

# Victoria Regional Transit Commission

Chair and Members

November 9, 2021

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## **SUBJECT: Draft 2022/2023 Service Update**

### **PURPOSE**

#### **2021/22 Service Update**

To provide the Victoria Regional Transit Commission with an update on changes to the original 2021/22 Annual Service Plan for **INFORMATION**.

### **BACKGROUND**

The 2021/22 Annual Service Plan was presented to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission on February 23, 2021. This report outlined two options, including a base plan (return to targeted essential service levels) and an expansion plan.

The Victoria Regional Transit Commission endorsed the expansion plan option, which involved first returning to the targeted essential service levels by the end of 2021 and then expanding by an additional 20,000 annualized service hours and 8 buses in January and April of 2022.

### **DISCUSSION**

Ridership has increased with the return of in-person learning at post-secondary institutions, along with some employees returning to the office in a variety of sectors. The ridership increase represents approximately 65% of pre-pandemic levels. Service hours have increased to reach targeted essential service levels and to meet obligations under the Safe Restart funding agreement. However, BC Transit is experiencing unexpected labour shortages that are impacting service delivery.

These labour shortages are similar to those being experienced in other BC Transit systems, and throughout other sectors. This shortage has resulted in cancelled service and is expected to continue throughout the near term. On October 5, the Province announced a mandatory proof of vaccination policy for its public service employees, and BC Transit announced its own policy on October 15 requiring all employees be fully vaccinated by November 29. The new policy is an additional measure to keep customers and employees safe, and has the potential to further impact our ability to provide service should employees choose not to vaccinate.

In an effort to address labour shortages, BC Transit has increased its focus on a retention and recruitment strategy that includes the introduction of a \$500 referral bonus program that launched in June. Additional recruitment initiatives include billboard and shelter ads, a social media campaign, posters at bus stops, on-board messaging, and a job fair at the end of October. BC Transit also introduced a Career Transition Allowance of \$1,500 as an additional incentive for potential candidates. These efforts have resulted in a steady increase in applications, but more are still required to offset natural attrition and achieve a net growth of over 30 transit operators.

As a result of these ongoing labour challenges, the service changes scheduled for January 2022 will include temporary service reductions on some transit routes across the region. These temporary service reductions are being developed to ensure minimal disruption to customers, and customers will be notified through media and service alerts in advance of the January 2022 changes. As the labour challenges improve, BC Transit will also deploy flexible service that can be used to quickly support any ridership demand, congestion or unforeseen challenges.

BC Transit will also be postponing most service expansion until ridership has stabilized and recruitment needs are fulfilled. Some components of service expansion that were planned for January 2022 can still be accommodated through service optimization. These include expanding service to the community of Sc'ianew (Beecher Bay) and the highest priority service reliability improvements.

The improvements to Frequent and Rapid Transit Networks will be distributed between the September 2022, December 2022, and January 2023 service changes as operator availability improves, and the West Shore network restructure and investment will be deferred to September 2022 to align with the launch of Rapidbus.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Victoria Regional Transit Commission receive this report for **INFORMATION**.

Prepared by: Lisa Mullins

Phone:

Position: Senior Manager of Government Relations

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