

Bella Coola Valley Transit

System Review Report



February, 2018



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Executive Summary

The purpose of this Service Review is to provide an assessment of the Bella Coola Valley Transit System and recommend short-term and long-term actions to improve its effectiveness and efficiency.

The report examines ridership and service levels, community requests for service changes, infrastructure, and transit system marketing.

A field visit was conducted from October 11-15, 2017 as a way to ride the bus, review the service and meet with stakeholders. During the field visit, phone and in-person interviews were conducted with representatives from Vancouver Coastal Health, Central Coast Regional District, Bella Coola Valley Operating Company and riders of the transit system, to determine how the system is working and if there are any improvements that could be made. Ridership data and trends were also analyzed to determine how the system is performing.

The following is a summary of the recommended actions identified in the report:

Marketing Ideas and Opportunities

- Promote Transit Service to Newcomers and Visitors
- Promote Service to Community Events
- Consistent Branding

Service-Related Ideas and Opportunities

- Consider trial Ferry Service
- Consider trial evening service on select nights
- Williams Lake Health Connection

Infrastructure Ideas and Opportunities

- Maintenance Agreement
- Continue to improve infrastructure through TRAN Transit Minor Betterments Fund¹ & BC Transit Bus Shelter Program

This report will be submitted to the Central Coast Regional District Hospital Board for information. Recommended actions identified in the report will not be pursued until direction is given from the Board.

¹ Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure program to fund infrastructure projects to a maximum of \$100K per fiscal year. Projects must support or address one or more of the following goals: safety, customer service, ridership, accessibility, reduce GHG emissions.

1.0 Introduction

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2.0 Transit System Background

Implemented in 2006, the Bella Coola Valley Transit System provides service within the Bella Coola Valley between Bella Coola and Firvale. The transit service operates through a funding partnership between Vancouver Coastal Health, BC Transit and the Central Coast Regional Hospital District. The service is delivered by the transit systems' operating partner, the Bella Coola Valley Bus Company.

The Bella Coola Valley Transit System offers paratransit service between Bella Coola, Four Mile, Hagensborg, Jourdenais and Glacierview, with service to Firvale available on request. The Bella Coola Valley Transit System operates as a Dial-a-Ride transit service, providing door-to-door service for people with mobility challenges and curb-to-curb service for other customers.

Service Summary

The Bella Coola Valley Transit System operates scheduled service between Bella Coola and Glacier View Monday through Saturday from 7:45 am to 6:15 pm. Service is not available on Sunday or Holidays. The service is available to anyone in the community, however, riders using the transit system for hospital trips are prioritized.

Bella Coola Valley Transit System Review

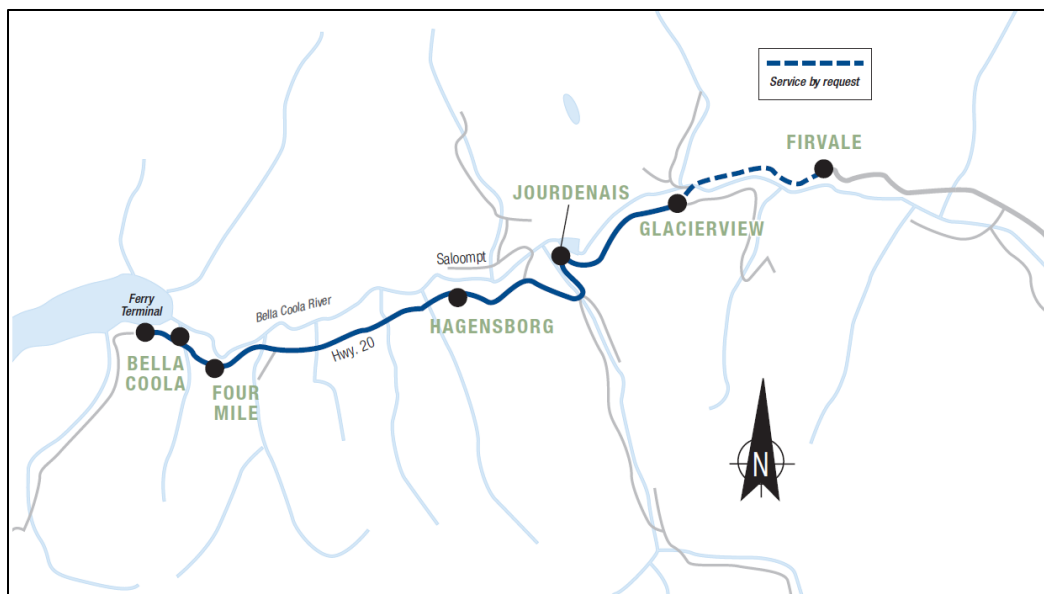


Figure 1 - Bella Coola Valley Transit System Map

Riders Guide Schedule

The system was last significantly changed in 2012 when the Riders Guide schedule was introduced.

The transit service is centered around the by-request model and loosely follows the Riders Guide schedule, the bus usually arrives within a 15-minute window of the scheduled time.

To schedule a pick-up, transit riders call the operator the day prior to their trip to request a pick up. The operator creates a schedule based on the requests received that day and notifies the riders of the schedule for the next day. Customers who did not schedule a pick-up can catch the bus at the bus stop in town or they can flag down the bus along the route.

Website

The Bella Coola Valley Transit System has a web page on the BC Transit website that explains how the systems works and how to schedule a trip, though the Riders Guide schedule is not posted on the site. BC Transit's Trip Planner is not available for this system, so users are not able to go online to use the Google Trip Planner to plan out their trips. Transit information is also found on the Central Coast Regional District's website explaining how the system works and how to schedule a trip.

Bella Coola							
To Glacerview				To Bella Coola			
Monday to Saturday				Monday to Saturday			
Lv. Bella Coola	Hagensborg	Jourdenais	Ar. Glacerview	Lv. Glacier View	Jourdenais	Hagensborg	Ar. Bella Coola
—	—	—	—	7:45	—	—	8:30
8:35	—	9:30	9:40	—	9:45	—	10:45
11:30	12:00	—	—	—	—	12:00	12:30
2:15	—	3:20	—	—	3:20	—	3:45
3:45	—	4:45	—	—	4:45	—	5:15
5:30	—	—	6:15	—	—	—	—
* Service to Firvale by request.							

Figure 2 - Bella Coola Valley Transit System Schedule

Fleet

Service is operated by two different buses; a 2015 20-passenger ARBOC Monday through Thursday and a 2015 International Friday and Saturday. As of January 2018, the 2015 International will be replaced with a 2017 ARBOC. Both of these vehicles are fully accessible to passengers using wheelchairs and scooters, while offering ease of boarding to other passengers with mobility aids and families with strollers.

Fares

Bella Coola Valley Transit charges a single cash one-way fare of \$2.50 per passenger. Monthly passes and 10-ticket books are available for \$60 and \$22.50 respectively. These can be purchased at the Bella Coola Hospital.

3.0 Existing System Performance

Ridership is reported based on custom and conventional ridership. Custom is defined as dial-a-ride or requested service, whereas conventional ridership is based on pickups at the bus stop or passengers flagging down the bus without having a pre-arranged pick-up.

Ridership figures show that the system carried over 20,000 passengers in 2016/17, a sixteen per cent increase from the previous year. The chart below shows how the system's overall ridership has changed over the past seven years, as well as the respective conventional and custom portions of service.

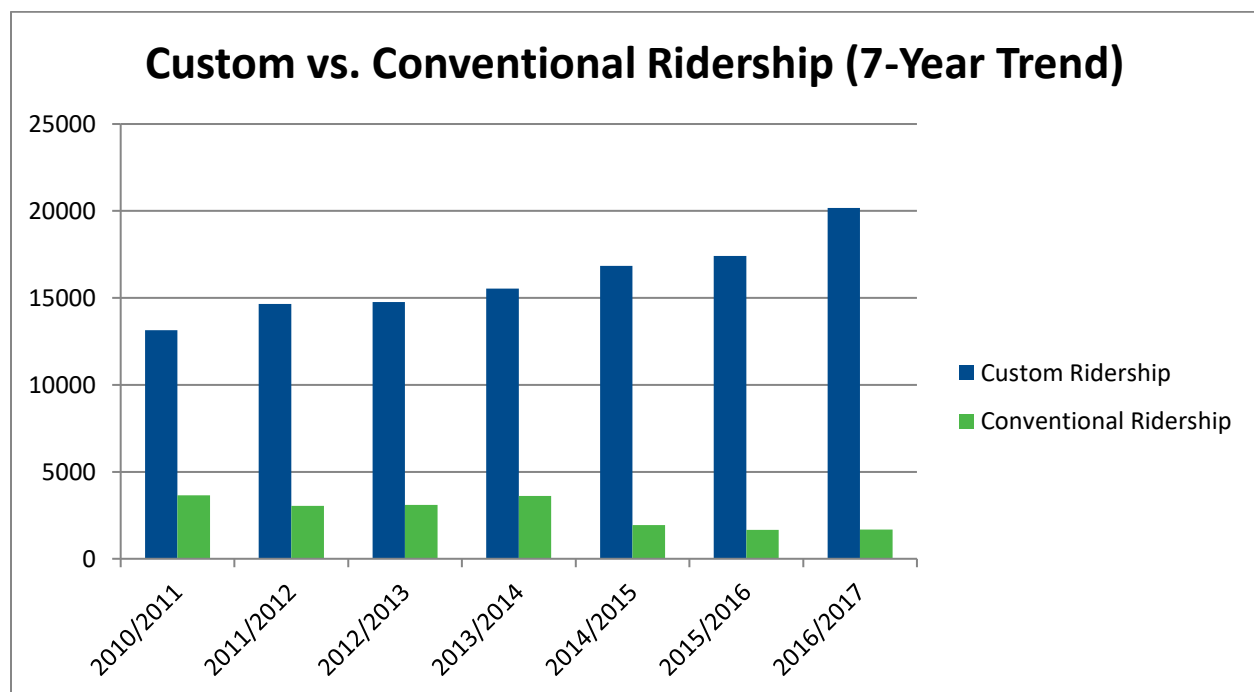


Figure 3 - Bella Coola Valley Transit System Annual Ridership Trend

In general, ridership trend shows:

- An overall increase over the past 7 years of 54 per cent
- A steady increase in ridership for the custom service

Bella Coola Valley Transit System Review

- A steady decrease in ridership for the conventional service, with a significant drop in service (14.3 per cent) in 2014/15

The custom system had 20,000 passengers in 2016/17, an increase of 16 per cent from the previous year. Of those passengers, approximately 63 per cent were handyDART users, 13 per cent were companions or attendants assisting handyDART users, and 23 per cent was made up of other Bella Coola residents requesting a ride.

There were over 1,600 passengers using the conventional service, which has remained relatively stable over the last three years. This could be due to transit riders becoming familiar with the on-request service.

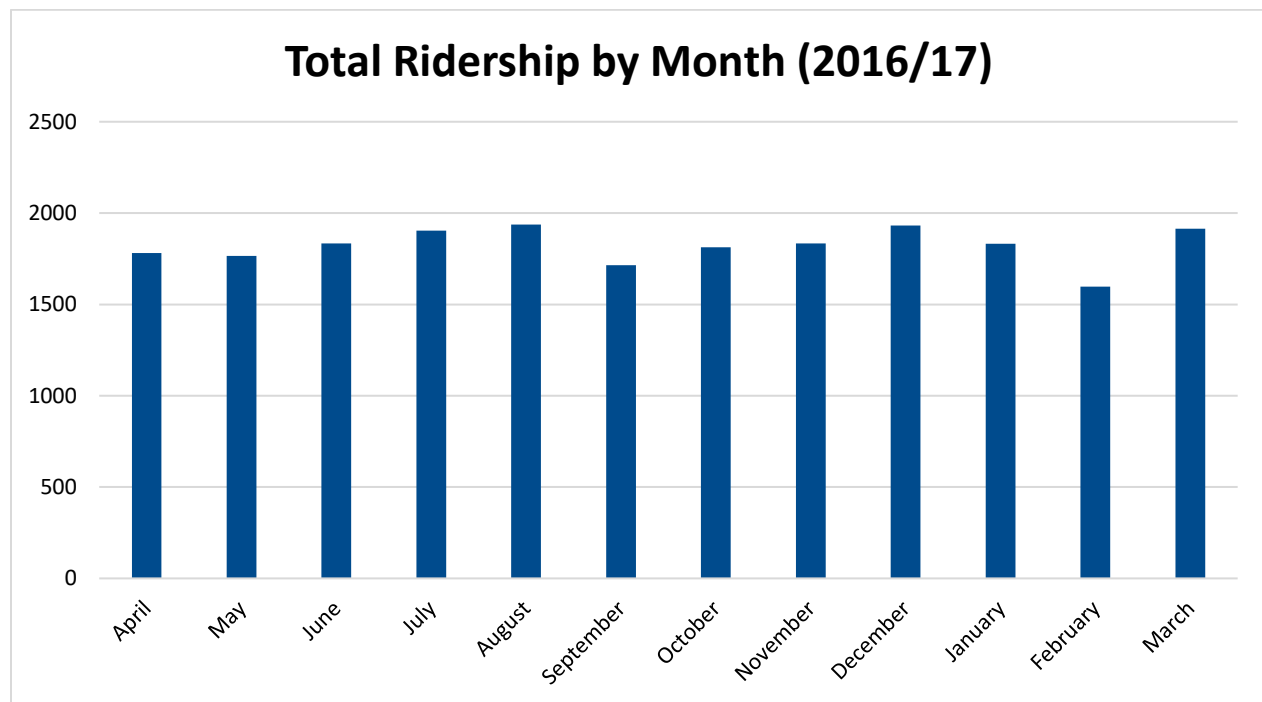


Figure 4 - Bella Coola Valley 2016/17 Monthly Ridership

Monthly ridership averages about 1800 boardings per month. Ridership remains fairly steady throughout the year, with a slight increase in service from June to October. This increase in ridership could be due to the number of tourists visiting the Valley during the summer months.

Within Bella Coola, some of the most frequent destinations visited during the site visit in October 2017 were:

- Bella Coola Hospital for the Adult Day Program
- Elders Drop-In Centre
- Commercial destinations and services within the downtown and highway commercial areas, including Hagensborg Store, Co-Op Grocery Store, Canada Post and Credit Union
- Housing and residence in Four Mile and Hagensborg
- Bella Coola Wharf

4.0 Demographic Changes

In 2016, Bella Coola Valley had a population of 2,010, a five percent increase from 2011 (StatsCanada Census Community Profiles).

- Approximately 20% of the population fall under the age of 14, the same as in 2011
- Approximately 65% of the population is between the age of 15-64, compared to 67% in 2011
- Approximately 15% of the population is 65 years of age or older, compared to 13% in 2011
- Median age increased to 41 years from 40 years (2011)

5.0 Challenges, Opportunities and Recommended Actions

Based on a review of the information and feedback from passengers and local transit partners, a number of challenges and opportunities have been identified, each with a recommended action to improve transit system ridership and reliability. These have been organized around themes of marketing, service and infrastructure.

MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES

A key way to continue to build ridership for the Bella Coola Valley Transit System is to undertake promotional activities. There are several strategies described below that will help promote the transit system.

1. Promote Transit Service to Newcomers and Visitors

Challenges/Opportunities: For newcomers to Bella Coola or visitors of the Valley, it is challenging to find information about the transit system and how to use it. There is an opportunity to advertise transit service to this group as a way to increase awareness and ridership.

Recommended Actions:

- Provide information through a 'new residents' package with all of the information one would need when moving to the Valley. This would be led by the Central Coast Regional District.
- Provide Riders Guides to hotels in the Valley to provide to guests upon arrival. This could be coordinated with Bella Coola Valley Tourism.
- Provide information through BC Ferries and Pacific Coastal Airline to customers booking trips to Bella Coola
- The operating company has developed a one-page poster that has been posted at the bus stop in Bella Coola to let people know how they can request a pick-up. This poster could be posted at a number of different locations, including hotels and restaurants, to let newcomers and visitors know about the transit service.

2. Promote Service to Community Events

Challenge/Opportunity: A way to continue to build ridership on the system is to promote service to community events. Below is a list of the regular bus trips that are not promoted through the riders guide or website.

- Thursday evening community supper: Each Thursday, a free community supper is held at 6pm at a Church on the corner of Burke Avenue and Mackay Street. The bus picks up a number of customers to bring them there for the start of the supper and will bring them home after. The community supper provides community members the opportunity to connect and socialize over a hot meal.
- Sunday afternoon farmers market (summer): Each Sunday from May to September, the Farmers Market is held from 10am to 1pm at Lobelco Fairgrounds off of Highway 20. Though service is listed as Monday to Saturday in the Riders Guide, the bus will do a number of trips to and from the Farmers' Market on Sunday.
- Daily trips to the community pool (summer): The bus regularly provides service for families to get to the pool during the summer months. The pool is located off of Highway 20 and, through discussions with the Regional District, a number of children and families are walking or hitchhiking along the highway to the pool. Promotion of a regular trip to the pool would help families plan their day around the trip to the pool and minimize the amount of hitchhiking.
- Daily trips to the Adult Day Program at the hospital: Each day throughout the year, community members take the bus to the Adult Day Program at the Bella Coola Hospital. This program provides a range of health, social and therapeutic recreational programs for older adults.

Recommended Action:

- Update the Riders Guide to reflect the extra service and regular trips that are being provided. Formalizing this service helps connect community and helps transit riders plan their day around these trips.

3. Consistent Branding

Challenges/Opportunities: Currently, posters and flag signs are using a branding developed by the Central Coast Regional District and Bella Coola Valley Bus Company. In addition to this, information on the Central Coast Regional District's website does not include any BC Transit branding or link to the Bella Coola webpage on the BC Transit website.

As a way to maintain awareness of the BC Transit brand, consideration should be given to developing a new flag sign for the bus stop as well as posters within the community.

Recommended Action: Design a new flag sign and poster that use BC Transit brand guidelines for consistent look and feel. Update BC Transit Bella Coola webpage and provide any revised content to the Regional District to update their webpage.

SERVICE RELATED OPPORTUNITIES

4. Ferry Service Reinstated

Challenge/Opportunity: Seasonal ferry service from Port Hardy will be reinstated in Summer 2018. The ferry will run service from June through to October. As a result, there could be an increase in the number of requests for pick-ups and drop-offs at the wharf. Consideration should be given to providing a regular trip to the Wharf when a ferry is scheduled to arrive or depart.

There are a number of challenges to consider when making scheduled connections between transit and ferries including scheduling constraints for transit service, schedule changes by BC Ferries and overall on-time performance of the ferry services.

The ferry does not have a regular daily schedule as departures and arrivals are scheduled sporadically throughout the summer. See Figure 5 for ferry arrival and departure dates.

Port Hardy – Bella Coola Direct 2018 Summer Service Schedule

Bella Coola Departures (Bella Coola to Port Hardy)			
Dates**	Departures	Stops/Transfers	Arrival
June: 19, 21, 23, 25, 29	7:30 AM	Non-Stop	5:30 PM
July: 3, 5, 7, 9, 13, 17, 19, 21, 23, 27, 31			
Aug: 2, 4, 6, 10, 14, 16, 18, 20, 24, 28, 30			
Sept: 1, 3, 7, 11, 13, 15, 17, 21, 25, 27, 29			
Oct: 1			
Port Hardy Departures (Port Hardy to Bella Coola)			
Dates**	Departures	Stops/Transfers	Arrival
June: 20, 22, 24, 26, 30	7:30 AM	Non-Stop	5:30 PM
July: 4, 6, 8, 10, 14, 18, 20, 22, 24, 28			
Aug: 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 25, 29, 31			
Sept: 2, 4, 8, 12, 14, 16, 18, 22, 26, 28, 30			

Figure 5 - BC Ferries Port Hardy to Bella Coola 2018 Summer Service Schedule

The ferry is scheduled to leave at 7:30 am which would require passenger drop-off trip at 7:15am. The arrival time is scheduled for 5:30pm, which would require a pick-up trip at 5:45pm.

Previously, before the discontinuation of ferry service in 2013, discussions with Bella Coola Valley Bus Company suggest that ferry passengers typically drove onto the ferry and did not require transit service.

If the Central Coast Regional District were to consider offering service to the ferry, it would require an expansion to the service span to include these trips. An increase of approximately 1.5 hours for each morning drop off and approximately 1 hour for each evening pick-up, or approximately 100 annual service hours. The total cost would be approximately \$6,500 or a projected local share of costs of \$2,800 once provincial cost-sharing and expected passenger revenue was factored in (see Figure 6). The challenge is that it is very expensive (approximately \$21.60 a ride) given the number of expected passengers to be carried. In addition, a robust marketing plan would have to be carried out to let passengers booking a ferry trip to or from Bella Coola know that there is transit service available. This plan would be coordinated with BC Ferries.

	Est. Ridership	Est. Revenue	Est. Operating Costs	Est. Total Costs*	Est. Net Local Share of Costs	Est. Provincial Share of Costs*
Weekday	238	\$128	\$4,722	\$4,722	\$2,389	\$2,205
Saturdays	65	\$35	\$1,282	\$1,282	\$648	\$598
Sundays	27	\$15	\$540	\$540	\$273	\$252

Figure 6 - High Level Cost Estimates for Service to Ferry

Recommended Action: That Central Coast Hospital Board determine whether service to the ferry is a priority for the Valley and if a pilot should be initiated.

5. Consider Trial Evening Service on Select Nights

Challenge/Opportunity: Occasionally there are requests for evening service from residents. Evening service can offer tremendous community benefit in terms of access to part time jobs, travel from school extra-curricular activities, social activities and overall safety. However, it can also be very expensive to provide such service since there needs to be enough service to enable transit to and from evening activities and ridership tends to be much lower than that which occurs during the day.

In general, evening service is not common within smaller B.C. communities of populations below 10,000, with only a single system (Port Edward, population 500) offering evening service in the less than 5,000 population range and a handful of communities offering it in the 5,000-10,000 range. Where evening service does exist in smaller communities, the most common way of introducing night service is to provide it on Friday nights only and then add further evenings as ridership grows.

If the Central Coast Hospital Board were to consider offering evening service on one night per week (i.e. on Friday nights), it could be implemented through an expansion. Expansion would add four hours per week or approximately 210 hours per year. The total cost would be approximately \$13,700 or a projected local share of costs of \$5,900 once provincial cost-sharing and expected passenger revenue was factored in (see Figure 7). The challenge is that it is very expensive (approximately \$19.50 a ride) given the number of expected passengers to be carried.

	Est. Ridership	Est. Revenue	Est. Operating Costs	Est. Total Costs*	Est. Net Local Share of Costs	Est. Provincial Share of Costs*
Friday	714	\$384	\$14,165	\$14,165	\$7,167	\$6,614

Figure 7 - High Level Estimate for Friday Evening Service

Recommended Actions: That Central Coast Hospital Board determine whether evening service is a priority for the Valley and if a pilot should be initiated for the summer months when there is an increase in tourists to the Valley.

6. Williams Lake Health Connection

Challenges/Opportunities: Through discussions with stakeholders, the desire for a Health Connection transit trip to Williams Lake was brought up by a number of different stakeholders. This service would eliminate the need to fly patients to Vancouver for medical services not provided in

Bella Coola. Through discussions with Vancouver Coastal Health, it was explained that patients are being flown out weekly and a weekly transit connection would eliminate the cost of flight and accommodation to Vancouver. The service would also provide a connection for nurses to work at both Williams Lake and Bella Coola.

The 453km trip to Williams Lake takes about 8 hours without stopping. Considering the bus would need to stop along the way, the trip would take approximately 9 hours. If this service were to pick-up passengers in communities along the way, this would require additional time, with conservative estimates of a 10-hour one-way trip. The Health Connection trip would be required to span over two days. A second bus would be required to be in service for the Health Connection trip, as a spare bus is required for the Bella Coola service.

There are a number of challenges to consider when determining whether this service is feasible. One consideration is that the service is expensive given the number of expected passengers to be carried. This cost should be compared to the current costs accrued for flying patients in and out of the Valley for medical services. Additionally, if there is a desire to stop at communities along the route, additional agreements with local governments would be required. There are also a number of risks associated with transporting passengers with medical complications long distances.

Recommended Actions: Review request with Central Coast Hospital Board to determine whether a feasibility study should be completed to assess whether this service is viable.

INFRASTRUCTURE OPPORTUNITIES

7. Maintenance Agreement

Challenges/Opportunities: One of the challenges with the current infrastructure is there is no formal agreement for the maintenance of the bus stop. Maintenance includes the upkeep in terms of garbage removal and replacement of glass panes if one is to break. Previously, the operating company has maintained the bus stop, but there is no formal agreement in place. Previously, a pane of glass needed replacing and the operating company coordinated the work. BC Transit reimbursed the operating company directly in January 2015. Typically, as with other systems, the responsibility for maintenance lies with the local government partner and paid through fares collected from the service.

Recommended Actions: It is suggested that a formal agreement be put into place to determine who should be maintaining the current and any future bus stops.

8. Installation of New Bus Stops

Challenge/Opportunity: Bus stops are where transit customers and transit vehicles meet and interact. They not only frame the transit user experience, but form the most visible fixed indicator of transit service in the community. Currently, there is one stop in downtown Bella Coola. The shelter is a BC Transit branded E-series glass shelter. The shelter is in a visible and well-lit location and provides a safe sheltered place for people to wait for the bus. Through discussions with stakeholders, a few other locations were suggested for having formal stops and shelters installed.

- Hangensborg Store: The Hangensborg store is one of the main stops the bus regularly makes each day. The bus currently stops at the east side of the store, closest to the

paved sidewalk. The bus is sometimes unable to stop there as cars will park there. Formalizing this stop will ensure that the bus always has a safe place to drop off and pick up customers.

- Four Mile: Four Mile and the surrounding neighbourhood is another regular stop that the bus makes. Formalizing a stop here with a shelter would provide a place where people could wait for the bus as opposed to having users walk along the highway to flag down the bus.
- Wharf: The Wharf is another location that the bus will often frequent. There are many fishermen who ride the bus each day and request a ride from the Wharf. Providing a formal stop with either a shelter or a bench would provide a comfortable place for passengers to wait for the bus.
- Hospital: The Hospital was another location that was identified for a shelter. The layout of the hospital parking lot provides a challenging environment for the bus to pull in and out to let passengers board and alight. The hospital has an existing overhang, but installation of a bench could be considered for those waiting for the bus.

Recommended Action:

- Review opportunities to make use of the BC Ministry of Transportation Transit Minor Betterments Fund to improve transit system infrastructure.
- Review the BC Transit Shelter Program for opportunities to fund capital costs of bus shelters. Liaise with Regional District staff to confirm there is capacity for additional stop installations.

5.1 Summary of Recommended Actions and Suggested Next Steps

Item #	Recommended Actions	Suggested Next Steps
Marketing Ideas and Opportunities		
1	Promote Transit Service to Newcomers and Visitors	Direct staff to work with BC Transit on a marketing strategy to target newcomers and tourists to promote transit service.
2	Promote Service to Community Event	Direct staff to work with BC Transit to develop the brochure, bus poster and other materials to promote the service.
3	Consistent Branding	BC Transit staff to review marketing budget for new flag sign and development of posters that use BC Transit brand guidelines for consistent look and feel.
Service-Related Ideas and Opportunities		
4	Consider trial Ferry Service	That Central Coast Hospital Board determine whether service to the ferry is a priority for the Valley and if a pilot should be initiated for the summer of 2018.

5	Consider Trial Evening Service on Select Nights	That Central Coast Hospital Board determine whether evening service is a priority for the Valley and if a pilot should be initiated.
6	Williams Lake Health Connection	That Central Coast Hospital Board receive the report and discuss whether a Feasibility Study should commence to assess the viability of a Health Connection to Williams Lake.
Infrastructure Ideas and Opportunities		
7	Maintenance Agreement	That Bella Coola Valley Bus Company and Central Coast Hospital Board, in coordination with BC Transit's Annual Operating Agreement, develop a maintenance agreement for the maintenance of bus stops.
8	Continue to improve infrastructure through TRAN Minor Betterments Fund & BC Transit Bus Shelter Program	That BC Transit staff continue to liaise between TRAN and local transit partners to prioritize and implement infrastructure investment. BC Transit also to determine when a shelter could be installed pending a maintenance agreement.

6.0 Conclusion

This report presents a broad variety of considerations in the areas of service, infrastructure, and marketing. BC Transit staff would be pleased to further discuss and develop any of the ideas presented in this report with local transit partners in order to assist in determining how the Bella Coola Valley Transit System can continue to evolve.

It is recommended that the Central Coast Hospital District:

- Receive this report for review and comment;
- Provide direction on whether it would like to pursue any of the recommended actions presented.