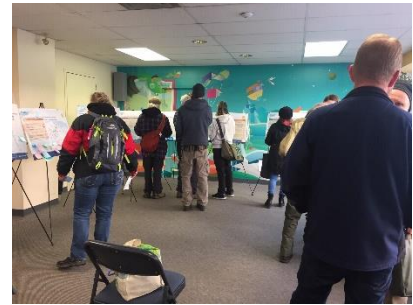


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transit Future Service Plan

Kootenay Lake West, Castlegar and
Area and City of Nelson

West Kootenay Transit System



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BC Transit would like to thank the Regional District of Central Kootenay, City of Nelson, City of Castlegar, Village of Salmo, Village of Slocan, Village of Silverton, Village of New Denver, Village of Nakusp, Village of Kaslo, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, Arrow and Slocan Lake Community Services, Trail Transit Services, the West Kootenay Transit Committee and West Kootenay stakeholders and community members who provided input into this Transit Future Service Plan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transit has tremendous potential to be the best transportation solution for strong, more sustainable communities. The need to realize this potential in the West Kootenays is increasingly important due to factors such as climate change, an aging demographic and unique shifts in population.

In partnership with the West Kootenay Transit Committee, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, the City of Nelson, the villages of Silverton, New Denver, Nakusp, Kaslo, and Salmo, and the City of Castlegar, BC Transit has undertaken the development of this West Kootenay Transit Future Service Plan (TFSP).

As set out in the mutually agreed upon Terms of Reference the objective of the TFSP is to form a complement to the 2016 Trail and Area Service Review and update the transit priorities identified in the: Central Kootenay Service Review (2011), West Kootenay Master Plan (2012), Nelson and Area Transit Recommendations (2012).

The TFSP is intended to:

- Itemize Plan progress to date
- Examine transit requirements based on demographic trends, official community plans, proposed land development and road network changes, and citizen priorities expressed through consultation
- Analyze and report on the performance of the existing transit in the area.
- Outline and recommend service priorities over the short- and longer-term periods, for consideration by the West Kootenay Transit Committee, RDCK Board, and City of Nelson to improve transit system performance and effectiveness
- Ensure transit priorities align with any updates to the Regional District Community Plans, City of Nelson Official Community Plan, City of Castlegar Community Plan, Active Transportation Plan and Low Carbon Path to 2040 Plan, neighbourhood plans and other local planning initiatives
- Make recommendations on infrastructure priorities required to support service priorities over the short and longer term periods.

This TFSP is an analysis of all transit routes operating within the City of Nelson and RDCK, including Partatransit service operating in the Slocan and Kootenays Zones, services operating within the City of Castlegar and Interregional Connectors.

The impetus for this review stems from the length of time since the last reviews were completed and the changes within the communities and institutions of the region since this time.

The primary focus of this TFSP is on the scheduled conventional and paratransit portions of the City of Nelson, Kootenay Lake West and City of Castlegar transit service, but custom handyDART service will also be considered.

As the West Kootenay TFSP was nearing conclusion in spring of 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic began to take hold in Canada, causing significant and rapid changes to the transit landscape. Transit ridership initially dropped more than 69 per cent compared to 2019 levels. Swift action to assess transit needs was undertaken and officials chose to maintain service levels to ensure that transit remained available and accessible to those who require it. Transit is an essential service, and its continued operation during uncertain times is critical.

On December 4, 2020, in recognition of the role in transit in maintaining strong communities the Government of Canada and Province of BC announced Safe Restart funding for public transportation agencies in British Columbia. This funding ensures that essential service levels of transit systems are maintained over the next three years and that fares remain affordable.

The focus of this TFSP is on the expansion and improvement of the West Kootenay Transit system over the next five years and beyond. It is acknowledged that the pandemic and subsequent shifts in demand and efforts to restore ridership to may impact the timelines and order of service change priorities outlined in this document.

The transit service and infrastructure priorities identified within this Transit Future Service Plan are based on consultation with key stakeholders and the public, changes in performance of the transit system from 2015 to 2019, consideration of changes in demand drivers, and consideration of local government policies and changing policies and community conditions.

Service Review Process

The following steps were undertaken by BC Transit staff as part of this TFSP:

- Traveled several times to the area to better understand the local transit dynamics, met with local operations managers, customers, general public and stakeholders, and local partners and staff;
- Researched current and future demographic and economic trends, reviewed planning documents to determine current and future land use and growth areas, and examined existing transportation options;
- Conducted a full review of the transit system, including both system and route-by-route overviews, and conducted an analysis of ridership, existing system infrastructure, and operational considerations;
- Organized and held public engagement events and activities, including open houses, stakeholder meetings, and online surveys, and obtained and summarized feedback from these activities in engagement reports, and;
- Reviewed previous plans and considered information gathered from the steps above to propose detailed service and infrastructure change options and critical, short-, and medium-to-long-term recommendations.

The development of the West Kootenay Transit Future Service Plan (TFSP) was highly collaborative and included staff and representatives from BC Transit, the City of Nelson, Regional District of Central Kootenay, Arrow and Slocan Lakes Community Services Society, Trail Transit, Selkirk College, the public and representatives from a wide array of stakeholder organizations.

Existing Transit

The transit routes within this plan area are operated by the City of Nelson, Arrow and Slocan Lakes Community Services Society, and Trail Transit. The system offers a mixture of services:

- *Conventional Transit* Fixed-route, fixed-schedule service
- *Paratransit* Flexible service paratransit connects rural communities with one another and to the conventional routes. Service is provided on-request with customers phoning to book.
- *Health Connections* Routes funded by Interior Health to enable access to non – emergency medical services that are not available in smaller rural communities.
- *Custom (handyDART)*

- Castlegar and Area is served by a distinct custom handyDART transit system provided by Trail Transit.
- Nelson and Area does not have a distinct handyDART service - the Paratransit service and Health Connections services fulfill handyDART-like duties.








Ridership in the West Kootenay Transit System has increased by 59 per cent since 2013 to 933,970 rides per year, while annual service hours have increased by 2 per cent relative to 2013 to 46,858 annual hours. Ridership growth has been based in external driving factors and is among the highest in British Columbia for communities of an equivalent size over this time period.

Service Design Standards and Performance Guidelines

Service Design Standards and Performance Guidelines for the overall West Kootenay Transit System were produced in February 2016. Pivotal to these guidelines is the classification of West Kootenay Transit's routes into service layers according to their characteristics: regional transit, local or connecting transit – either ridership based or coverage based – and targeted transit (special trips for work shifts, school bell times, or seasonal activities).

This TFSP includes a revised route classification for the Service Design Standards and Performance Guidelines, which introduces of a new service layer: the frequent transit route. This new classification is applied to route 2 within Nelson and route 31 within Castlegar, separating them from their previous “local transit” classification in order to support higher levels of resources to these high-demand routes.

The following colour scheme will be applied in some sections to distinguish between route classifications:





 Connector Route (98, 99, future)	 Paratransit Route
 Frequent Transit Route	 Health Connections Route
 Local Transit Route - Ridership	 Targeted Transit Route
 Local Transit Route - Coverage	

Public Engagement

Development of the transit priorities for this plan were supported by a comprehensive public engagement platform delivered in three phases. Each phase included events developed for different audiences, various tools to solicit input and feedback, and opportunities for one-on-one conversations with project staff. Engagement is critical in providing insights into community priorities and needs to enable the further shaping of service.

Phase 1 was comprised of targeted transit partner and stakeholder engagement through a series of workshops and meetings held from April to August 2019. Phase 2 consisted of a series of open houses held throughout the region at the end of November 2019 and supported by a comprehensive online survey. Phase 3 was student-focused campus engagement events held in collaboration with Selkirk College staff in January 2020.

In total over 1,600 people participated in the consultation. The majority (67%) completed online surveys, while over 500 people attended scheduled events.

Phase 1		Targeted Stakeholder workshops – 77 people
Phase 2		Open House Events 143 people
		Online Survey 1119 people
Phase 3		Campus Events 320 survey completions
Selkirk College		

Service Options

Based on the analysis of existing transit performance, existing and future community demographics and land use, and feedback from the public engagement process, the following options are presented to guide further investment in the system to continue to improve its effectiveness and community benefit.

Refinement of the service options has been informed by the results of Phase 2 Public Engagement process, including ongoing collaboration with the local operating companies, the RDCK, City of Nelson and other local partners.

These refined options are divided into three time horizons for implementation; critical (options which can be implemented immediately), short-term (2-3 years), medium-term (3-5 years) and longer-term for future consideration. Broadly the service directions contained in this plan can be described in three steps:

1. Recover ridership and fix critical capacity issues **immediate**
2. Address service inequities and ensure service can be reliably provided **short-term**
3. Implement service improvements of corresponding route classifications consistently across all regions. **medium and longer-term**

The ultimate order of implementation (including the opportunity to combine multiple options into a single option) will be confirmed in collaboration with West Kootenay Transit Committee, RDCK and City of Nelson as part of the three-year budget process, which occurs annually. It is worth noting that the implementation of some options is dependent upon the implementation of other options, since some implementations can only be realized by adding a new bus.

The following tables summarize the proposed Critical (immediate), short-term and medium-term service and infrastructure options for consideration. More detailed costs as well as longer term options are included in the full Service Review. A very modest reallocation of hour resources may be possible, but the upward trend in ridership, coupled with existing low levels of service on some routes make reallocation inadvisable.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and subsequent related shifts in demand impact the prioritization. The column 'Post COVID Impact' clarifies how each service change is impacted by COVID.

Table 1: Proposed Immediate Service Changes

Critical Fixes				
#	Proposed Service Change Option	Proposed Implementation Timeline	Resource Implications	Post COVID impact
1	99 Kootenay Connector Critical fix through two new round trips on Route 99 at peak times.	See Post-COVID impact	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	College dependent
2	10 Balfour Extension of the weekday 4:04 p.m. Route 10 trip to Balfour	Immediate (within 12 months)	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	Applies
3	98 Columbia Connector Introduction of two new weekday Route 98 trips to maintain connectivity with Route 99	See Post-COVID impact	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	College dependent
4	33 Selkirk College Introduction of two new weekday trips to connect the new Route 98 trips with Selkirk College	See Post-COVID impact	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	College dependent
5	2 Fairview One additional morning weekday peak overload trip on Route 2	See Post-COVID impact	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	College dependent

Table 2: Proposed Conventional and Paratransit Short-term Service Changes

Short-term Service Changes				
#	Proposed Service Change Option	Proposed Implementation Timeline	Resource Implications	Post COVID impact
6	53 Edgewood Additional run time to address ferry runtime issues	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	Applies
	Nakusp Local Adjust service times to maintain service levels	Short-Term (2-3 years)	No change	Applies
7	Salmo ↔ Nelson Introduce basic service between Salmo Ymir and Nelson; three round trips to coincide with high school start/end and office end time	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Some reallocation is possible, but expansion resources will still be required.	Applies
	15 Perrier Discontinue service (will be served by the new Salmo service)	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Apply resources to the new Nelson ↔ Salmo service	Applies
	72 Salmo ↔ Nelson Seek permission from Health Connections to adjust trip times and change the fare structure	Short-Term (2-3 years)	No change	Applies

Short-term Service Changes				
#	Proposed Service Change Option	Proposed Implementation Timeline	Resource Implications	Post COVID impact
8	Fruitvale ↔ Salmo Extend service Fruitvale to Salmo	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required	Applies
9	Castlegar Local Extend evening service within Castlegar to better align with service standards and equity for customers.	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	Applies
10	Castlegar Local Introduce additional peak service to distinguish route 33 from 98; improve route 32 Columbia and 36 Ootischenia;	See Post-COVID impact	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	College dependent
11	98 Columbia Connector All route 98 trips go to the College	See Post-COVID impact	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	College dependent
12	Castlegar Local Improve Castlegar Saturdays to address high demand and better align with service standards and equity for customers.	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	Applies
13	52 Naksup ↔ Slocan Align all trips to pass by New Denver Health Care Centre	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Very modest expansion resources are required.	Applies
	76 New Denver ↔ Nelson Align all Route 74 trips to pass by New Denver Health Care Centre	Short-Term (2-3 years)	No change	Applies
14a	20 Slocan Discontinue the first northbound trip and the last southbound trip on all service days	Short-Term (2-3 years)	This service change is cost neutral*. Any resources saved from this change will be reinvested back into the transit system.	Applies
14b	20 Slocan Saturday and Friday later evening service	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	Applies
15a	10 Balfour Discontinue the first northbound trip and the last southbound trip on all service days	Short-Term (2-3 years)	If combined with 14a this service change <u>may</u> be cost-neutral*.	Applies
15b	10 Balfour Saturday improvement to prevent reaching critical	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	Applies
16	Nelson Local Realign all Nelson routes to serve the new transit exchange at Victoria	Short-Term (2-3 years)	TBD	
17	76 Kaslo ↔ Balfour Introduce two additional round trips per week.	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	Applies
18	52 Naksup ↔ Slocan Introduce two additional round trips per week.	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	Applies
19	Kaslo ↔ Silverton Introduce 1 day/week in June, July and August	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	Applies
20	Feasibility study Explore options for introducing transit to Procter	Short-Term (2-3 years)	NA	Applies

*This service change is contingent on securing a satellite garage facility and assumes that the annual savings in service hours will directly offset the lease of buses required for spare purposes.

Table 3: Proposed Short-term Custom (handyDART) Service Changes

Short-term Custom (handyDART) Service Changes				
#	Proposed Service Change Option	Proposed Implementation Timeline	Resource Implications	Post COVID impact
21	Introduce dedicated weekday handyDART service to the Nelson Area.*	Short-Term (2-3 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required.	Applies

*Custom-like service would continue to be fulfilled in the rural Kootenay West Areas by Paratransit and Health Connections services.

Moving beyond the short term work must be undertaken to ensure that infrastructure is adequate to accommodate the service changes that are identified for the medium and long term of this plan. Many of these service changes are strategic expansions intended to make transit attractive to people currently driving. Achieving a mode shift from driving to transit among regular commuters is an effective way to reduce carbon emissions and address congestion and parking challenges. See table 4.

Table 4: Proposed Short-term Infrastructure Initiatives

Short-term Infrastructure Initiatives		
Initiative	Description	Post COVID impact
Create Satellite Garages	Village of Slocan – required for service change 11	Applies
	Balfour – required for service change 12	
Build or Expand Exchanges	New Exchange Downtown Nelson (planning work is underway).	Applies
	New Exchange Downtown Trail (planning work is commencing)	
Assess Operations and Maintenance Facility needs	Nelson Facilities Strategy	Applies
	Castlegar Facilities Strategy	
	Trail Facilities Strategy	
	Paratransit Facilities Strategy	
Expand and Build new Park'n'Rides	Expansion of the Playmor Junction Park'n'Ride	Applies
	Slocan City Park'n'Ride	
	Salmo Park'n'Ride –	
	Castlegar- Area Examine the need for a Park'n'Ride	
Bus Stops	ONGOING – Upgrades, Maintenance and opportunities for new stops	Applies

Table 5 Medium and Longer-term Service Changes

Medium and Long Term Conventional and Paratransit Service Changes			
#	Proposed Service Change Option	Proposed Implementation Timeline	Resource Implications
22 to 24	Trail, Castlegar and Nelson Local Weekday improvements to attract more residents to transit from driving, work towards equity and prepare to connect to new combined connector trips	Medium-term (3-5 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required.
25	Nelson ↔ Trail Connector Creation of the combined connector on weekdays for a one-seat ride between Nelson and Trail. 11 Round trips per weekday with consideration for airport connections – service day end extension.	Medium-term (3-5 years))	Yes. Expansion resources are required.
26	20 Slocan ↔ Playmor Add 2 round trips per weekday service to support improved access to the regional connector – reaching 7 round trips per day.	Medium-term (3-5 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required
27	10 North Shore Add 2 round trips per weekday to support improved access to the regional connector	Medium-term (3-5 years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required
28 to 30	Trail, Castlegar and Nelson Local Saturday improvements attract more residents to transit from driving, work towards equity and prepare to connect to new combined connector trips	Longer-term (5+ years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required
31	Nelson ↔ Trail Connector Introduction of the combined connector on Saturdays and the addition of one later trip for a total of four round trips.	Longer-term (5+ years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required
32	Nelson ↔ Salmo Expand weekday trips from 3 to 4 and introduce 3 trips on Saturdays.	Longer-term (5+ years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required
33 to 35	Trail, Castlegar and Nelson Local Introduction of Sunday urban service (at 2020 Saturday levels)	Longer-term (5+ years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required
36	Nelson ↔ Trail Introduction of the combined connector on Sundays	Longer-term (5+ years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required
37	10 North Shore Introduction of Sunday Service	Longer-term (5+ years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required
38	20 Slocan ↔ Playmor Introduction of a Sunday Service	Longer-term (5+ years)	Yes. Expansion resources are required

Table 6: Information Proposals

Information Proposals		
Category	Descriptions	Post COVID impact
Updated Marketing Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued support for hardcopy information Including additional budget for biannual or quarterly printed targeted transit information in rural and small villages served by paratransit. Supporting the provision of high contrast larger format schedule information at bus stops with schedule posters to assist customers who are vision impaired 	Applies
Raising awareness of Health Connections service days with Interior Health Facilities	BC Transit will support West Kootenay Local Governments in advocating for more informed scheduling of Interior Health medical appointments for residents originating in communities that are reliant on Health Connections routes.	Applies
Awareness campaigns within the Cities	<p>BC Transit will work with the City of Nelson, RDCK (Castlegar), and RDKB (Trail) to boost awareness and consideration to local transit service along city residents.</p> <p>Timing: Campaigns can coincide with major infrastructure improvements or service changes.</p>	Applies

Service improvements will be integrated into the Three Year Transit Improvement Process (TIP), which is updated on an annual basis. Infrastructure proposals will inform capital plans for both BC Transit, the City of Nelson, the Regional District of Central Kootenay and Regional District of Kootenay Boundary. Prior to implementation of service changes, BC Transit planning staff will work with staff at these three organizations and the relevant constituent local governments to ensure service improvements appropriately reflect local needs. Additional targeted engagement may be required.

New emerging technologies will have a direct impact on future mobility within the West Kootenays. SmartBus, BC Transit's Low Carbon Fleet Program, mobility as a service, autonomous vehicles, and other emerging bus technologies have the potential to reshape how people choose to move throughout their communities

To achieve the goals of this TFSP, capital and operating investments in the transit system will be required over the next five years and beyond. Dependent on COVID, the annual operating costs based on the critical and short term proposals are projected to increase by over 12,000 conventional hours, representing a 25 per cent increase over 2019 service hours. Service changes which remain relevant in the critical and short term inspite of COVID represent about 7,500 hours for a 16 per cent increase over 2019 service hours. An additional 2,500 hours are identified to establish a new custom handyDART service. The plan also calls for critical and short term capital investments that include:

- Up to additional 11 buses added to the transit fleet
- Infrastructure initiatives related to two downtown transit exchanges, four operations and maintenance centres, two satellite garage facilities, park'n'rides, and improvements to customer amenities at transit stops