

Victoria Regional Transit Commission

BC Transit 520 Gorge Road East
September 12, 2023 | 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

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; Commissioner Marianne Alto, Vice-Chair; Commissioner Dean Murdock; Commissioner Kevin Murdoch; Commissioner Colin Plant; Commissioner Chris Coleman; Cleo Philp, Student Representative, University of Victoria

BC Transit Staff:

Chelsea Mossey, Senior Manager, Government Relations, Chris Fudge, Director, Government Relations; Christy Ridout, Vice-President, Strategy and Public Affairs; Stephen Anderson, General Manager, Victoria Regional Transit; Ryan Campbell, Senior Regional Finance Manager - Victoria; Carl Purvis, Manager, Planning; Levi Megenbir, Senior Transit Planner; James Wadsworth, Manager, Project Development; Tessa Stewart, Business Development Advisor; Christine Lewis, Executive Assistant and Divisional Coordinator (Recorder)

Regrets:

None

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 Chris Coleman and SECONDED by Commissioner Colin Plant the agenda as written.

CARRIED

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JUNE 13, 2023

Motion MOVED by Commissioner Colin Plant and SECONDED by Commissioner Kevin Murdoch to approve the minutes as written.

CARRIED

3. CHAIR'S REMARKS

The beginning of fall marks the return of students and for many of us time to get back into our regular routines. Fall service changes have begun in the region. As students head back to class, more trips have been added on routes that serve post-secondary and K-12 students. For the first time since the pandemic, extended late night service has been reinstated, providing transit riders will more options to travel safely across the region.

A new BusReady program has launched in Victoria to teach and guide our youngest riders how to ride transit safely. This program works in tandem with the Free Transit for Children under 12 program that will help build a new generation of transit riders.

I had the pleasure a few weeks ago to be part of the official launch of Umo, the new electronic fare collection system in the Victoria Regional Transit Region. Riders here in the Victoria

Regional Transit System, are the **first riders in the province** to be able to pay for their transit fare with an innovative and intuitive **mobile app!**

Umo's arrival introduces contactless payment methods and new fare products that will allow transit riders to pick the **best** options for **their** lifestyle and travel habits.

Riders no longer need to worry about finding exact change or take unnecessary trips to a retail location to buy tickets or a monthly pass— instead, Umo's new payment methods – the Umo Mobility App or reloadable Umo card, are here to make taking transit more convenient for riders.

We are excited to be part of this positive change in the way our riders experience transit in the region.

4. CORRESPONDENCE – BUS CONNECTION TO FERRY – AUGUST 3, 2023

The Commission was informed of a letter received to both the Victoria Regional Transit Commission and BC Ferries regarding coordination between both ferries and bus service at the Swartz Bay Terminal. BC Transit will be preparing a response acknowledging efforts currently made to work with BC Ferries on coordination of service and acknowledging that there has been frustration by riders on these routes and we will be exploring areas for improvement.

Correspondence was received for INFORMATION.

5. DELEGATION

handyDART website and Umo (Craig McKinnon)

The Commission heard from Mr. McKinnon on his experience as a user of handyDART services and his frustration with the current website. Mr. McKinnon expressed disappointment that the new Umo fare system is not currently being implemented on handyDART buses.

Staff acknowledge that work is underway on a provincial custom transit strategy and will be addressing some of the concerns raised in a report that will be presented to the Commission at their next meeting in November.

Motion MOVED by Commissioner Colin Plant for staff to provide a report at the next meeting of the Commission on work being done to improve the handyDART website and on the overarching custom transit strategy. SECONDED BY Commissioner Marianne Alto.

CARRIED

The presentation was received for INFORMATION.

NOTICE OF MOTION

None

6. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE REPORT SUMMARY – Q1 – FOR INFORMATION
RYAN CAMPBELL

The Commission was presented with the financial performance report for Q1 of the 2023/24 fiscal year. Revenue from passenger trips in Q1 was favourable 4% due to higher than budgeted monthly pass and employer bus pass sales. Diesel prices continue to fluctuate; 19% below budget for Q1 and forecasted to be 11% below budget for the 2023/24 fiscal year. Supply chain challenges and increased cost of materials resulted in the maintenance expenses being 9% over budget in Q1 and forecasted at 3% over budget for the 2023/24 fiscal year.

Administration costs were slightly over budget due to the recent marketing campaigns on new major initiatives including Umo and Blink. The 2023/24 year-end Transit fund balance is forecasted at \$15 million which is slightly above budget due to strong passenger revenue in Q1. Transit service hours delivered were under budget due to labour shortages, however costs have remained stable due to higher overtime costs offsetting any labour shortage savings. With more passenger trips throughout Q1 than budget, we are seeing a lower operating cost per passenger trip for both Conventional and Custom transit.

The Financial and Performance Report Summary – Q1 was received FOR INFORMATION by unanimous consent.

7. THREE-YEAR SERVICE EXPANSION – FOR APPROVAL
CHELSEA MOSSEY

The Commission heard that based various transit planning initiatives, and most recently on the 2022 Victoria Regional Transit System 10-Year Vision, BC Transit is recommending that funding for expansion resources be pursued for both conventional and custom service in Years 1 and 2 (2024/25 and 2025/26) as well as for conventional transit for Year 3 (2026/27). This investment trajectory will allow BC Transit to meet growing ridership demand and build towards the Victoria Regional Transit System's transit mode share target. The service expansions presented to the Commission represent the maximum expansion trajectory staff feel is feasible based on vehicle availability, operations and maintenance facility capacity and projected labour levels.

MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Colin Plant, SECONDED by Commissioner Maja Tait to APPROVE BC Transit to include 20,000 hours for conventional transit, and a \$150,000 increase to the Taxi Supplement budget, as part of the funding request to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure for service expansion in the 2024/25 fiscal year and APPROVE the commitment to increase the VRTS bus fleet by up to eight heavy-duty buses starting in January 2025.

CARRIED

8. FARE STRATEGY – FOR APPROVAL

TESSA STEWART

The Commission was presented with a report outlining five possible options for fare increases for the Victoria Regional Transit System, with three recommended to go forward to public consultation later this year. The last fare increase was 10 years ago. The cost per passenger trip is significantly higher than what is charged to passengers, which is standard for public transit, but the Victoria Regional Transit System's fares are currently among the lowest in Canada. Staff will now commence drafting an engagement strategy and report back to the Commission with a final report at the meeting in February 2024.

MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Kevin Murdoch and SECONDED by Commissioner Marie-Terese Little to include Option 5, in addition to options 1, 2 and 4, in the options brought forward to public engagement.

CARRIED

MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Colin Plant and SECONDED by Commissioner Chris Coleman to present a preferred option when engaging the public on Fare Strategy options.

DEFEATED

9. 2024 MEETING SCHEDULE – FOR APPROVAL

CHELSEA MOSSEY

A meeting schedule was presented to the Commission for their approval for 2024 and outlined a schedule for when they would receive and approve reports throughout the year.

MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Colin Plant and SECONDED by Commissioner Maja Tait to amend the time for the May 14, 2024 workshop to 9am to 1pm.

CARRIED

The 2024 Meeting Schedule was APPROVED by unanimous consent.

10. CRD WORKBOOK – FOR APPROVAL

CHELSEA MOSSEY

The CRD is undertaking a review of Transportation Governance in the Capital Region. In support of these efforts, the CRD is engaging member municipalities, electoral areas and partner agencies over the summer and fall of 2023 to solicit feedback. In order to accurately capture the input of the VRTC, the Workbook was distributed by Staff to all Commissioners for individual responses. The Workbook presented to the VRTC summarizes the responses received from four out of eight Commissioners. Completed workbooks were received from Commissioner Little, Commissioner Murdoch, Commissioner Plant and Commissioner Murdoch.

Where applicable, the answer most commonly chosen was selected. In the case of three questions, there was a 2-2 tie between responses, and was noted in the workbook.

MOTION MOVED by Commissioner Kevin Murdoch and SECONDED by Commissioner Colin Plant to APPROVE a collated workbook response from the Victoria Regional Transit Commission, noting where the responses generated a tie response, with Staff sharing the finalized Workbook with CRD staff by the September 29th deadline.

CARRIED

11. PLANNING & INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION
LEVI MEGENBIR, JAMES WADSWORTH

The Planning department presented the Commission with information on recent service changes for the fall season that included the resumption of late-night service on some routes, and the reintroduction of seasonal service on routes serving schools. In January 2024, there will be a restructuring of the West Shore network as per the West Shore Local Area Transit Plan. Work continues on the Regional Corridor Strategy, which seeks to update the Transit Future Network and shape the strategic planning priorities for the next 5+ years. Although these priorities may shift with the completion of the Regional Corridor Strategy, current upcoming strategic plans may include a Gorge and Hillside Corridor Plan, a Quadra Corridor Plan and a James Bay and Jubilee Local Area Transit Plan Update.

There are several infrastructure projects on-going in the Victoria Regional Transit System, to support both current and future service delivery.

The Planning and Infrastructure Update was received for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.

12. OPERATIONS UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION
STEPHEN ANDERSON

The Commission heard that service delivery over the summer months met the target of 99.5%. Recruitment efforts continue for both transit operators and mechanics. Progress has been made on the hiring of operators; however, retirement of current staff has resulted in the need to continuously attract more hires. Recruitment fairs and efforts will continue in the months ahead.

As we see ridership continue to grow, pass-ups have been seen on high volume routes. This will continue to be monitored by staff as we assess ridership during the fall and winter.

BC Transit participated in several community events over the summer including getting people safely to and from downtown Victoria Canada day celebrations and participating in the local Pride parade using a custom wrapped Pride bus.

The Operations Update was received for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.

13. ATAC UPDATE– FOR INFORMATION
STEPHEN ANDERSON

The Commission received a report on the ATAC committee. At their last meeting, the Committee was given a presentation on the Battery Electric Bus Project that included highlighting their range of capabilities and accessibility features. It was also noted that the new handyDART facility currently under construction is being built to accommodate a totally electric fleet in the future.

The ATAC Update was received for INFORMATION by unanimous consent.

14. STUDENT UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION
CLEO PHILP

The Commission heard that the reinstatement of late-night service is appreciated by students. The recent implementation of Umo has resulted in several questions from students on its use which will be followed with by staff to help support students as they transition to the new fare collection system.

The student update was received FOR INFORMATION by unanimous consent.

MOTION BY Commissioner Colin Plant and SECONDED by Commissioner Kevin Murdoch to adjourn meeting at 11:26 a.m.

CARRIED

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING
November 7, 2023