

Victoria Regional Transit Commission

BC Transit Remote Meeting via WebEx
June 16, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

DRAFT MINUTES

The Victoria Regional Transit Commission conducts its business on the homelands of the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations.

Present:

Councillor Susan Brice, Chair, Mayor Fred Haynes, Mayor Geoff Orr, Mayor Kevin Murdoch, Mayor Lisa Helps, Mayor Maja Tait, Mayor Rob Martin and Quinn Cunningham, Camosun Student Rep.

BC Transit Staff:

Christy Ridout, *Vice President, Business Development*; Roland Gehrke, *Vice President Finance & CFO*; Jonathon Dyck, *Communications Manager*; Kevin Schubert, *General Manager, Victoria Regional Transit*; Levi Timmermans, *Director, Infrastructure Management*; Lisa Trotter, *Senior Manager, Government Relations*; Megan Hill, *Director, Budgeting and Forecasting*; Ryan Dennis, *Manager, Sales and Revenue*; Levi Megenbir, *Senior Transit Planner*, Seth Wright, *Transit Planner*, Kristen McKeracher, *Project Manager* and Tina Sulea, *Executive Assistant (Recorder)*

Regrets:

Councillor Sharmarke Dubow

1. TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Susan Brice called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Motion by Mayor Helps and seconded by Mayor Orr to APPROVE the agenda as presented.

CARRIED

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 25, 2020

Motion by Mayor Helps and seconded by Mayor Martin to APPROVE the minutes as written.

CARRIED

3. CHAIR'S REMARKS – Susan Brice

When the commission last met on February 25, 2020 we approved a budget that allowed for expansion of 20 000 hours and 8 new busses. Immediately after that, we deployed a fleet of 12 new CNG fuel buses as part of the low carbon fleet strategy. Then on March 16, 2020, we became aware of COVID-19 and changes immediately impacted transit operations.

I want to thank the commission for the immediate decisions surrounding eliminating fares to enable rear door boarding and protect the operators and the public, and the decisions to reduce service levels as business closed their doors. By March 17, 2020, the Province declared a state of emergency, transit was declared an essential service, and the Public Health Officer and the Province guided BC Transit decisions.

On behalf of the commission I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister indicating a loss of revenue of \$3.4 M a month and motor fuel tax of an additional \$6M a month in the Victoria Regional

Transit System was causing concern or the future sustainability of transit, and requesting additional mechanisms for federal contribution to operating costs.

The commission was notified May 3, 2020 that fare collection and front door boarding would be able to resume June 1, 2020. Since that time, I have had conversations with the Minister and BC Transit staff about the path to recovery and the rebuild of transit. I would like to thank all the staff at BC Transit and especially the front line staff our operators for all they have endured over the last several months.

As BC's Restart Plan allows for business to reopen and activities to begin to resume we enter a phase of recovery and move into rebuilding ridership. I want to take a moment to thank all the BC Transit staff in particular our operators that kept the buses rolling throughout this pandemic to ensure essential business could be carried out during the pandemic.

I would like to welcome Quinn Cunningham as our new student representative to the commission; he is from Camosun College and is a welcome addition to our commission

4. Pandemic Recovery Strategy Update – FOR INFORMATION – Lisa Trotter

On March 17, 2020, the Province of British Columbia declared a provincial state of emergency due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Public transportation was designated as an essential service for essential service worker transportation. The BC Transit Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was activated and had weekly meetings with TransLink and Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA). Emergency scaled down measures were put into place. A modified summer service level schedule was implemented early. Ridership decreased 70-80% which is on par with other transit agencies across Canada. The priority continues to be the safety of our operators and customers. A number of safety measures were put into place such as rear door boarding, elimination of fares, reduced passenger loads, vinyl barriers, enhanced cleaning and digital Rider's Guides.

Now in phase three of recovery, service levels are scaling back up with 2/3 capacity on buses as businesses reopen. Customers are encouraged to wear a face mask when 2 metre distance is not attainable. Expansion for the current year was deferred as we rebuild ridership and evaluate customer needs. Ridership trends are being reviewed on a daily basis as we return to the 'new normal'.

Revenue was impacted with the inability to collect fares and a drop in gas tax due to reduced travel. BC Transit continues to work closely with the Province of BC and advocate for federal support.

Going forward with long-term sustainability and short term funding challenges our focus is on rebuilding ridership and scenario planning for a potential second wave of COVID-19. Planning for future infrastructure capital investments continues as well as planning for implementation of deferred expansion and rapid bus.

Discussion

There was a comment with regard to messaging that if customers are not well with a contagious illness do not take public transit to get to the doctor. Public transportation to get to regular medical appointments is ok.

What are the ridership numbers now? Ridership is back up to 33% as of this week, June 15, 2020 (down 66% from regular ridership). At the height of the pandemic we were down to 80% of regular ridership. Ridership is showing a gradual recovery.

The Province of B.C. bases their contribution on a percentage of the system's operating budget.

Have we reviewed putting in barriers between seats? BC Transit has been in contact with other transit agencies to see what they are doing. Barriers between seats would be logistically challenging. Key messaging now is to follow advice of Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer, don't use transit if you're sick and use a face covering when using public transit.

Is UPASS gone completely this year if University's are still working online and how do we make up the lost revenue? We are in discussion educational institutions. Many UPASS holders continue to use transit outside of their commute to and from school. We will see some UPASS revenue but it will not be what we've had in the past. We are predicting 40-60% ridership for fall 2020. We continue to monitor mobility trends as reopening evolves.

Motion by Mayor Helps and seconded by Mayor Haynes to receive the report for information.

CARRIED

5. Financial and Performance Reporting Summary 2019/2020 Year-End – FOR INFORMATION – Megan Hill

Financial and Performance Reporting Summary was reviewed. Tracking normally in Q3 pre-COVID. Year-end March 2020 passenger revenue was above budget then collection of fares stopped and mid-March shows a revenue loss of \$460K with an estimated ridership loss of 675,000 passengers. Fuel tax revenue was above budget. Operations was nearly on budget, down slightly at year end. Fuel was below budget due to lower fuel prices and service hours were below budget with the service reduction due to COVID-19 estimated at 5,000 hours. Maintenance and Administration budgets were on target. Operating Reserve Fund was reviewed. The Province operating budget was \$4.3M below budget due to a one-time draw down of operating reserves. Effective March 31, 2020 the Ministry instructed the operating reserve for the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (VRTC) be fully drawn down and remaining local share be transferred to the VRTC Transit Fund to be used at the VRTC's discretion.

Discussion

There were questions regarding the current revenue shortfall and why the Provincial government took \$4.3M out of the operating reserve? These will be discussed later in the meeting.

Motion by Mayor Helps and seconded by Mayor Haynes to receive the report for information.

CARRIED

6. Operations Update – FOR INFORMATION – Kevin Schubert

Prior to the impact of COVID-19, and not including the week impacted by snow and freezing temperatures, scheduled service reliability was averaging over 99.6%. In the early weeks of March, the uncertainty around the pandemic caused shortfalls to the availability of operators and service reliability fell to 92% in one week.

Physical distancing becoming necessary to protect operators and customers from the potential spread of the virus. As a result, BC Transit moved to rear-door boarding and stopped fare collection. Capacity on the bus was limited to approximately 50%. BC Transit took additional measures to provide a safe work environment for operators to reduce the amount of lost service due to operator availability. A modified summer service schedule was implemented May 25 to September which gives us the ability to be responsive to changing demands as reopening evolves. A high of 99.87% service reliability was realized in the most recent weeks.

Custom Transit service levels have been maintained. There was a drop in demand in April. We've relied on taxi supplements accommodate same-day requests and reduce unmet trips but we have been maxing out the capacity of local taxi services.

Thank you to all transit operators for the outstanding work during this pandemic.

Motion by Mayor Helps and seconded by Mayor Haynes to receive the report for information.

CARRIED

7. Rapid Bus Implementation Plan – FOR INFORMATION – *Matt Boyd*

In spring 2020, BC Transit launched the Rapid Bus Implementation Strategy with the support of the consulting team Urban Systems. The intention of this project is to create a unifying action plan for the implementation of a Rapid Bus system in the Victoria Region that aligns with local and regional goals. A Rapid Bus service is faster, more frequent and more reliable and will build off the positive momentum created from the introduction of bus lanes. The primary deliverables of the project will include an overarching service design and brand strategy, corridor analysis and a launch strategy that includes associated estimated costs. The key next steps in the project will include targeted local partner engagement over the summer 2020, with the project completion targeted for fall 2020. Next step is targeted stakeholder engagement.

It was suggested to send out a statement from the VRTC to all mayors in the CRD region saying that we have plans that will involve all municipalities across the CRD and ask for their staff's support during the engagement period.

There was a question with regard to the difference between Rapid Bus and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)? Urban Systems will be defining the two in the plan.

How much will Rapid Bus cost and how does this integrate into the 25 year facilities masterplan? Costs will be included in the study. Yes, the facilities infrastructure team has been involved as infrastructure will be required to support new buses and stations.

Motion by Mayor Helps and seconded by Mayor Haynes to receive the report for information.

CARRIED

8. VRTC 10-Year Vision Update – FOR INFORMATION – *Levi Megenbir*

A high level draft 10-year vision was presented to the VRTC for feedback. This vision combines several plans into one with ongoing collaboration with local government partners. Performance measures, projects and plans were reviewed. Some planning project timelines have been

extended due to COVID initiatives taking up planning resources. The final report, including an updated Gantt chart, will be presented at the August 2020 VRTC meeting.

Discussion

It was suggested to include in the Gantt chart things like land acquisitions for future projects such as Rapid Bus, Uptown Exchange or an additional transit facility so when land acquisitions are brought to other boards, it's clear that it's part of a longer-term plan that supports expansion.

Do you anticipate a change to this plan when the South Island Transportation Initiative is released by the Province this summer? This is a living document and will be updated on an annual basis.

There was a question with regard to why this vision is for ten years? A ten-year plan is best practice with transit agencies. After five years, plans becomes vague and we need to be cautious that we don't over commit.

It was suggested to include a project list as an appendix to this document that shows a complete list of future capital projects.

Motion by Mayor Helps and seconded by Mayor Haynes to receive the report for information.

CARRIED

9. Infrastructure Update – FOR INFORMATION – *Levi Timmermans*

Bus Shelter Program Update

In November 2019, the 2019/20 bus shelter program was expanded to accommodate a total of 47 shelters across the province with 21 of these shelters within the Victoria region. Multi-Year federal funding through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) was received in July 2018 and provides 40% funding towards costs for three years. All 21 shelters have been installed and are in service. A Negotiated Request for Proposals (NRFP) was issued in January 2020 due to the expiration of the existing contract for shelters. A new contract is now in place with the vendor and an expanded suite of shelters and optional add-ons are now available. The Patterson contract does not allow for BC Transit branding on those stops.

CNG Fueling and Facility Modifications

CNG buses are now in-service around the city. CNG fueling and infrastructure modifications are underway at the Langford Transit Centre (LTC).

handyDART Centre

The focus for the new handyDART centre in View Royal has been engagement with local stakeholders including Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations. A neighbourhood working group was established. Due to COVID-19 traditional community engagement has not been possible and is taking longer than originally anticipated. Environmental consultants have been brought in to assess impacts to the nearby creek. Targeting initiation of site work in fall 2020 and starting construction in early 2021.

Island Hwy Transit Priority Plan

BC Transit continues to work with McElhanney and local municipal staff to progress the detailed design for transit priority measures on the Island Hwy between Goldstream and

Highway 1. Design work is nearing 30% completion. A request for project funding will be presented to the VRTC for approval in fall 2020 to secure funding for construction in 2021.

University of Victoria Transit Exchange Refurbishment

Enhancements at the UVic exchange will see the redesign of the north side of the exchange near the bookstore. This phase will rebuild damaged or failed bus pads, asphalted areas as well as address function and safety concerns with additional bus bays and new shelters. BC Transit is working in collaboration with the University to build a business case and secure federal funding.

Operations and Maintenance Facilities Master Plan

BC Transit has secured a consultant team to complete an update to the 25-Year Operations and Maintenance Facilities Master Plan. The plan includes the following key objectives:

- Increase short-term maintenance and bus storage capacity at the Langford & Victoria Transit Centres;
- Modernization of the Victoria and Langford Transit Centres facility operations;
- Support the low carbon fleet strategy by developing a facility investment strategy to support battery electric buses and compressed natural gas buses;
- Plan for future facility needs with Victoria Regional Transit System fleet growth scenarios and a Provincial Parts Distribution Centre.

Westshore Transit Priority Action Plan

Substantial progress has been made on the Westshore Transit Priority Action Plan to date. Additional concept development in Colwood on Sooke Rd between Metchosin and Jermone Rd is still underway and not yet complete. The objective of the study was to develop concept designs and cost estimates for future transit priority measures in the Westshore area that will integrate with the Rapid Bus strategy. A technical advisory committee comprised of City of Colwood, the City of Langford, the Capital Regional District and the Ministry provided guidance and expertise throughout the study process. A final report will come back to the VRTC for review and approval.

Discussion

Is there a way to add small scale bike lock-ups at shelters? Yes, if there is room and the roadway is not constrained.

a. Bus Shelter Program Overview - *Kristen McKeracher*

A high level overview of the Bus Shelter Program was presented and some of the new options now available were highlighted. The program provides provincial and federal funding to make bus stops more affordable for local government partners. It brands and standardizes stops around B.C. and is coordinated with the Ministry's Minor Betterments Program to fund stops along the Ministry's right of way. The average cost of a bus shelter in Victoria is \$20,000 to \$25,000. Various shelter designs and optional add-ons were reviewed. Shelter information is available at bctransit.com. The contract with The Jim Patterson Group for stops along Douglas Street do not allow for BC Transit branded shelters.

Motion by Mayor Helps and seconded by Mayor Haynes to receive the report for information.

CARRIED

10. Planning Update – FOR INFORMATION – *Seth Wright*

Service Changes were reviewed. Spring service went into effect April 6. Due to a 75% reduction in ridership and reduction in operator availability, service was further reduced and late night service was discontinued. To align with shifting demand, a revised summer schedule was implemented early on May 25 instead of June 29.

Both phases of public engagement have been completed for the Broadmead/Cordova Bay and Esquimalt/View Royal Local Area Transit Plans. Staff propose to provide a summary of this plan at the August meeting of the Commission. Local area transit planning for the Saanich Peninsula is slated to begin late in 2020 and will employ video meetings and new web-based engagement tools to facilitate stakeholder and public consultation.

Motion by Mayor Helps and seconded by Mayor Haynes to receive the report for information.

CARRIED

11. ATAC Minutes – FOR INFORMATION – *Kevin Schubert*

ATAC minutes were presented for information.

Motion by Mayor Helps and seconded by Mayor Martin to receive the report for information.

CARRIED

12. CORRESPONDENCE – *Susan Brice*

- a. Email from Mark Burnham
- b. Letter from City of Victoria re: VRTC COVID-19 Recovery
- c. South Island Climate Action Network – Jane Devonshire

Motion by Mayor Helps and seconded by Mayor Martin to receive all correspondence for information.

CARRIED

Motion by Mayor Haynes and seconded by Mayor Martin to move in camera to deal with matter that is subject to negotiations.

CARRIED

13. IN CAMERA

The Commission received a verbal report on financial matters and discussions with various levels of government.

Motion by Mayor Tait and seconded by Mayor Murdoch to adjourn in camera meeting at 11:56 a.m.

CARRIED

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

Tuesday, August 11, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.