase in travel time on Route 72 and the reduction of service in three areas of Sidney - on Lochside Drive in South Sidney, on Canora Rd/Ocean Ave/Stirling Way in West Sidney, and to the West Sidney Industrial Park – “will reduce ridership by a comparable amount, leading to an overall lack of change in overall ridership levels.” Thus, there is no new ridership; instead, there is a shift in who rides the bus.

- *Reduced frequency to West Sidney Industrial Area and Canora Rd/Ocean Ave/Stirling Way.*

Improved, more frequent service was added to West Sidney’s industrial and residential areas on January 6, 2026. Over the past two years, Sidney Council has approved 320 rental units and supported a new 130-room hotel along Beacon Avenue West, with the understanding that these developments, and others in earlier years, would benefit from this enhanced transit service. Yet the new proposal, slated for implementation as early as September 2026, would reverse these much-needed improvements just months after they were introduced.

Equity and accessibility are important across the regional system. This sacrifice of Sidney service for better service elsewhere in the system lacks fairness for residents and workers in our community.

In April last year, Sidney Council approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Victoria Regional Transit to establish a new transit hub near the Mary Winspear Community Centre in Sidney near the highway. This is a necessary step to help facilitate the plan to provide the region with a Peninsula RapidBus service, following the successful West Shore–Downtown RapidBus that launched in early 2023.

Reducing valued service on some existing routes in Sidney would be a big step backwards and undermine years of community advocacy for better transit in our area.

Direct service to the Airport should only be considered further when the new Peninsula RapidBus service or other new express service is being considered.

The region’s population and transit ridership are both growing, and mode shift to transit is gradually increasing. The Victoria Regional Transit Commission should continue its strong record of expanding service, rather than the risk of impacting service on Route 72 and reducing service for one group of riders to benefit another.

It’s a matter of fairness.

Sincerely,



Mayor Cliff McNeil-Smith