

# TRANSIT *future*

▶ **actionplan**

## COMOX VALLEY

2022



# Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge with respect that BC Transit delivers our mission on the ancestral territories of Indigenous Peoples across British Columbia, and their historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

The Comox Valley is located on the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land.

***We are grateful to live, work, and play on their traditional lands.***

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# 01 Transit Vision

An affordable, efficient and convenient transit network with routes that connect transit users with neighborhoods and other transport modes and contribute to a vibrant and equitable quality of life in the Comox Valley.

The Comox Valley Transit Future Action Plan aligns with regional mobility priorities outlined in the Comox Valley Mobility Primer to reduce GHG emissions, enhance health and well-being, support equity and inclusion and maintain fiscal responsibility.

The Plan also upholds community goals and objectives contained in the Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy and Official Community Plans and works to strengthen the link between transportation and land-use in support of sustainable growth. The Plan also serves to inform any future local or regional transportation plans.

The transit vision supports the goals in the 2014 Transit Future Plan to grow ridership to 2.7 million trips per year and achieve a 3% transit mode share target by 2038.



Transportation and Land Use to reduce emissions and traffic noise



Coordinated approach to make transit the preferred choice



Transit-supportive land use policies



Development of transit to integrate with active modes



Transit prioritizes equity groups, promoting an equitable transit system that all community members benefit from

# Comox Valley Transit Supportive Plans

**The Comox Valley Mobility Primer** outlines opportunities for change in regional mobility in order to support regional goals and objectives. Public transit continues to be a solution to provide accessible transportation in the region and shift travel to active and sustainable modes.

**The Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy** is a shared vision for managing growth and community impacts in urban and rural neighbourhoods in the Comox Valley.

## **Town of Comox Official Community Plan (2011)**

- Encouraging transit oriented development
- Consideration to reduce the parking requirement for mixed-use development within 400 metres of a transit route
- Providing transit connectivity to key development areas

## **Village of Cumberland Official Community Plan (2014)**

- Concentrating development to Village Centre and other corridors served by frequent transit
- Building new roads as complete streets that allow for and support efficient transit service
- Integrating transit with other active transportation modes
- Maintaining frequent service levels in areas with sufficient population and employment density

## **The Draft City of Courtenay Official Community Plan**

- Increasing density along the Frequent Transit Network and prioritizing higher-density proposals adjacent to transit corridors
- Supporting transit use educational programs
- Investing in transit infrastructure

## **The Town of Comox Transportation Master Plan (2020)**

- Improve the frequency of transit service and the regularity of trip schedules
- Planning and design for an expanded downtown Comox Exchange
- Continue participating in BC Transit's development referral program and undertake land use decision making that focuses higher density development within 400 metres of existing transit routes
- Consistently consider opportunities to leverage changes to improve transit infrastructure

## **Connecting Courtenay: Transportation Master Plan (2019)**

- Close sidewalk gaps on the transit network
- Invest in accessible transit stops
- Enhance safety around transit stops
- Transit priority treatments at key intersections, including Cliff Ave & 5<sup>th</sup> St, Old Island Hwy and Ryan Rd, Cowichan Dr and Ryan Rd
- Improving transit passenger amenities

# 02 Shaping Your Transit Future

The role of the Transit Future Action Plan is to:

**Build** on the 2014 Transit Future Plan and identify new service and infrastructure priorities for the community

**Review** changes that have occurred in the community since 2014

**Inform** both the planning and operational activities

**Drive** a range of objectives and actions that will deliver a fit for purpose network across the community

**Guide** decision making to develop the desired transit network

**Engage** with the community



# 03 BC Transit Corporate Initiatives

Over the next five years, the Comox Valley Regional District and BC Transit will continue to evolve the transit system by introducing new programs and technologies to improve the customer experience and reduce the impact the environment.

BC Transit's Strategic Plan provides the blueprint for how we will facilitate this transformation. Our common vision of the future is to create responsive and reliable services, improve integration with other mobility providers, introduce electronic fares, build more transit supportive infrastructure and transition to greener fleets.

For more information, please visit:

<https://www.bctransit.com/transforming-your-journey>

## Low Carbon Fleet Program

<https://www.bctransit.com/low-carbon-fleet-program>

## Digital On Demand

## Electronic Fare Strategy

## NextRide

## BC Transit Development Referral Program

<https://www.bctransit.com/development-referral-program>

## Equity, Diversity and Inclusion



# BC Transit Corporate Initiatives

## Low Carbon Fleet Program

The first deployment of battery electric buses will happen in the Victoria Regional Transit System in 2022.

BC Hydro will help determine the readiness of the electricity infrastructure to support electric fleets across the province.

BC Transit will work with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to refine the anticipated funding requirements, for buses and new operation and maintenance facilities.

## Electronic Fare Strategy

BC Transit is working to improve rider convenience and enable mobility partnerships and create new data collection opportunities.

Systems will also accommodate a mix of fare products, including the continuation of cash fares. The system will also be able to operate in areas with low-cell phone coverage.



## Digital On Demand

BC Transit has completed a feasibility study on digital on-demand transit and plans to roll out this service type to one or two communities starting in 2023, with a view to add more communities in future years, based on the success of the initial phase.

## Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

BC Transit is committed to building an inclusive work environment that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve. Every day, we aim to ensure our communities thrive by providing the safest, highest-quality, most accessible public transit – this means listening to and meeting the transportation needs of British Columbians.

Future plans include furthering engagement with Indigenous communities and using Gender-Based Analysis+ (GBA+) to integrate multiple perspectives in transit planning, and guide decisions that provide the best experience for all riders.

## Development Referral Program

Local governments or developers can send referrals and supporting information to BC Transit to review.

BC Transit will provide comments about how the proposal may relate to the current or future transit service and infrastructure, and how the application or plan could be changed to better support current or future transit service and infrastructure.



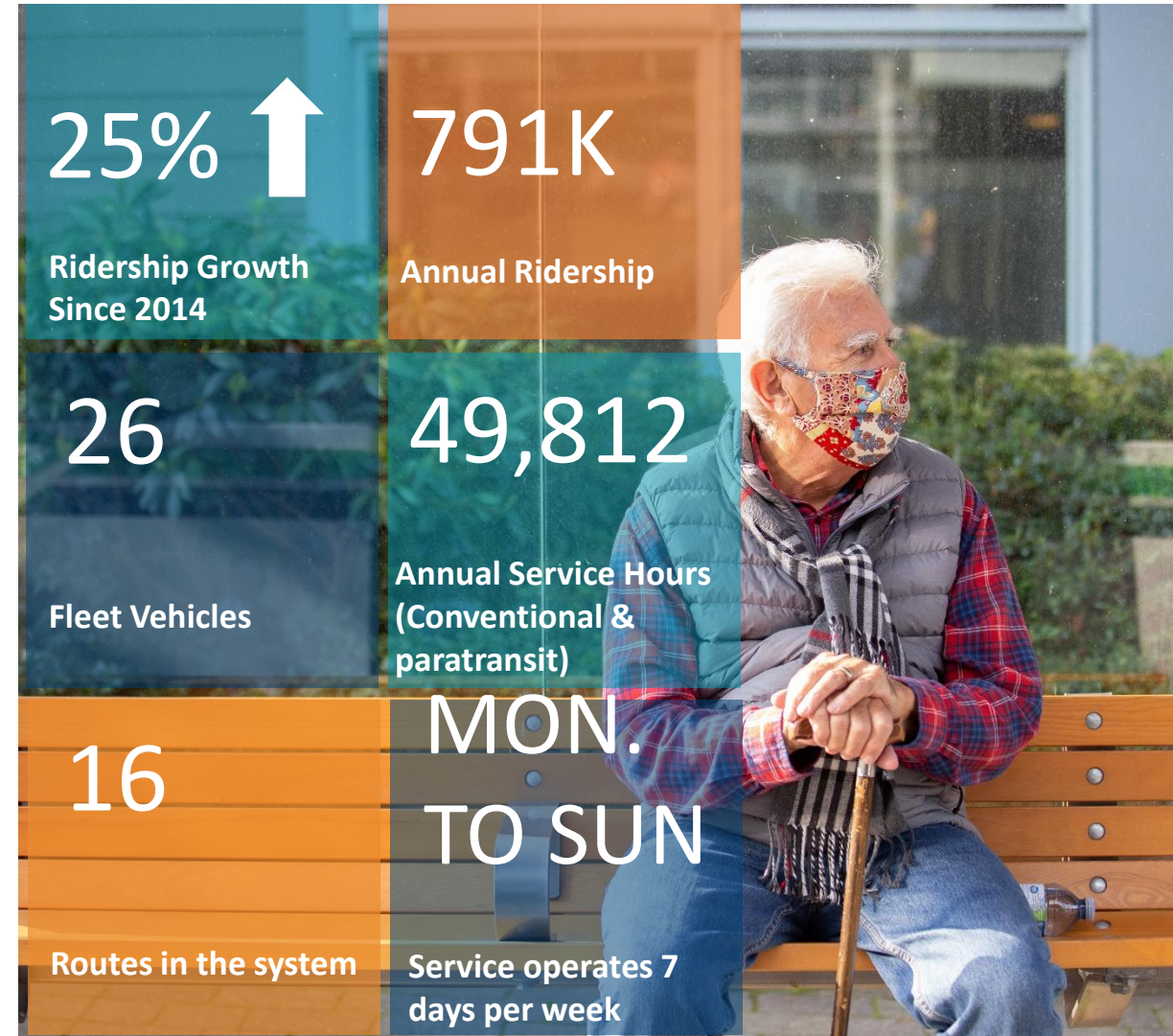
# 04 Transit Today

Comox Valley transit ridership is growing

Inaugurated in 1990, the Comox Valley Transit System has seen ridership grow from 630 thousand rides in 2014-15 to 791 thousand rides in 2019-20. The system is delivered through BC Transit's innovative cost sharing model and in partnership with the Comox Valley Regional District who make decisions on fares, routes, and service levels.

Recent changes to the system include:

- Introduction of route 15 Comox Mall/Aquatic Centre via Back Road that provides service to K'omoks First Nation two days per week
- Additional service on route 1 Anfield Centre/Comox Mall
- Additional morning service on route 10 Fanny Bay
- Additional afternoon service on route 12 Oyster River/Downtown, providing connections to Campbell River



# 04 Transit Today

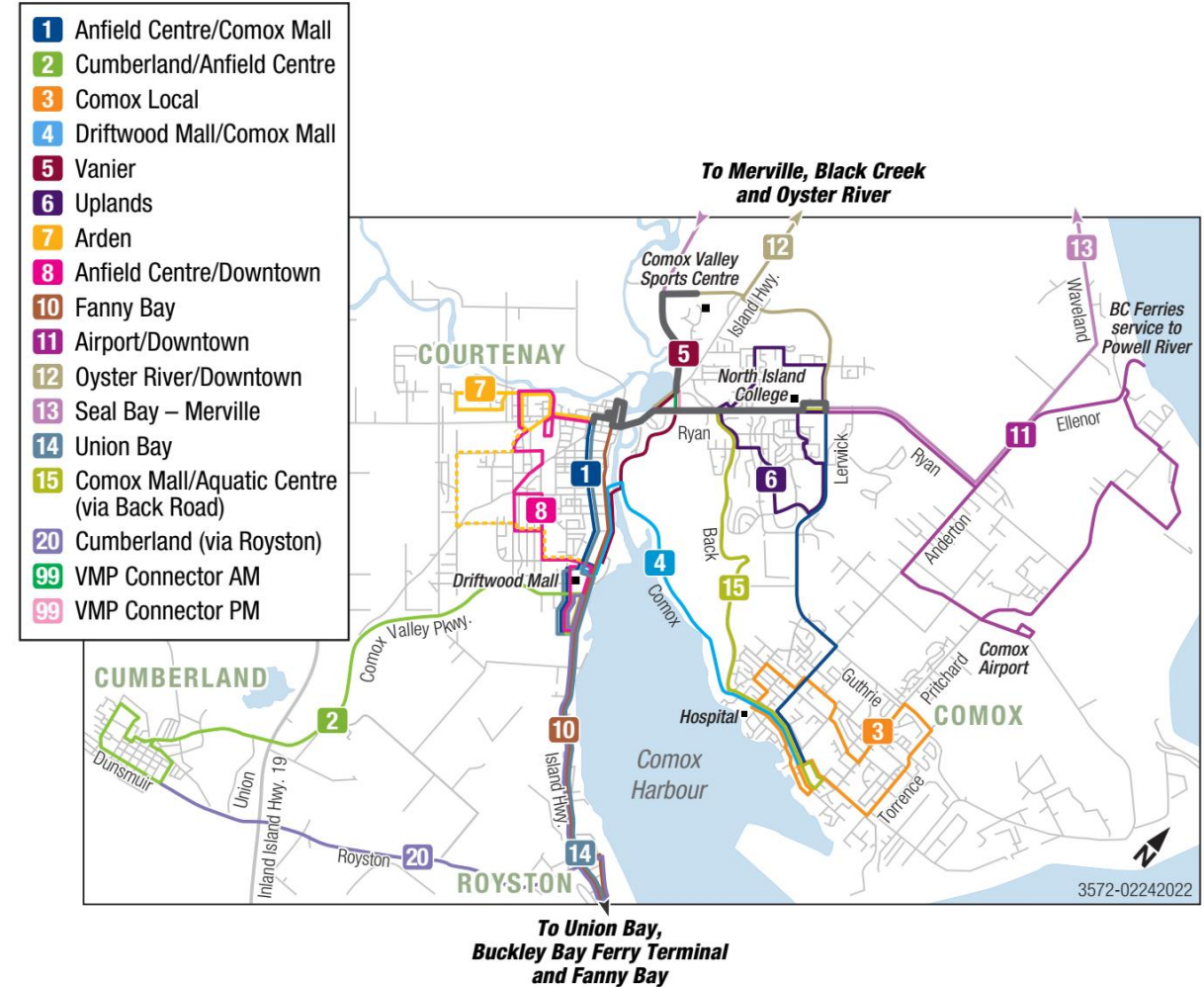
## Comox Valley Transit Network

The Comox Valley conventional transit system consists of 16 routes one of which provides dedicated school service (99 VMP Connector).

The network is primarily designed around the Frequent Transit route 1 Comox Mall/Anfield Centre, connecting Comox Mall, downtown Courtenay, Driftwood Mall and Anfield Centre.

Service extends as far south as Fanny Bay on route 10 Fanny Bay/Downtown Courtenay and as far north as Oyster River on route 12 Oyster River/Downtown Courtenay. Passengers can connect to the Campbell River transit system at Oyster River.

On demand service is offered for routes 13, 14, 21 and 22. Routes 13 Seal Bay – Merville and 14 Union Bay Shuttle will deviate off-route for pick-up and drop-off. Routes 21 Cape Lazo/Point Holmes and 22 Huband Road/Seal Bay operate on-request only at given times.





# 05 Transit Need

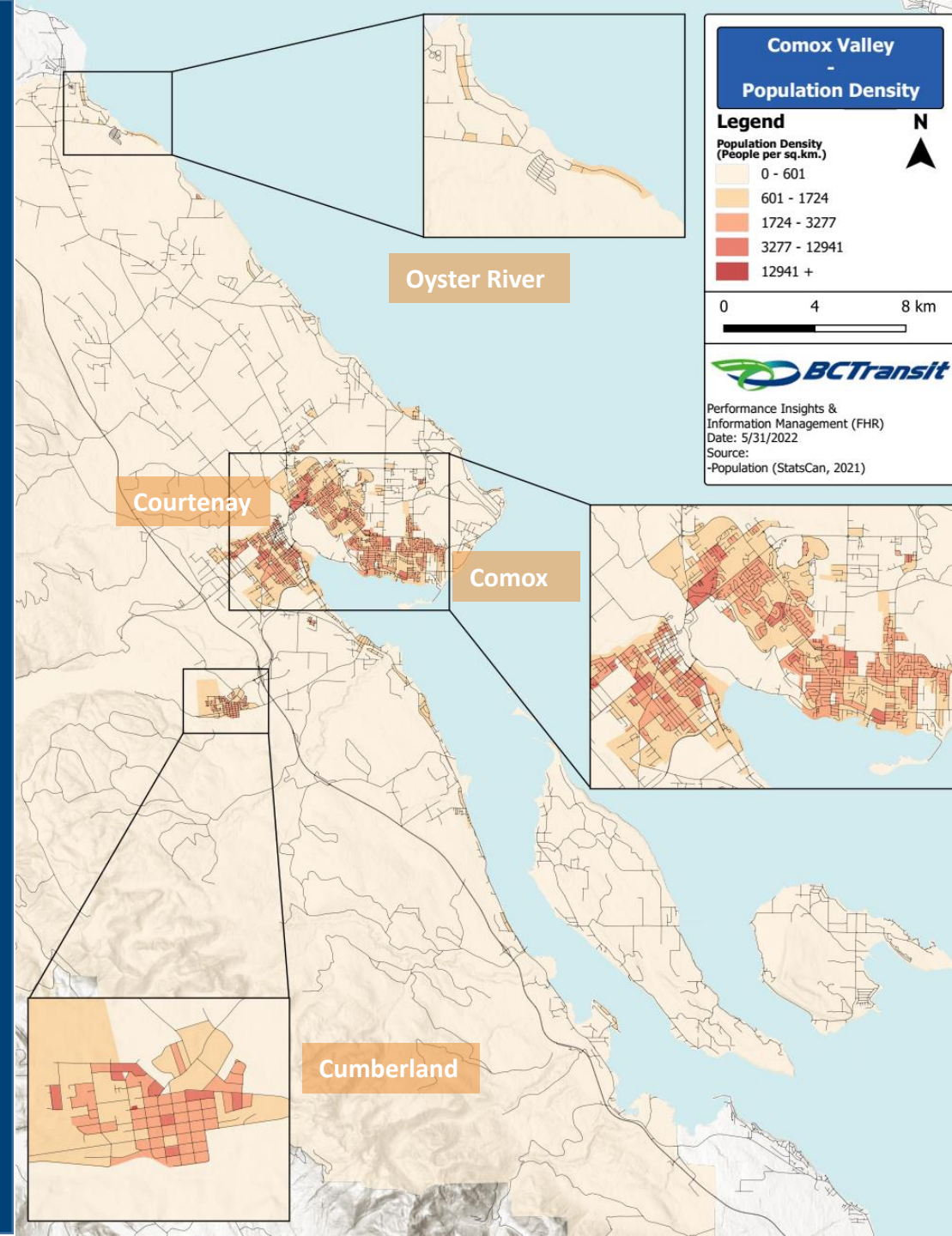
## Demographics in the Comox Valley

The population of the Comox Valley grew by 8.9 percent between 2016 and 2021 (Census 2021). Over half of Comox Valley's population is within the City of Courtenay and the Town of Comox. All areas of the Comox Valley grew from 2016 to 2021, with K'omoks First Nation and the Village of Cumberland seeing the most significant growth in the region.

## Key Travel Information (Comox Valley Mobility Primer 2022)

- 55 per cent of trips happen entirely within urban areas
- 8 per cent of trips begin or end outside of the Comox Valley
- Two-thirds of rural trips are to/from urban areas
- Average trip distance in the Comox Valley is 6.9 km

Transit is an important solution in the Comox Valley to connect communities, ensure accessibility and support the shift to active and sustainable modes of transportation.





# 05 Transit Need

## Inclusive Planning

Transit need goes beyond population density and key travel patterns.

Many intersection factors can affect how people travel and the way they travel. Undertaking Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) provides insights into how different people experience transit service.

Equitable transit service should provide access to people with the highest need. This often includes focusing investments into areas that have been historically underserved.

The implementation of priorities will consider areas of the highest need in the Comox Valley.



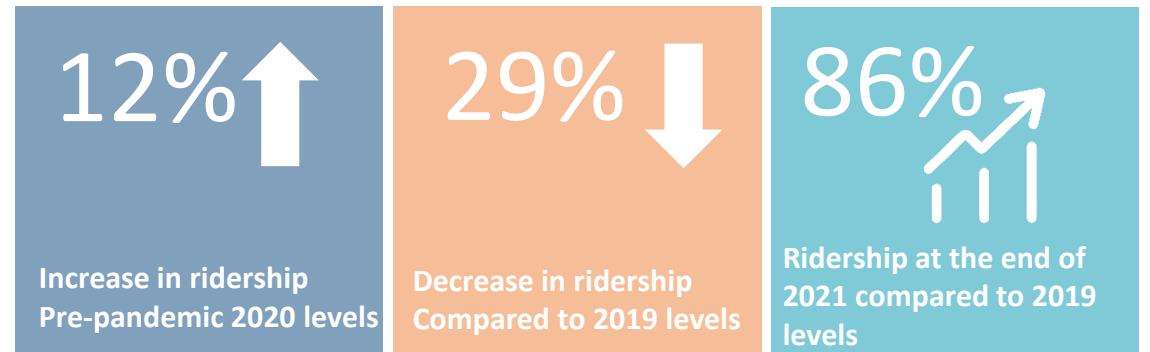
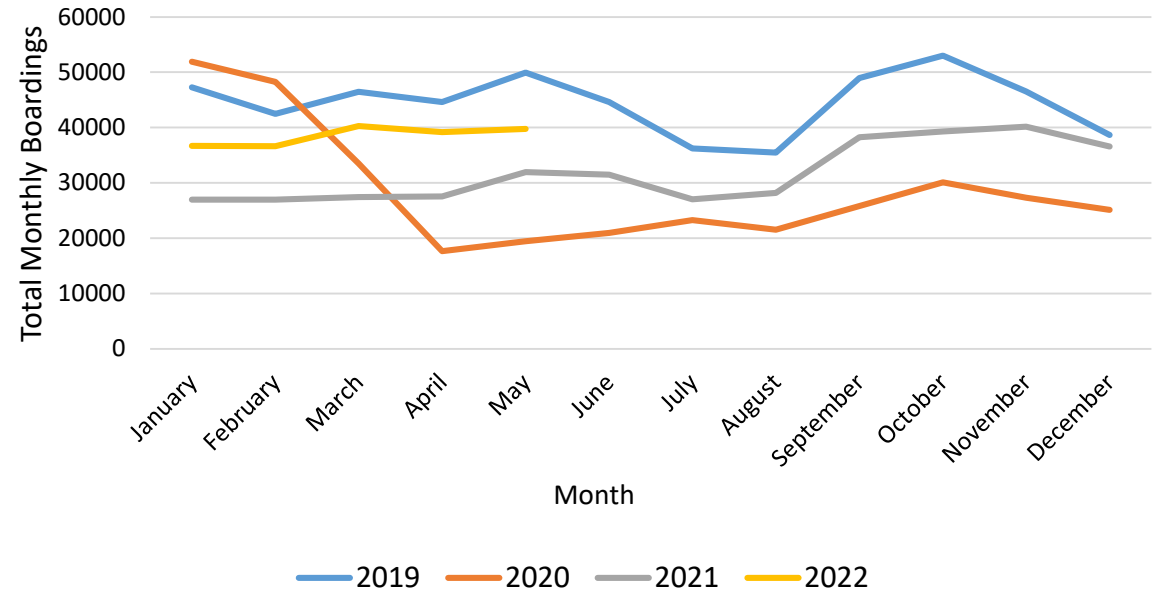
# 06 System Performance

## COVID-19 Impacts

As expected, given the British Columbia's Public Health Officer's advice to limit non-essential travel, transit ridership in the Comox Valley dropped significantly and abruptly in March 2020. Service levels within the transit system remained at their pre-COVID levels, until the 5<sup>th</sup> St Bridge construction project began, which required investment in the transit system to maintain service levels. The graph highlights the impact that the return to in-person classes had on ridership in the Comox Valley in Fall 2021, and the stable trend of recovery seen since then.

## Key Takeaways

- At its lowest point, monthly boardings fell by 60 per cent compared to 2019 levels, but ridership has since seen a significant increase compared to similar size transit systems
- Between January and February 2020, ridership surpassed 2019 levels by approximately 12 per cent
- Ridership continues to grow, and transit continues to provide essential services to the community, including access to schools, North Island College, North Island Hospital and other key destinations.



# 06 System Performance

## Route Performance

**1 Comox Mall/Anfield Centre** has the highest ridership across the Comox Valley Regional Transit System, with an average of 22 rides per service hour in 2021.

**5 Vanier** and **99 VMP Connector** are both designed to service schools and have recovered ridership to pre-pandemic levels.

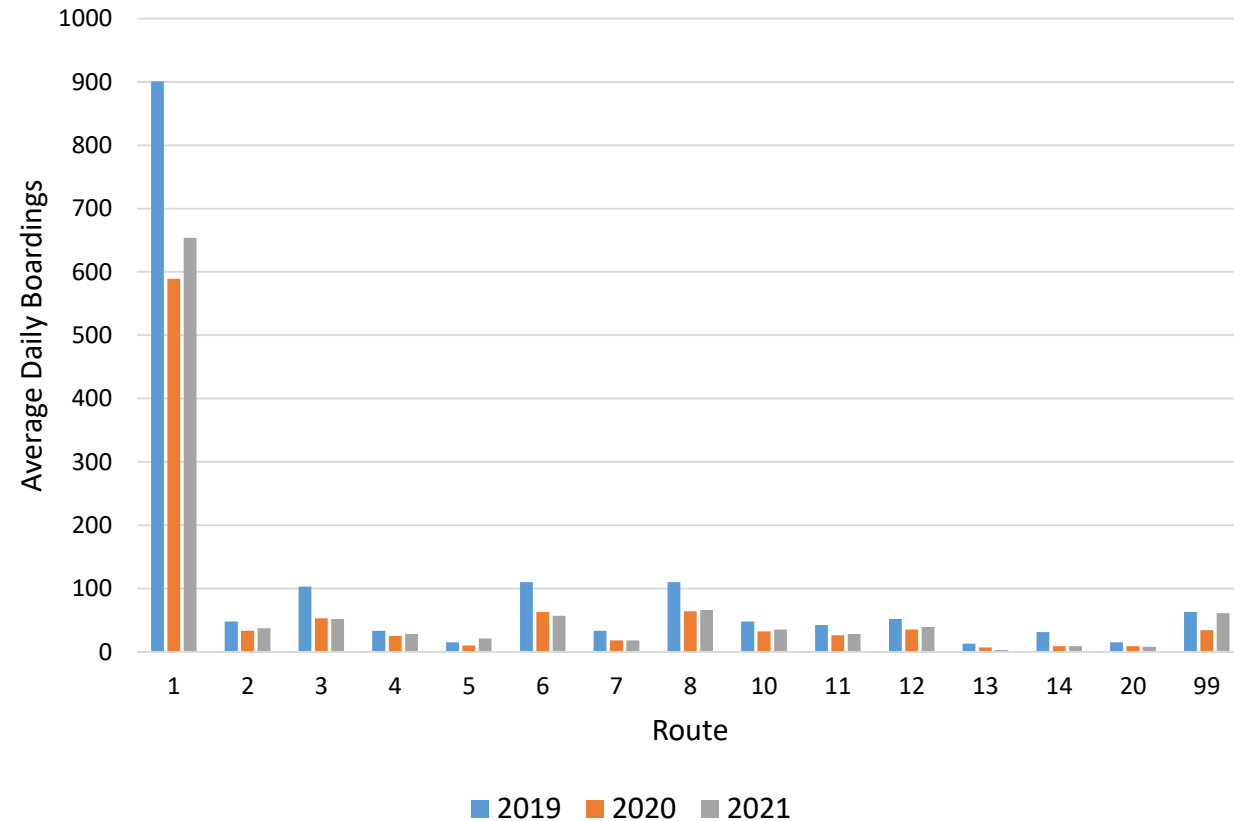
Routes operating in urban core areas such as **2 Cumberland/Anfield Centre**, **3 Comox Local**, **4 Driftwood Mall/Comox Mall**, **6 Uplands**, **7 Arden** and **8 Anfield Centre/Downtown** are lower ridership, and may require additional resources to attract ridership.

1,304

Average weekday boardings in 2021

59%

of system ridership is on route 1





# 07 How We Engaged

As part of BC Transit's commitment to public engagement, outreach was carried out to identify draft service and infrastructure priorities through workshops, and conversations with key stakeholders.

Public engagement was launched online from April 14, 2022 to May 20, 2022. Paper surveys were also made available in key areas of the community. Marketing to the community was facilitated through a variety of tools including: a project website, newspaper ads, radio advertisements, internal bus ads, social media.

**15** key stakeholders represented the community



**530** online survey response



**2,768** total comments



## Stay engaged!

Check out the full engagement summary report and register for future updates.

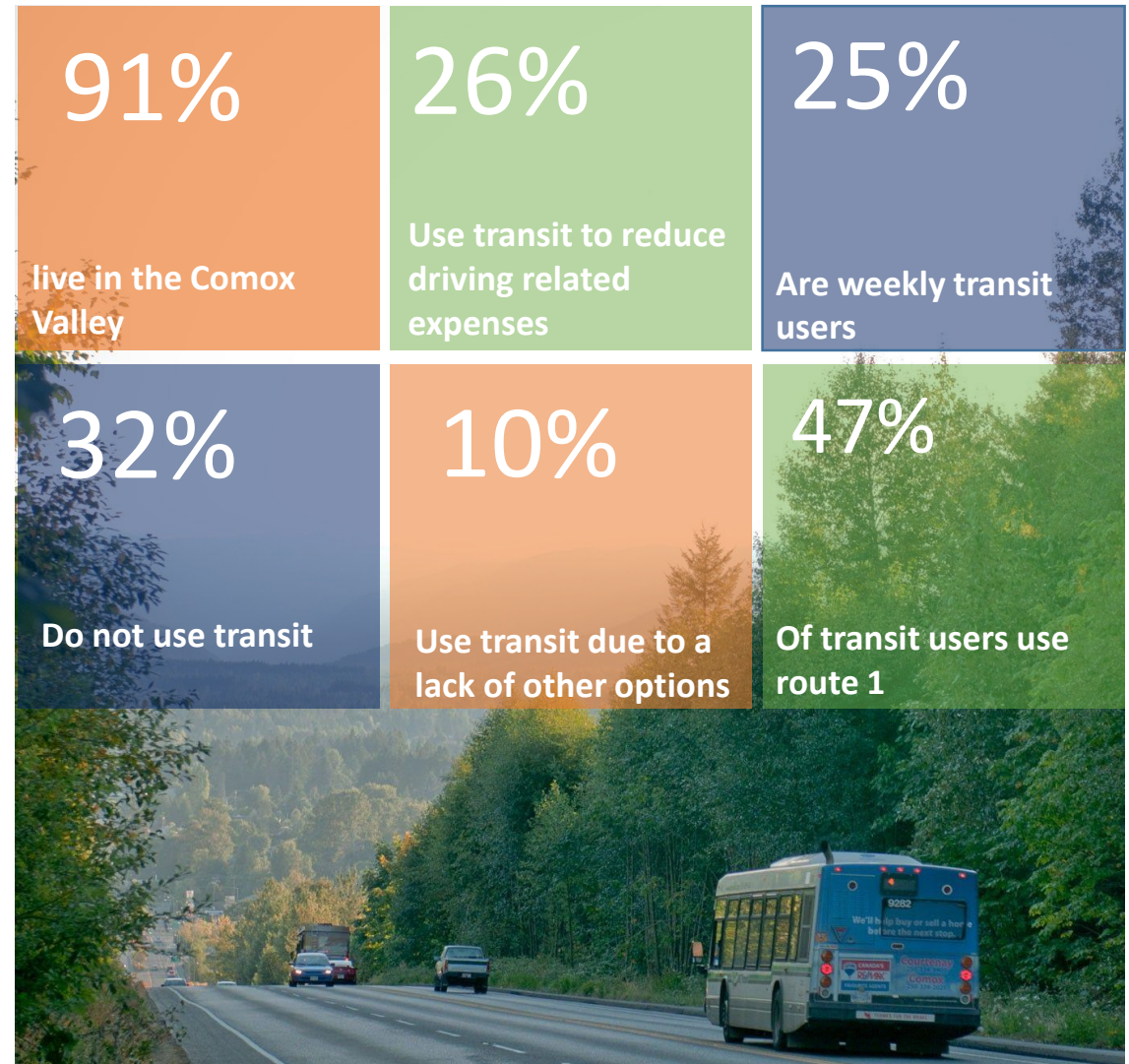
<https://engage.bctransit.com/comoxvalley2022>

# 08 Who We Heard From

Over 530 responses were received from the public during engagement, with the majority submitting feedback through the online survey.

## Key findings:

- most respondents live in the Comox Valley
- 32 per cent of respondents do not use transit, whereas 15 per cent use transit a few times per month. 11 per cent of respondents are regular transit users, taking the bus five or more times per week
- The top reasons people use transit are to reduce driving related expenses, reduce environmental impact and because of a lack of other options
- Of those who use transit, almost half use route 1 Comox Mall / Anfield Centre, corresponding with ridership patterns seen in the transit system

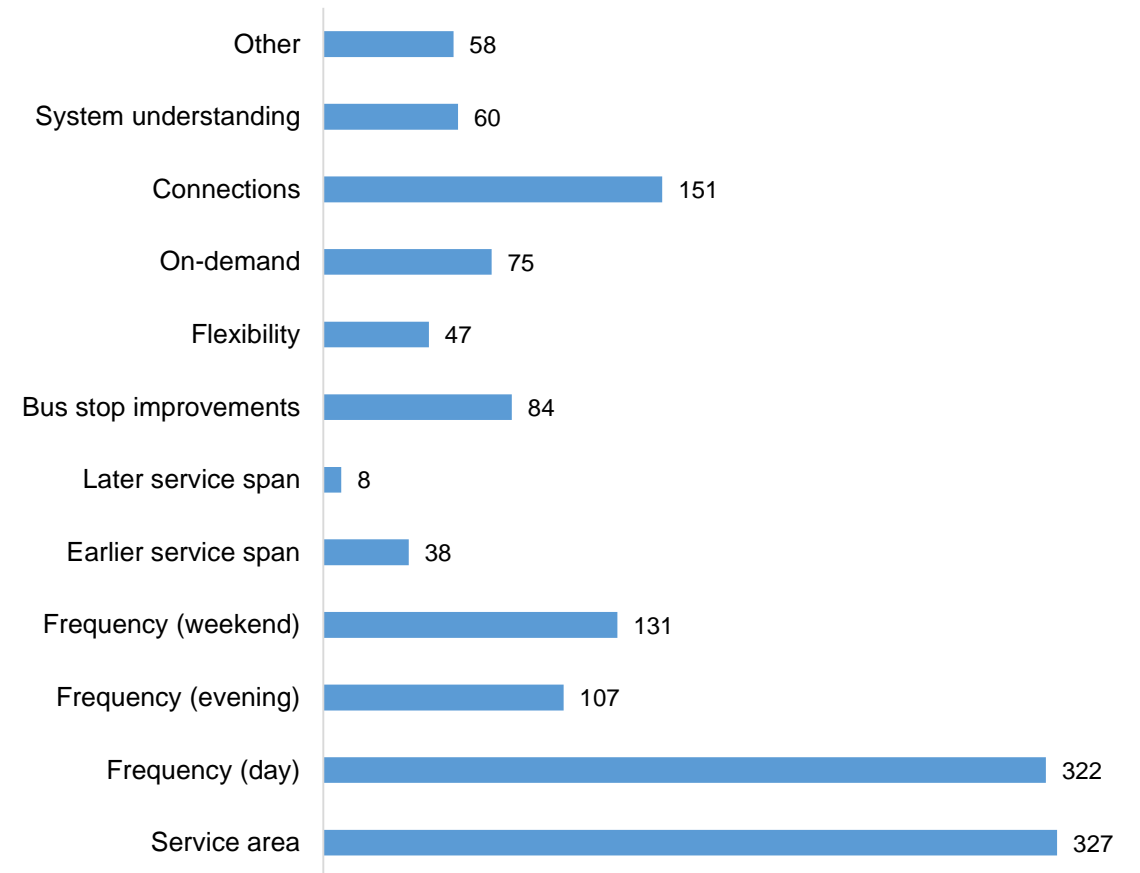


# 09 What We Heard

## Service area, frequency and connections

- Non- transit users would like to see more frequency and improved connections between routes to encourage use of transit
- There was a desire to expand service area with areas such as Nanaimo, Denman Island, Hornby Island, Macaulay Road and the Comox Valley Farmer’s Market
- The ranking of priorities indicated that introducing service to the Regional District of Nanaimo, introducing service on statutory holidays, as well as improving frequency on route 1 Comox Mall/Anfield Centre are high priorities
- Routing changes in West Courtenay that would improve coverage in the area were strongly supported
- Though service to the Regional District of Nanaimo was indicated as a high priority, a majority of respondents indicated they would use the service a few times per year

## What would encourage you to use transit more often?





# 10 Ongoing Engagement

## Voice of the Rider

BC Transit believes that in order to understand our riders and prospective riders better, we need to move a step closer to your community and make the community a part of important business decisions. Our Voice of the Rider panel is an effort to drive community engagement on every project we undertake, understand the satisfaction levels of our riders, and take recommendations and suggestions to improve the overall transit experience.

## Engaging with Indigenous Communities

BC Transit is developing a strategy for increasing engagement with First Nations and supporting meaningful reconciliation. We recognize the need to engage with communities in ways that are appropriate for each culture. BC Transit and the Comox Valley Regional District will continue to work with K'ómoks First Nation to understand how we can best serve their community.

**Do you have something to say  
about transit in your community?**

**VOICE**  
of the Rider



Learn more at [engage.bctransit.com/frequently-asked-questions](https://engage.bctransit.com/frequently-asked-questions)

# 11 Service Improvement Priorities 2022-2026

Priority	Description	Expansion Resources*
Route 1 Anfield Centre/Comox Mall service level improvements	Increase service levels to have 15 minute frequency throughout the day on weekdays.	7,500 hours, 3 buses
Service on statutory holidays	Provide Sunday service levels on 14 statutory holidays.	600 hours
West Courtenay service improvements	Realign routes 5, 7,8 and introduce route 9.	13,500 hours, 5 buses
Route 2 Cumberland/Anfield Centre service level improvements	Increase service levels on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays to provide hourly service all days and extend service span on Sundays.	1,800 hours, 1 bus
Route 3 Comox Local frequency improvements	Increase span of service on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays	1,200 hours

\*The current transit facility and some transit exchanges are nearing or at capacity. Additional infrastructure upgrades may be required for some expansions.

# 11 Service Investigation Priorities 2022-2026

Priority	Description	Expansion Resources
Initiate detailed service planning for an interregional service between Comox Valley and Nanaimo	Work with the Regional District of Nanaimo to undertake detailed service planning, including identifying potential routing and service levels and undertaking additional engagement. Work with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure on provincial initiatives supporting interregional transit.	TBD
Explore logistics of implementing BC Transit service on Denman Island and Hornby Island	Develop a Service Discussion Document that outlines all service planning and operational considerations for implementing service.	TBD
Work with School District 71 to create synergies with planning and scheduling service for schools.	Investigate opportunities to share resources/reduce costs, and align transit routes/schedules with schools in order to increase student/staff ridership.	N/A
Investigate On-Demand	Investigate and possibly implement on-demand service for areas served by low performing routes.	Reallocation, additional resources TBD



# West Courtenay: Routes 7,8 and 9

This proposal realigns routes 7 and 8 and introduce a new route 9.

Route 7 would be extended to Powerhouse Rd and Lake Trail. Route 8 would extend to Anfield Centre, and would become more direct routing along Cumberland Rd. A new route 9 would be introduced to provide service between downtown Courtenay and Anfield Centre via Lake Trail and Arden.

Service levels would also be increased to meet short term Service Standards, as outlined in the Comox Valley Service Standards and Performance Guidelines. Additional engagement would be required prior to implementation and would coincide with changes to route 5 Vanier.

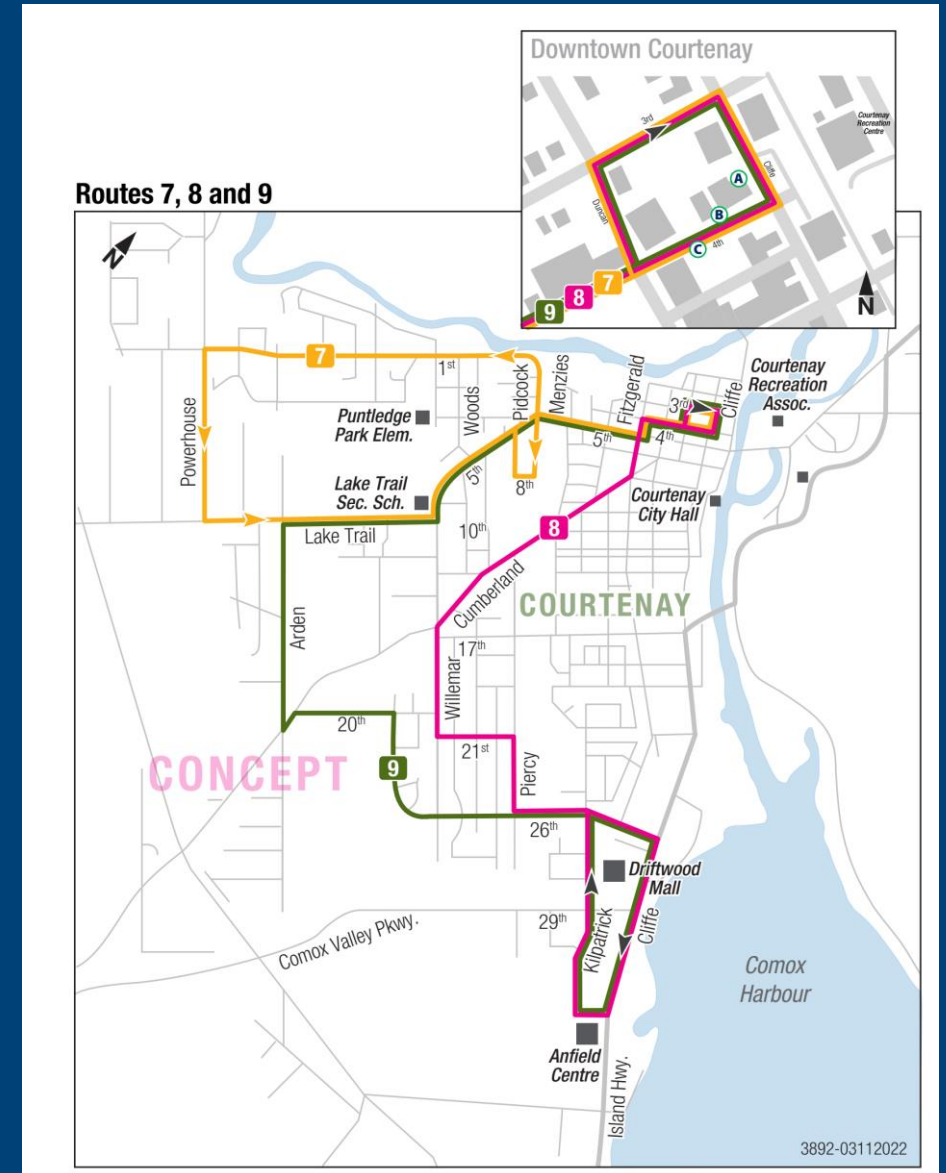
8,500

Annual service hours

3

vehicles

Prior to implementation, routing and bus movements will require sign-off from BC Transit Safety & Training and Operations



# West Courtenay: Route 5 Vanier

This proposal looks to realign route 5 to provide service between Anfield Centre and the Comox Valley Sports Centre. Service levels would also be increased to meet short term Service Standards, as outlined in the Comox Valley Service Standards and Performance Guidelines. Specific trip times would be targeted to service the Comox Valley Farmer’s Market and well as the Comox Valley Food Bank. Additional engagement would be required prior to implementation and would coincide with changes to routes 7 and 8 and the introduction of route 9.

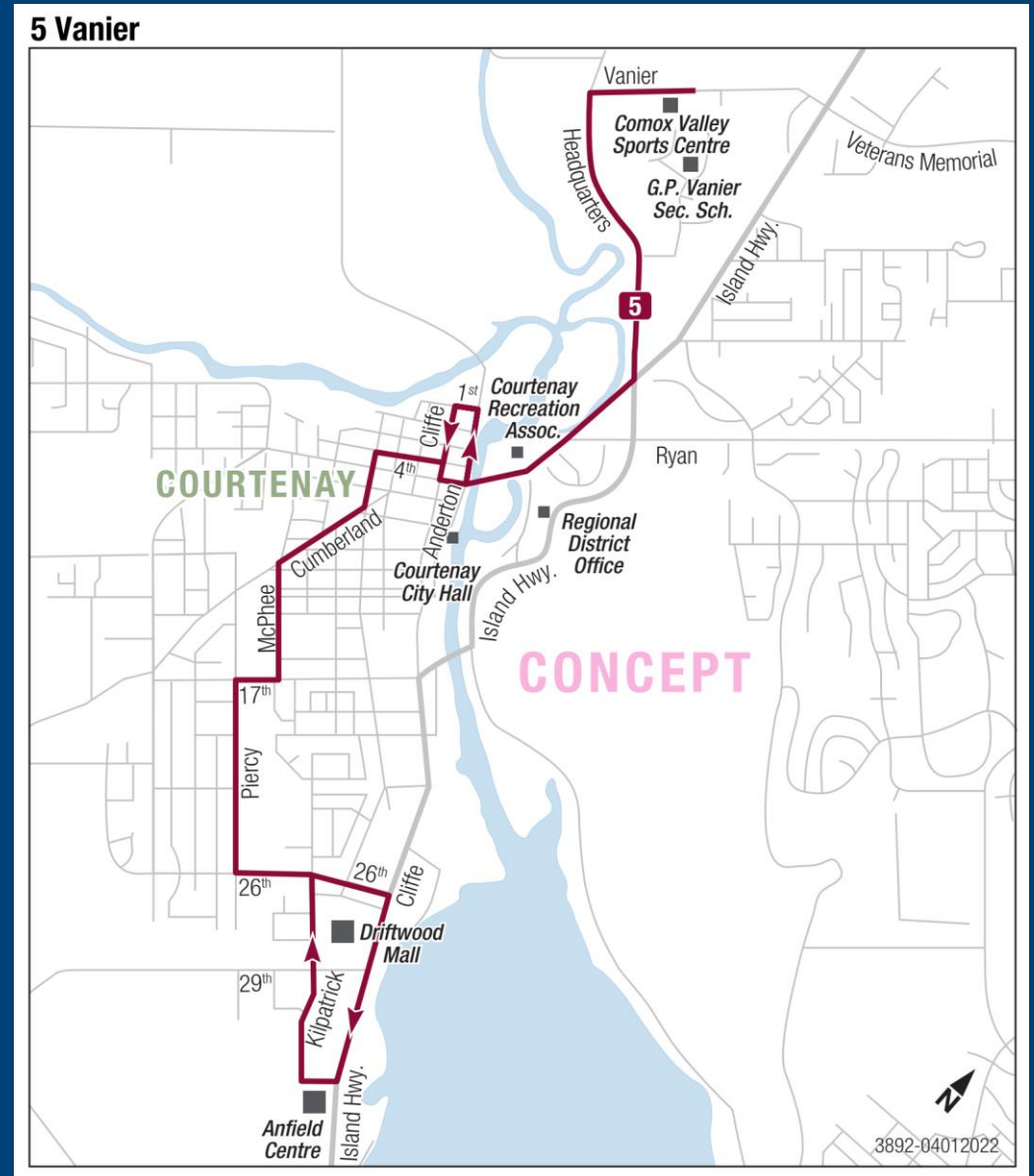
5,000

Annual service hours

2

vehicles

Prior to implementation, routing and bus movements will require sign-off from BC Transit Safety & Training and Operations.



# On-Demand Service in the Comox Valley

*Analysis to determine best path forward for introducing on-demand service in the Comox Valley*

This priority will look to produce a short service option report analyzing the different opportunities for introducing on-demand service in the Comox Valley. Opportunities include creating a new route, or modifying existing service to have on-demand capabilities. Additional public engagement may be required.



## Flexible Routing

- Requires existing fixed-route service
- Requires street network accessible by standard transit vehicles
- Requires layover facilities to recover time and minimize delay
- Zone size is usually smaller than other on-demand formats
- Consider consolidating very low frequency routes in similar directions with a single flexible route



## First/Last Mile Service

- Requires nearby higher-order transit
- Provides a wider catchment area and more spread-out and lower-demand trip generators
- Zones are typically less than 15-20 square kilometers
- Consider in residential or mixed-use areas nearby higher-order transit such as commuter rail or BRT, but beyond a comfortable walking distance



## Shuttle Service

- Requires nearby higher-order transit
- Serves a limited number of trip generators within the zone, with service directed to higher-order transit
- Service is traditionally short distance
- Consider in employment areas nearby higher-order transit such as commuter rail or BRT, but beyond a comfortable walking distance



## Curb-to-Curb Service

- Useful for providing large coverage of low-demand and widely distributed trip generators
- Zones are typically less than 15-20 square kilometers
- Demand in zone is generally too low and inconsistent over the service period to warrant attractive fixed-route transit
- Trips are localized within the zone
- Useful when expanding service into new areas on the urban fringe



# 12 Custom Transit Service Priorities 2022-2026

Priority	Description	Expansion Resources
Expand weekday service at peak times	Add additional service throughout the day, addressing peak morning and afternoon times	2100 hours, 1 bus
Extend service to end later on weekdays and weekends	Extend span until 7pm all days	800 hours
Start service earlier on weekdays and weekends	Start service at 7am all days	2,500 hours
Expand service area	Review handyDART service area boundaries to see where improvements can be made	TBD
Service on statutory holidays	Provide service from 8am until 4pm all statutory holidays	150 hours

# 13 Service Priorities 2026 and Beyond

Priority	Description	Expansion Resources
Additional service on route 15 Aquatic Centre/Comox Mall via Back Road	Introduce service on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays	850 hours, 1 bus
Route 12 Oyster River/Downtown service level improvements	Meet all Campbell River route 6 trips in Oyster River	3,600 hours, 1 bus
Route 10 Fanny Bay service level improvements	Service span and frequency improvements on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays to meet short term service standards	4,300 hours, 1 bus
Split route 11 Little River into two routes	Modify route 11 to create more direct service to Comox Airport from downtown Courtenay. Introduce a new route operating between downtown Comox, Comox Airport and the Little River Ferry terminal.	TBD
On demand service improvements	Improvements to routes 13 Merville-Seal Bay Shuttle, 14 Union Bay Shuttle and Cape Lazo/Point Holmes and Huband Road/Seal Bay on request service with consideration to expanding service area and timing.	TBD
Route 6 Uplands service level improvements	Service span and frequency improvements on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays to meet short term service standards	2,500 hours, 1 bus

# 14 Infrastructure Priorities 2022-2026

Priority	Description
Transit Facility Expansion/Relocation	Upon approval of the Transit Facility Study, undertake detailed planning work to pursue an expansion/relocation.
South Courtenay Transit Exchange	An improved exchange in South Courtenay to accommodate four bus bays.
Ryan Rd/ Old Island Highway Queue Jump	Reallocate space on the intersection's east leg to add a westbound queue jump lane that would allow buses to bypass queued left-turn vehicles.
Old Island Highway/Comox Rd Queue Jump	Repurpose the eastbound right-turn lane as a shared queue jump / right turn lane to allow buses to bypass vehicle queues and clear the intersection more quickly.
Downtown Courtenay Transit Exchange	Advance planning and design work for a downtown Courtenay Transit Exchange.



# 14 Infrastructure Priorities Beyond 2026

Priority	Description
Oyster River Transit Exchange	An improved exchange in Oyster River to accommodate 2 bus bays.
Downtown Comox Transit Exchange	An improved exchange in downtown Comox to accommodate 4 bus bays.
North Island College Transit Exchange	An expanded exchange at North Island College to accommodate 6 bus bays and improved pedestrian connections.
Lerwick Rd / College Way NB left turn phase	Signal modifications to allow buses entering North Island College to clear the intersection prior to southbound through traffic moving through the intersection.
Ryan Rd / Cowichan Ave Signal	Consideration of signaling this location to create gaps in traffic on Ryan Road to facilitate bus turns in/out of North Island College
Signal Priority	A number of locations have identified along the FTN corridor where traffic signal timing may be altered to favour specific movements where the FTN transit service operates.

# 15 COVID-19 Response Plan

## Safety of our Passengers

BC Transit's top priority is the safety of our passengers and operators. The key measures are summarized in the image opposite, but the full strategy and details can be found at <https://bctransit.com/COVID19>.

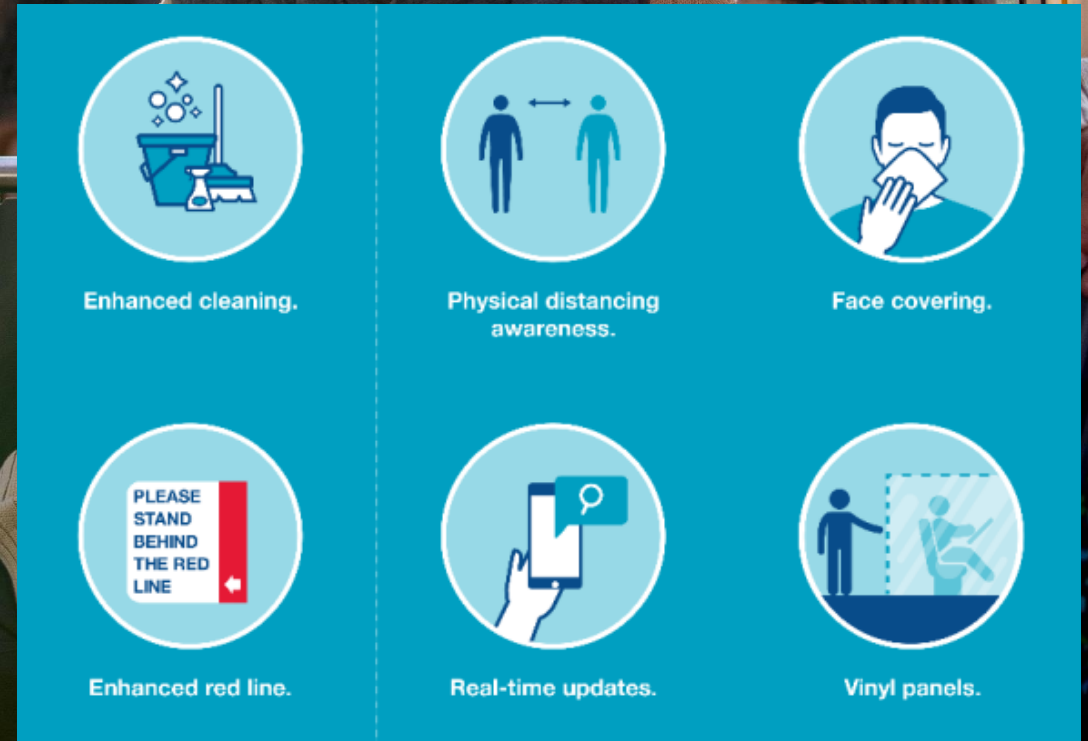
## Support Ridership Return

To support ridership return, the Province of British Columbia has provided restart funding to the Local Government sponsors to ensure the continued effective delivery of transit across your transit system.

The **Free Transit for Children 12 and Under Program** was introduced in September 2021. This program also aligns with BC Transit's commitment to delivering initiatives to drive new and effective measures to improve the transit experience and help grow young ridership, create life-long transit users and further reduce congestion on our roads.

## Optimizing Your Services to Maximize Ridership

BC Transit will continue to monitor and direct service improvements to ensure service hours are being effectively used on routes and at times where your community needs them.



# 16 Moving Forward

## Monitoring + Implementation

Performance of the transit system is monitored on an annual basis, which is typical for transit systems of this size. Performance may be monitored more closely after a significant service change to evaluate the change.

Service improvements will be integrated into the Three Year Transit Improvement Process (TIPs), which is updated on an annual basis. Infrastructure improvements will be incorporated into BC Transit's Capital Plan. Prior to implementation of service changes, BC Transit planning staff will work with Comox Valley Regional District staff to ensure service improvements appropriately reflect local needs. Additional targeted engagement may be conducted.





# 17 Investment Strategy

## *Funding the plan*

To achieve the goals of this plan, capital and operating investments in the transit system will be required over the next five years and beyond.

Annual operating costs are based on service hours that are projected to increase by over 40,000 hours. The plan also calls for capital investments that include at least 14 additional vehicles, new and upgraded transit exchanges, signal priority and a new transit facility. The current transit facility can only accommodate 8 additional vehicles, a new or expanded facility will be required to accommodate expansions beyond 8 vehicles.

In order to achieve the goals laid out in this plan, consistent provincial and local funding is required. BC Transit will continue working with the Comox Valley Regional District to further the development of the Comox Valley Transit System.





# 18 Acknowledgements

Thank you,

The development of this Transit Future Action Plan provides the planning overview for the development of the Comox Valley Transit System.

This plan was made possible by participation from provincial and local governments, interested and affected groups and the public. BC Transit would like to thank staff from:

- Comox Valley Regional District
- City of Courtenay
- Town of Comox
- Village of Cumberland
- Pacific Western Transportation
- K'ómoks First Nation

