

Victoria Regional Transit Commission



DATE: September 8, 2026

PREPARED FOR: Victoria Regional Transit Commission

PREPARED BY: Jacob Burnley, Transit Planner

SUBJECT: Planning Update Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fall 2026 and Winter 2026 service changes introduce targeted schedule adjustments and seasonal service increases to improve reliability. BC Transit is also advancing the Victoria Regional Transit Plan, which outlines future rapid, express and frequent transit corridors, local service enhancements, and emerging OnDemand applications.

Attachment(s): Appendix 1 – Winter 2026 Service Performance Report

PURPOSE

To provide the Victoria Regional Transit Commission ("the Commission") with an update on transit service planning in the Victoria Region for **INFORMATION**.

TRANSIT SERVICE CHANGES

Fall 2026 Service Change

Effective September 8, 2026, the Fall service change included the following:

- Minor trip time changes on various routes across the region to ensure service reliability and timed connections
- Seasonal service changes. Post-secondary service levels restored, and K-12 trips reintroduced. Changes to Route 70 and 75 to reflect seasonal service demand
- New Route 72A Swartz Bay/YYJ/Downtown providing early morning and late-night direct airport service outside of scheduled Route 88 trip times

Holiday 2026 Service Change

Effective December 14, 2026, the holiday service change includes the following:

- Service will be seasonally reduced to better align with the lower ridership demand from post-secondary education institutions, including Routes 4/9, 7, 8, 12, 14, 21, 26, 38, 39, 51X, 52, and 76

Service reductions in December allow the provision of additional service in seasons with higher ridership demand.

Winter 2027 Service Change

Effective January 4, 2027, the winter service change includes the following:

- Runtime Adjustments on select routes to improve service reliability and/or to reflect current traffic conditions and trip running time changes
- Trip Time Adjustments on select routes to ensure timed connections and blocking efficiency
- Service will be seasonally increased to better align with the higher ridership demand from post-secondary education institutions, including Routes 4/9, 7, 8, 12, 14, 21, 26, 38, 39, 51X, 52, and 76
- The City of Victoria's Douglas Street watermain construction project will require minor adjustments to routing and bus stop locations within the Downtown Victoria area

TRANSIT SERVICE PLANNING INITIATIVES

Victoria Regional Transit Plan

The Victoria Regional Transit Plan (VRTP) final draft is now complete and is being presented for approval to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (Sept. 8, 2026).

Future Planning

Network Modernization

Following approval of the VRTP, staff will bring the draft Network and Route Design Guidelines to the Commission in early 2027 as a key next step. Once the Guidelines are in place, staff will have an opportunity to translate the VRTP's network modernization priorities into a package of potential service and network changes.

These changes could include building out the Frequent Transit Network, improving connections and service frequency on key corridors, simplifying and restructuring routes, and exploring OnDemand service in lower-density areas. Initial planning and key stakeholder and public engagement would be expected to begin in summer 2027, with implementation as soon as 2028/29.

Bus Stop Harmonization Program

As an outcome of the VRTP's focus on network modernization, BC Transit is in the initial phases of developing a Bus Stop Harmonization Program to review stop spacing and locations along key transit corridors. More closely spaced bus stops can increase travel time and contribute to service reliability challenges. A corridor-based approach to harmonization provides an opportunity to improve transit speed, reliability and the consistency of the customer experience, while identifying opportunities to reinvest operational savings back into the corridor through improved service. This program is in alignment with public feedback noted through VRTP engagement, where public survey results revealed a willingness amongst riders to have stop

spacing increased on key corridors if supported with improved frequency and reliability of service.

A pilot project is planned for 2027 to test the approach, with candidate stops assessed using factors such as spacing, accessibility, connections, key destinations, customer impacts and operating conditions. The pilot will also help establish a repeatable approach for future corridor reviews and explore opportunities to integrate bus stop harmonization with municipal road resurfacing and capital projects.

Other Planning Work

- **Bus Stop Improvements** – BC Transit continues to work closely with Local Government Partners within the Victoria Region to coordinate improvements to stop configurations and layout to improve accessibility and customer experience.

Notably, BC Transit staff are currently engaged with the City of Victoria on various corridor plans, with site planning and analysis for current and future bus stops serving crosstown and local routes via key corridors such as Pandora Avenue, Yates Street, Johnson Street, and Begbie Street.

- **Development Referral Process** – BC Transit receives and responds to development referrals from Local Governments considering rezoning and large-scale development proposals. BC Transit provides comment on opportunities for transit supportive development, improvements to transit supportive infrastructure such as bus stops and sidewalks and provides comments on the feasibility of future transit service to the proposed development. Planning staff received approximately 20 development referrals between June and August 2026 from six municipalities.

Service Monitoring

- **Service Performance Report** – Planning regularly monitors service performance against the service standards and performance guidelines identified in the 2013/14 Service Review document. Regular performance monitoring allows for a better alignment between service levels and ongoing changes in demand and travel patterns. Appendix 1 provides information on ridership performance over the Winter 2026 service period from January 6 to April 12, 2026, and provides information on historical ridership and service reliability trends up to April 13, 2026.

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Appendix 1 – Winter 2026 System Performance Report

1.0 Introduction

This report compares system-level ridership performance for the Victoria Regional Transit System (VRTS) between 2024 and 2026. Further, this report provides more detailed ridership information at the route-level for the Winter 2026 service period, occurring between January 6 and April 12, 2026. Performance reporting from this service period noted the following high-level findings:

- Overall VRTS ridership remained relatively stable between Winter 2025 and Winter 2026
- Frequent and near-frequent routes experienced an approximately 3 percent decline, while Westshore local routes increased approximately 7 per cent
- Recent targeted service changes, including Route 51 and the restructuring of Route 39, have shown encouraging ridership and productivity results
- Continued monitoring will focus on routes performing materially above or below established productivity guidelines and the relationship between service investment, reliability and ridership

1.1 Data

Ridership information is collected through Automated Passenger Counter (APC) units, which are in place on almost 100 per cent of the buses assigned to the VRTS' conventional fleet. This system counts the number of persons boarding and disembarking from a vehicle. If a person boards multiple buses in a single journey or on a specific day, this is reflected as multiple boardings. It also collects information on service reliability, comparing scheduled to actual departure times at timing points along the route.

1.2 External Factors

In addition to service changes, there are external factors that may affect transit ridership. Some of these include fare increases, changing fuel prices, shifting economic conditions, land use changes and major interruptions.

2.0 Performance Trends

This report presents ridership performance information at the system and route-level.

2.1 System Level Performance Trends

For the purposes of this report, overall system ridership has been presented weekly from the beginning of 2024 to compare year-over-year ridership trends.

While ridership saw modest improvement system-wide between 2024 and 2025, between the Winter 2025 and Winter 2026 service periods, ridership has remained relatively stable across the transit system.

As noted historically year-over-year, and similar to what is observed in peer systems, the VRTS notes distinct seasonal patterns, with most routes reaching peak ridership during the Fall and

Winter service periods. Select routes, such as Route 70, note higher average daily ridership during the summer service period, attributed in large part to the increase in visitor traffic to and from the Swartz Bay Ferry.

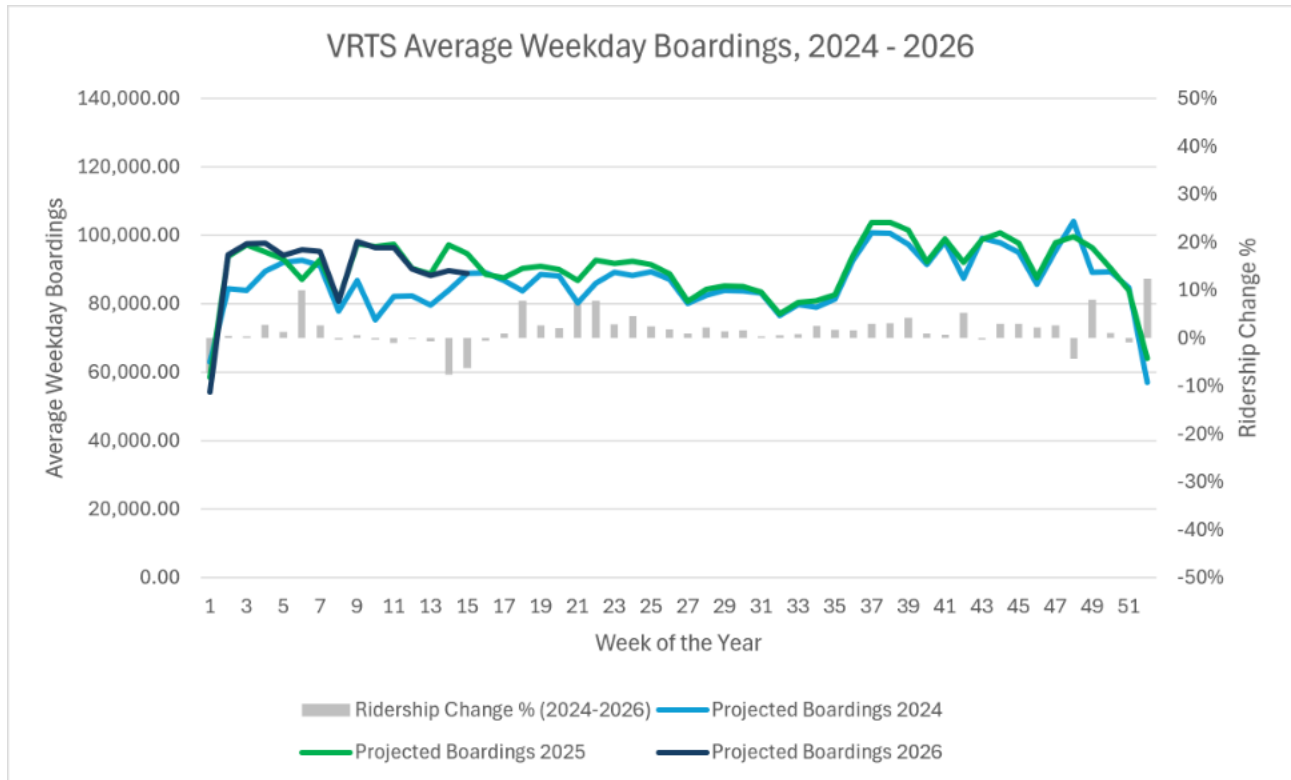


Figure 1: VRTS Average Weekday Boardings, 2024-2026.

2.2 Route Level Performance

For the purposes of this report, ridership has been aggregated and presented in five route-type categories for Winter 2026, including Rapid Transit, Frequent Transit, Local Transit (Ridership), Local Transit (Coverage) and Targeted Transit. These route-type categories were originally developed in the [2013/14 Service Review](#), and included associated performance targets.

The red line shown on the following graphs indicates the performance guideline for that route class. Routes falling outside the ± 25 per cent performance range are flagged for further review to understand contributing factors and determine whether service adjustments, additional investment, or continued monitoring are appropriate.

Frequent or near-frequent routes across the transit system saw a slight decline in year-over-year ridership, with an approx. -3 per cent decline in ridership between the Winter 2025 and Winter 2026 service periods. Routes that experienced service reductions associated with schedule-maintenance requirements saw an average year-over-year ridership decline of approximately 4 per cent, suggesting that reductions in service availability may have contributed to lower ridership.

While growth in ridership was noted as limited, service in the West Shore has yielded positive ridership growth, with local routes (previously restructured via Local Area Transit Plan

recommendations in 2024) seeing positive ridership growth of approximately 7 per cent between Winter 2025 and Winter 2026. These routes, reporting year-over-year growth, offer local service to areas such as Royal Bay, Happy Valley, and Thetis Heights, connecting in with the broader transit network via the Langford and Colwood Exchanges.

Investment in off-peak service for the Route 51 in January 2026, connecting Langford to UVic via limited stop service, yielded highly positive ridership returns, with daily ridership in the Winter 2026 service period more than doubling the overall daily ridership in Winter 2025. The Route 51 is now nearing the performance expectation of 60 riders per service hour for a targeted service. Combined with the overwhelmingly positive user feedback from this improvement, additional investment in targeted, limited-stop, competitive transit service between key regional destinations could yield benefit in growing ridership.

The splitting of Route 39 (Camosun Interurban to and from UVic), also implemented in January 2026, has also supported improved productivity (+8-10 per cent boardings per revenue hour), and on-time performance between both sections of the former Route 39 alignment.

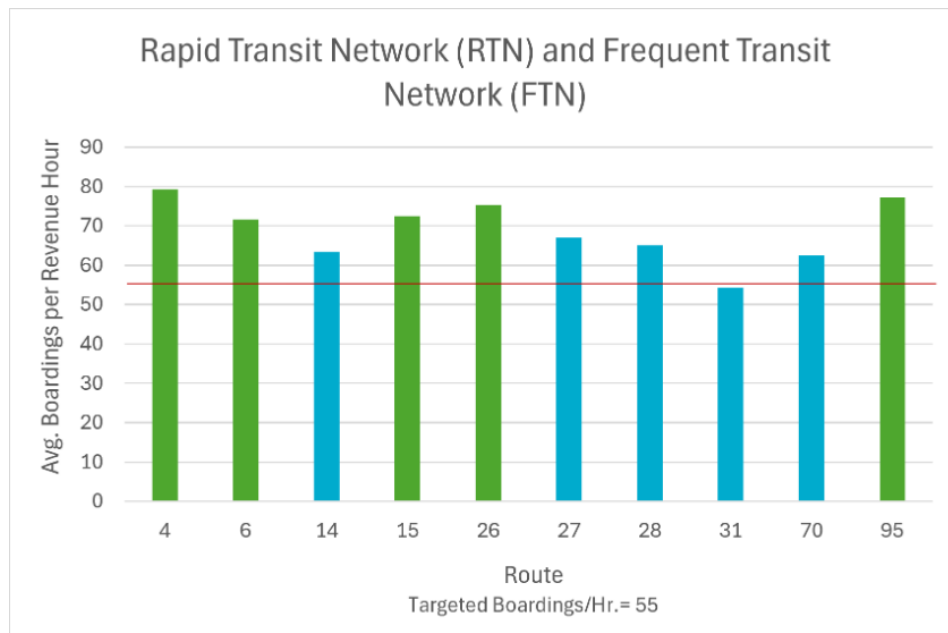


Figure 2: Boardings per Revenue Hour for the Rapid Transit Network and Frequent Transit Network, Winter 2026 (Performance Guideline = 55); Exceeds target by 25%+, within 25% of target, below target by 25%+.

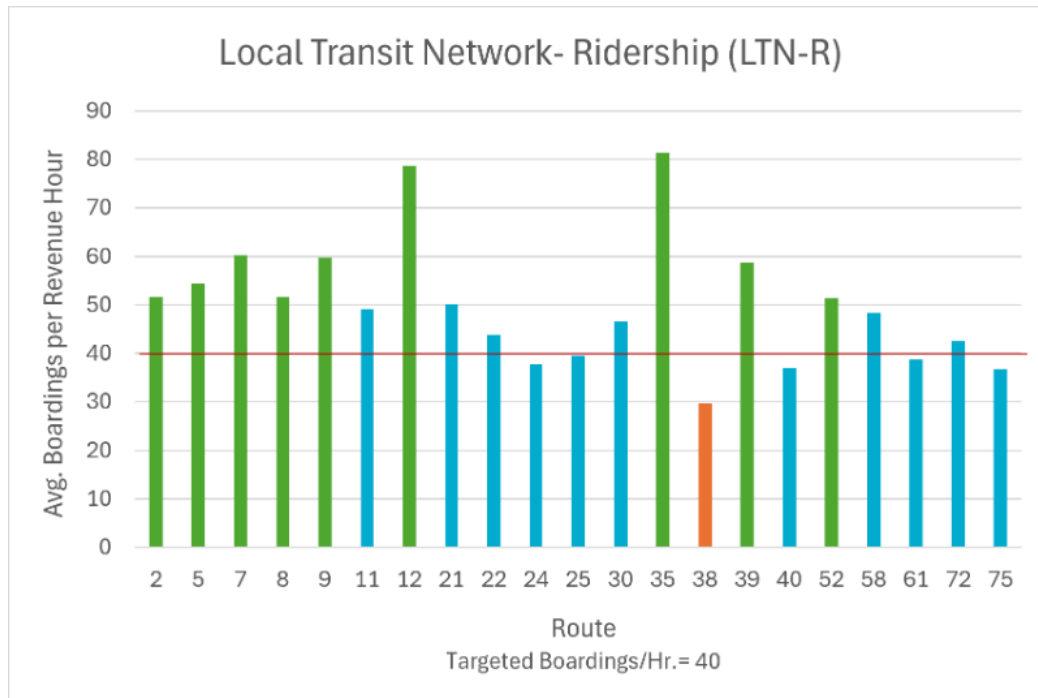


Figure 3: Boardings per Revenue Hour for the Local Transit Network - Ridership, Winter 2026 (Performance Guideline = 40); Exceeds target by 25%+, within 25% of target, below target by 25%+

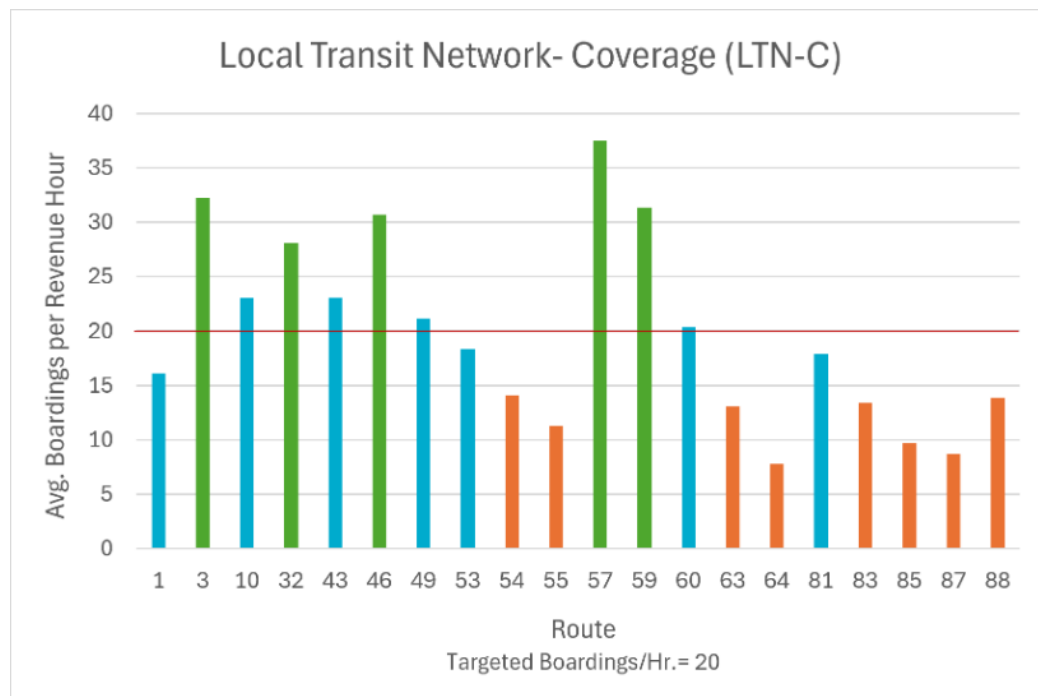


Figure 4: Boardings per Revenue Hour for the Local Transit Network - Coverage, Winter 2026 (Performance Guideline = 20); Exceeds target by 25%+, within 25% of target, below target by 25%+

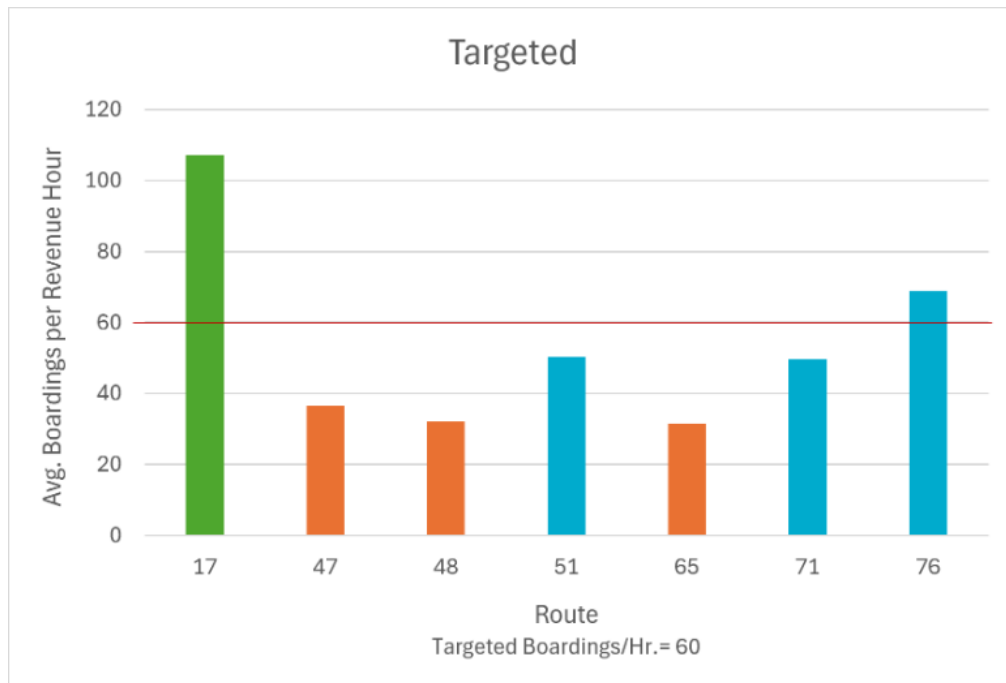


Figure 5: Boardings per Revenue Hour for Targeted Transit, Winter 2026 (Performance Guideline = 60); Exceeds target by 25%+, within 25% of target, below target by 25%+.