



**Victoria Regional
Transit Commission**

January 17, 2022

**Councillor Susan Brice –
Chair**
District of Saanich

**Councillor Charlayne
Thornton-Joe**
City of Victoria

Mayor Fred Haynes
District of Saanich

Mayor Lisa Helps
City of Victoria

Mayor Rob Martin
City of Colwood

Mayor Kevin Murdoch
District of Oak Bay

Mayor Geoff Orr
District of North Saanich

Mayor Maja Tait
District of Sooke

Honourable Rob Fleming
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure

Re: Additional operational funding for public transit

In fall 2020, the Government of Canada and the Province of B.C. announced the provision of \$1.08 Billion in Safe Restart funding, of which the Victoria Regional Transit System received \$49.5M to directly compensate for passenger fare revenue losses, increased COVID-19 related expenses and reduced motor fuel tax revenues for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 fiscal years. The Victoria Regional Transit Commission (VRTC) appreciates the Safe Restart funding to date as it has been vital in continuing to promote sustainable transportation in the region.

The VRTC governs the second largest transit system in British Columbia, delivering over 27 million passenger trips per year. Like many other transit systems across the country, we believe transit will play a transformative role in communities in the coming years, and we would like to encourage you to make further investment in transit a key consideration. Safe Restart funding directly addressed fare revenue losses and added expenses for the 20/21 and 21/22 fiscal years, however, the pandemic has severely impacted transit ridership. Although an allocation of our Safe Restart funding has been carried into 2022/23, the VRTC is concerned that slow revenue recovery could negatively affect the long-term sustainability of our transit services.

Ridership recovery has been our primary focus and following the removal of several COVID-19 related restrictions, BC Transit increased service to support the return to in-person learning at post-secondary institutions in September 2021. We are excited by the introduction of fare-free transit for children 12 and under as we expect it to have a positive impact longer term by creating lifelong riders. The VRTC has approved the implementation plan for RapidBus, focusing on increasing ridership by providing a service that outperforms the automobile in efficient travel for commuters between the Westshore and Downtown Victoria, and in January 2022 we implemented service to Sci'aneew First Nation. The VRTC and BC Transit remain committed to identifying areas for transit improvement and maximizing efficiency of resources. As of December 2021, BC Transit ridership has recovered to an average of 65% compared to prior year.

We all appreciate that efficient and reliable public transit systems are vital in promoting sustainable mobility in Canada. Effective public transit assists in mitigating congestion, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, encourages better land use policies for municipalities and regional authorities and enables Canadians with an affordable mobility option. The VRTC continues to invest in the system to grow ridership, but with many still working remotely and decreased motor fuel tax and recent gasoline rationing, there is a continued need for support from all levels of government.

The VRTC is incredibly appreciative of the Safe Restart Agreement Program funding and request consideration to further contribute to the ongoing recovery of the transit system during this unprecedented challenge of ridership regrowth. There is risk to the ongoing plans for transit in the region in a community that continues to see tremendous population growth. Funding would help mitigate the pressure on the local tax base and help mitigate the risk of undoing our recovery efforts to date.

We look forward to your continued support of this vital service as we continue to deliver reliable and sustainable transportation services that families and essential workers rely on.

Yours sincerely,



Susan Brice, Chair
Victoria Regional Transit Commission

Cc: Commission Members