
Integrated Intercity Public Transportation in B.C.

1 message

FR Jelfs <j0458@telus.net>

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To: TT.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Cc: Bowinn.Ma.MLA@leg.bc.ca, Brittany.Anderson.MLA@leg.bc.ca, George.Anderson.MLA@leg.bc.ca

The Honourable Mike Farnworth,
Minister of Transportation and Transit

Dear Minister Farnworth,

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Transportation and Transit.

Transport Action British Columbia (TABC) has almost 50 years of advocating for improved public transportation in B.C. We are affiliated with the national organisation, Transport Action Canada. Both organisations were once known as Transport 2000 Canada/B.C. We look forward to working with your government on important public transportation issues facing the province.

Your Ministry was renamed Transportation and Transit. We hope the name change signifies a commitment to major transit initiatives, in addition to those currently in progress.

A major priority for your government must be to address the lack of adequate intercity public transportation in the province. The current system is ad hoc, disjointed, uncoordinated, and often non-existent. Rural and remote areas are particularly hard hit.

Filling the gaps in the intercity public transportation system will require the same level of commitment that the Barrett government provided to urban public transit in the 1970's.

As a starting point, we recommend the "Connecting B.C." ([Connecting BC: A Ten-Year Vision and Investment Plan for Public Transit throughout BC | bcfed.ca](#)) proposal produced by the Canadian Centre for Policy Initiatives and the B.C. Federation of Labour. Their vision is a province-wide network of public transportation, allowing residents to travel the province without the need for a private automobile. We are supportive of this proposal but are not affiliated with either organisation.

A province-wide public transportation system must be planned, coordinated, integrated, promoted, financially supported, and overseen by the province. The integrated system must include existing providers and all modes; BC Transit, BC Ferries, BC Bus North, TransLink, VIA Rail, other public and private bus operators, and a return of passenger rail on Vancouver Island, in the former BC Rail corridor, and in the Fraser Valley. This will require co-operating and co-ordinating with First Nations, regional districts, municipalities, and the federal government.

Your predecessor pointed out that his government had funded intercity public transportation engagement and needs studies by the Northern Development Initiative Trust, Island Coastal Economic Trust, and the Economic Trust of Southern B.C. In addition, the Highway 16 Transportation Action Plan, BC Bus North, and Ministry work with Fraser Valley Rail and the Island Corridor Foundation show that much of the groundwork for a province-wide public transportation system is done.

There are existing models of integrated intercity public transit systems in Canada.

1. The Ontario Northland Transportation Commission provides rail and bus service in Northern Ontario with extensions south to Toronto, east to Ottawa and west to Winnipeg. Rail service from Toronto to Timmins is being restored. This restoration may be a model to consider for restoration of rail in the BCR corridor to Prince George with connections to Prince Rupert and Jasper/Edmonton.
2. Metrolinx provides integrated rail and bus services in the Toronto centred region. It also supports a single fare payment system across several transit operators, including Ottawa. This is a model that could be considered for B.C. – a single fare card usable across modes and authorities, including B.C. Ferries walk-ons.

3. Alberta is developing an aggressive plan for a provincial intercity rail and bus system, with links to the National Parks. Given the amount of cross-border travel between our provinces, we urge you to work with Alberta to ensure that connections to B.C. are considered.

Working within the overarching, province-wide structure discussed above, we have several project suggestions for consideration.

1. Much work has been done in the Highway 16 corridor to improve transit, but the service is not well coordinated. Our Prince Rupert member developed a handout of Prince Rupert to Prince George services which clearly shows this. All carriers leave at the same time. Westbound Mondays has 3 trips; westbound Tuesday none. Northern Health service prioritises medical needs and is not a true common carrier service. Ideally a re-instated North Vancouver to Prince George rail service could connect to Via's Skeena, providing a direct route from the mid-North to Vancouver, serving several isolated communities.

EASTBOUND PRINCE RUPERT → TO PRINCE GEORGE		WESTBOUND PRINCE GEORGE → TO PRINCE RUPERT	
SUN	: VIA RAIL TO PRINCE GEORGE - 8AM	SUN	: NORTHERN HEALTH BUS TO PRINCE RUPERT - 8AM
MON	: NORTHERN HEALTH BUS TO PRINCE GEORGE - 8AM	MON	: VIA RAIL TO PRINCE RUPERT - 8AM BC BUS NORTH TO PRINCE RUPERT - 8AM NORTHERN HEALTH BUS TO PRINCE RUPERT - 8AM
TUES	: BC BUS NORTH TO PG - 8AM (WITH PORT EDWARD - 8:15AM) FRIENDSHIP HOUSE BUS (TO TERRACE ONLY) - 10AM	TUES	: FRIENDSHIP HOUSE BUS (TERRACE TO RUPERT ONLY) - 2:30PM
WED	: VIA RAIL TO PRINCE GEORGE - 8AM NORTHERN HEALTH BUS TO PRINCE GEORGE - 8AM	WED	: NORTHERN HEALTH BUS TO PRINCE RUPERT - 8AM
THURS	: FRIENDSHIP HOUSE BUS (TO TERRACE ONLY) - 10AM NORTHERN HEALTH BUS TO PRINCE GEORGE - 8AM	THURS	: VIA RAIL TO PRINCE RUPERT - 8AM BC BUS NORTH TO PRINCE RUPERT - 8AM FRIENDSHIP HOUSE BUS (TERRACE TO RUPERT ONLY) - 2:30PM
FRI	: VIA RAIL TO PRINCE GEORGE - 8AM BC BUS NORTH TO PG - 8AM (WITH PORT EDWARD - 8:15AM)	FRI	: NORTHERN HEALTH BUS TO PRINCE RUPERT - 8AM
SAT	: NORTHERN HEALTH BUS TO PRINCE GEORGE - 8AM	SAT	: VIA RAIL TO PRINCE RUPERT - 8AM

We note that the Northern Development Initiative Trust still does not include Via Rail or B.C. Ferries as public transportation providers ([Bus the North | Connecting you to the people and places that matter.](#)) in the north. This is an oversight that should be rectified. Information on all intercity transportation providers should be included as a step to information integration.

2. The NDP's election platform promised expanded bus service across the province. The experience of setting up BC Bus North enables this project to be expedited. The services and terminals used must be co-ordinated with other providers so customers can easily transfer between services. As it stands, various operators may serve the same city but use different terminals and may not serve the local transit service exchange. Thus, in Kamloops, EBus and RiderExpress have separate terminals and neither serves the University transit exchange which is about a kilometre from their respective terminals. Persuading intercity carriers to serve local transit exchanges is another step in integrating systems.

3. Extend the West Coast Express to Abbotsford and connect the Langley SkyTrain to Abbotsford and Chilliwack via the former B.C.E.R. line. An all day, regional, rail service could relieve pressure on Highway 1 and reduce the need for expensive highway expansion. Alberta is justifying its extensive rail and bus plan as a way to reduce costly highway expansion.

4. Vancouver Island presents a unique opportunity to provide reparations and economic development to and in partnership with First Nations through the much-needed restoration and revitalisation of passenger and freight rail on the former E&N railway. A phased approach with initial service between Victoria and Nanaimo, the strongest market, seems a logical start with a new station at Cassiar/Nanaimo to connect with air services. Rail would serve as an alternative to continuous Malahat highway expansion and provide year-round service (Vancouver Island Connector and Tofino Bus services shut down in the winter). It could also replace the current hotch-potch of Island intercity services cobbled together by the regional districts and BC Transit. An Island Transit Authority (like TransLink) is worth considering.

5. Improve transit connections and transfer facilities at BC Ferries terminals. Routes to consider include Tsawwassen-South Surrey/White Rock-Langley, Duke Point-Downtown Nanaimo, and Swartz Bay-Langford. Encouraging transit use to ferry terminals reduces vehicle use and congestion at terminals and allows customers to avoid vehicle charges; a particular concern as B.C. Ferries is discussing 30% fare hikes by 2028.

6. Work with the federal government, to relocate the BNSF tracks from the Semiahmoo Peninsula waterfront to a bypass in the Highway 99 corridor. A Colebrook rail flyover/under would minimize delays to Amtrak passenger and freight trains caused by Roberts Bank rail traffic.

The BNSF rail line is at risk from derailment-threatening landslides and climate change storms and tide surges. It is also vulnerable to earthquakes. Long coal trains regularly block access (including by first responders) to Crescent Beach homes and the White Rock waterfront. There are also safety issues with people trespassing on the tracks in White Rock.

Relocation – though expensive – is a much-needed infrastructure hardening that enables returning lands to the Semiahmoo First Nation, while permitting faster Amtrak passenger train services and opening the door for future high-speed rail (HSR).

These projects will be costly. However, Better Island Transit estimates the province subsidises highway expenditures by \$800/capita/year ([Transportation Expenditures Compared](#)). A 10% reduction in this subsidy/capita yields ~\$400,000,000 (\$80.00 X 5,000,000 population) annually that could be applied to improving intercity public transportation.

And as fuel tax revenues decline due to taxpayer funded EV conversion, alternate funding sources must be found. In addition to a subsidized purchase price, EVs pay no equivalent to fuel taxes for their road use, even though they are heavier, causing more road wear and potentially deadlier crashes. An annual weight/mileage surcharge on ICBC premiums may be one funding alternative.

Your predecessor responded to letters discussing returning passenger rail to the BCR corridor with the oft heard statement that rail does not cover costs. No transportation system covers its costs, as indicated by the massive subsidy to highways in the Better Island Transit report. We never hear of a highway proposal being rejected because it will not cover its costs.

Thank you for your time. Feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance.

CC: The Honourable Bowinn Ma - Minister of Infrastructure
The Honourable Brittny Anderson – Minister of State for Local Government and Rural Communities
George Anderson – Parliamentary Secretary for Transit

Sincerely,

Rick Jelfs,
Secretary – Transport Action British Columbia
J0458@telus.net
<https://bc.transportaction.ca/>