FR Jelfs <j0458@telus.net>

Core Messages for Retaining the BCR Line as an Operating Railway:

1 message

FR Jelfs <j0458@telus.net> 2 November 2025 at 20:32

To:

Squamish First Nation
District of Squamish
Village of Pemberton
Resort Municipality of Whistler
Lower Stl'atl'imx Tribal Council
Lil'wat First Nation
Lillooet Tribal Council
District of Lillooet
Xaxli'p First Nation
Bonaparte First Nation
Village of Clinton
District of 100 Mile House
City of Williams Lake
City of Quesnel
City of Prince George
Lheidli T'enneh First Nation

Dear Mayors, Chiefs, Councillors, Directors, and Administrators:

RE: Core Messages for Retaining the BCR Line as an Operating Railway:

Further to our email of August 15, 2025, Transport Action British Columbia (TABC - Transport Action British Columbia – Towards a Province-Wide Sustainable and Equitable Transportation System), is providing a rationale for the retention of the BCR rail corridor as a viable freight and passenger rail system.

We understand that a roundtable of Municipal, Regional District, First Nations, and MLAs has convened and we are willing to participate, in some capacity. We wish to thank those involved in establishing the roundtable for the speed with which disparate groups have come together. This is excellent progress.

We also wish to note that, while retention of the BCR rail link is an immediate concern, there exists a broader - "Nation Building" - need for a national rail transportation strategy and policies that combine the national interest with private sector interests.

Our reasons for supporting the retention of the BCR rail link follow.

1. Reconciliation:

The line runs through several First Nations. Retaining it as an operating railway could allow First Nations partners to beneficially participate in the operations, maintenance and expansion of rail services as has happened elsewhere in Canada.

2. Resiliency:

Much of Canada's national logistic and supply-chain lacks critical redundancy which places us at extreme risk, particularly in B.C.'s mountainous regions.

Climate change effects (atmospheric rivers, wildfires) have resulted in the closure of the Fraser Canyon rail lines. The BCR route provides an alternative, all-Canadian rail route from Vancouver to the Interior of B.C. and then to the rest of Canada.

A Hope Slide or Chilcotin River disaster west or north of Hope could completely sever the Lower Mainland's land transportation connections to the rest of Canada.

As a rail line, the BCR route is not subject to the vagaries of road travel in which a highway can be closed for several hours due to collisions, as happens regularly on the Sea-to-Sky highway.

It is less susceptible to weather challenges such as fog or precipitation. However, snow and land slips will be an ongoing operational issue. These risks can be minimised with modern snow removal equipment and avalanche detection and snow sheds typically used in other mountainous areas.

Saving the existing BCR line allows future examination of a rail connection between Clinton and Ashcroft. This connection would allow CPKC traffic to access Kitimat and Prince Rupert. Shipping can access the Pacific Ocean from those ports, without crossing U.S. waters, a potential risk to Trans-Pacific trade from Vancouver, if the U.S. decides to abrogate the Oregon Treaty. This would combine resiliency with robust redundancy and is in the national interest.

CN is also proposing discontinuance of the rail connection from Dawson Creek into Alberta. This connection could prove useful for shipment of mineral, agricultural and forest products with an independent operator and should be analysed for potential future business before abandonment. Again, a solid investment in needed redundancy.

3. Diversity of Connections:

An additional rail route allows for more competition in the rail transport industry, forcing Canada's mainline railways (CPKC, CN) to be more amenable to shipper concerns about quality of service and delivery timetables.

Regulation allowing an operator of the BCR line access to port and transhipment facilities that may only be accessible through a competing railway (trackage rights) is mandatory.

4. Equity:

There is extremely limited scheduled bus service in the area served by the section of the route up for discontinuance. Those who cannot or do not drive or do not have access to a motor vehicle have limited or no mobility options. Passenger service on the BCR route would provide travel options to these disenfranchised British Columbians and those who chose not to drive.

The BCR line also links to communities that do not have easy road access. Passenger service would connect these communities to health, education, social services, and sporting events and facilities provided in larger centres.

Highway usage (commercial and passenger) is heavily subsidised. According to the Victoria Transport Policy Institute, the provincial government subsidy to highway construction and operations is $800 / capita / year (https://www.vtpi.org/ctebc.pdf). The same report shows minimal provincial contributions to intercity bus and none to intercity rail.

Re-allocating a portion of this subsidy to the BC Rail line (and public transportation in general) would improve access to remote communities along the route and provide travel opportunities for those who do not or cannot drive. This includes youth eschewing car ownership and a rapidly increasing seniors cohort seeking mobility alternatives.

And it would send a signal that the provincial government is serious about re-balancing transportation expenditures more equitably by mode.

5. Environment:

It is conceded that rail is a more efficient way to move goods and large volumes of people. Removing motor vehicles from congested roads helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A Car-go-Rail service would allow travellers to take their car with them to their destination, and avoid a, potentially, long drive.

In the BCR corridor, expanding highways would be expensive and environmentally challenging. A more environmentally sound option would be all-day, regional passenger rail to Squamish, with some trip extensions to Whistler. Long distance passenger rail service would overlay the regional service.

The rail corridor exists, and the environmental costs of its construction have long since been accommodated.

6. Economic:

Supplies for mining, oil and gas, and forestry projects and delivery of finished products are potential lines of business to a revitalised rail operation.

Rail-based tourism operations currently use the line (The Rocky Mountaineer) and the potential for such operation was detailed in the BC Rail Revitalisation Agreement signed by the provincial government and CN.

The success of the former Royal Hudson train operations show that properly operated “specialty” trains may again be feasible. Skagway, Alaska’s White Pass and Yukon excursion trains for cruise ship passengers may be a model to analyse.

7. Publicly Owned in BC:

The rail line is owned by the citizens of B.C. Policy and operating decisions can be made locally, without being dictated by head offices in Calgary or Montreal or by Wall Street short term profit takers.

8. Exists:

The line is there and in use. Building it now would be expensive and probably not feasible.

Thank you for your time. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

Rick Jelfs
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CC -
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Patrick Weiler - MP West Vancouver-Sunshine Coast-Sea to Sky Country
Lorne Doerkson - MLA - Cariboo-Chilcotin
Tony Luck - MLA - Fraser-Nicola
Lynn Block - MLA - West Vancouver-Capilano