

District of Squamish Resolution
for 2026 Regional Local Government Association and UBCM Conventions:

PRESERVATION AND REVITALIZATION OF STRATEGIC PROVINCIAL RAIL CORRIDOR

WHEREAS loss of the Squamish-Cariboo rail line which may ensue from CN Rail's plans announced in July 2025 to terminate its lease would result in shippers being forced to higher cost truck transport, increased public highway maintenance costs, loss of passenger (tourist or commuter) rail opportunity, higher GHG emissions, loss of transportation corridor redundancy affecting Western Canada, and constrained regional economic development;

AND WHEREAS rail discontinuance policies applying to the former BC Rail line do not necessarily take into account regional and long-term transportation needs and priorities and might frustrate economic viability of potential new short line operators, while infrastructure funding solutions for this valuable rail line's maintenance are lacking;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the provincial and federal governments be encouraged to consider a new regional authority or ownership structure including First Nations and transition to a short line operator model to support regional enterprise while maintaining the strategic redundancy of the line;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT senior governments be encouraged to consider potential public-private rail line maintenance funding solutions.

BACKGROUND

CN announced plans to discontinue its lease of the former BC Rail line from milepost 43 at Squamish to milepost 257 at 100 Mile House in its 2025 Three-Year Rail Network Plan. [1] The company must follow the terms and conditions contained in the 2004 BC Rail Revitalization Agreement. The line would be returned to BC Rail Co., a provincial Crown corporation. Starting July 2026, interested parties may apply to assume operations for existing or new train services. Should no party come forward, the corridor could be sold for net salvage value. [2] [3]

Railway service cutback and maintenance concerns, safety issues and increased highway maintenance cost burdens to the public resulting from reduced rail freight service have been voiced by corridor communities for some time. Highway 97 improvement needs have been highlighted in several recent BC Chamber of Commerce policy resolutions. [4]

Natural resource industries and tourism are critical for rail corridor communities. Economic development opportunity can be handicapped for generations with loss of rail service, shifting development and investment away elsewhere.

Rail can be the only cost-effective shipping option for heavy freight. Highway trucking is prohibitively expensive for the mining industry. (The Squamish-Cariboo rail line was at one time the busiest transport corridor for gold ore in the world.)

For forest product firms, transportation alone can represent about one-third of production costs. In more than one B.C. Interior location, lack of secure rail transportation arrangements has been an obstacle for investment in new pellet plants. Over the long term, active forest management strategies to restore productive, healthy forests in the Lillooet-Cariboo-Chilcotin regions will require reliable, affordable transportation to commodity markets.

A Forest Products Association of Canada submission to the 2014 Canada Transportation Act Review recommended “*Strengthening the Rail Line Discontinuance requirements to ensure they address the economic impacts related to the communities affected by the discontinuance.*” [5]

Rocky Mountaineer’s *Rainforest to Gold Rush* rail tours program, benefiting corridor communities Whistler and Quesnel, and other potential tourist train opportunities would be lost in case the line were discontinued.

Restoration of passenger rail service has been a longstanding wish of corridor communities. [6] Prior to being phased out in 2002, BC Rail’s ‘Cariboo Prospector’ passenger train service had offered essential mobility (including access to services, groceries, etc.) for First Nation and other small communities along the line.

The Western Transportation Advisory Committee (WESTAC) Compass Reports for 2025 and 2026 highlight issues of insufficient rail and port capacity, lack of redundancy in routes, and challenges posed by natural disasters. To build long term resiliency, a coordinated, long-term infrastructure plan is advocated which would address improving rail infrastructure including in alternative trade corridors. [7] [8]

The WESTAC reports highlight Burrard Inlet's Second Narrows Rail Bridge as critical infrastructure insufficient for handling increased exports from North Shore port facilities and a choke point hindering transportation network performance. Sending northbound empty railcars on the BC Rail line rather than across the Second Narrows Rail Bridge and east and north on the CN mainline can be part of a strategy for alleviating rail bridge congestion and risks affecting the Port of Vancouver.

Preserving and revitalizing the BC Rail corridor as available alternate route and connection to Squamish tidewater facilities with currently underutilized capacities could be part of a coordinated, long-term infrastructure plan. Abandoning the Squamish-Cariboo line and the transportation corridor redundancy it offers would be an irreversible mistake.

A Reconciliation lens must be applied to the challenge and opportunity of preserving and revitalizing the BC Rail corridor. First Nations are increasingly owners, partners and managers in natural resource industry and tourism businesses of the corridor.

The 2025 BC First Nations Transportation Action Plan report highlights the Tsal'ah shuttle serving the Anderson-Seton lakes corridor [9] – a transit service now at risk – and refers to a successful Indigenous-owned short line railway in Eastern Canada. [10]

Federal and provincial rail discontinuance and divestiture policies need to support more robust supply chains, people mobility, tourism growth and transportation emissions reduction. [11]

Current policy requiring that the Squamish-Cariboo line be offered for sale, lease, or transfer before outright abandonment should be complemented by active support for transition to a regional railway authority, perhaps indigenous-owned, a short line operator model and public-private funding partnerships to support railway corridor infrastructure maintenance.

Such a collaborative strategy might not only preserve railway operations to benefit the region and the province but also introduce competition in rail freight services where there is none. [12]

[1] CN Three-Year Rail Network Plan. <https://www.cn.ca/-/media/files/about-cn/company-information/three-year-plan-en.pdf>

[2] *Revitalization Agreement – British Columbia Railway Company and BC Rail Partnership* https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/reports-and-reference/reports-and-studies/planning-strategy-economy/transportation-reporting/bctfa/bcrc/bcrail_revitalization.pdf

[3] *Transfer and Discontinuance of Railway Line Operations and Railway Track Determinations: A Resource Tool*. Canadian Transportation Agency <https://otc-cta.gc.ca/eng/publication/transfer-and-discontinuance-railway-line-operations-and-railway-track-determinations-resource-tool>

[4] Why Is It So Hard to Move People and Goods Through and Within British Columbia? (2025)
<https://bcchamber.org/policy-search/why-it-so-hard-move-people-goods-through-and-within-british-columbia-2025>

Investing in Highway Infrastructure in North-Central BC (2025)

<https://bcchamber.org/policy-search/investing-highway-infrastructure-north-central-bc-2025>

Building a Safe Transportation Corridor for Central and Northern Communities (2024)

<https://bcchamber.org/policy-search/building-safe-transportation-corridor-central-and-northern-communities-2024>

Driving B.C.'S Economy: Improving Highway Infrastructure in Northern B.C. (2023)

<https://bcchamber.org/policy-search/driving-bcs-economy-improving-highway-infrastructure-northern-bc-2023>

[5] Submission to the Review Panel on the Statutory Review of the *Canada Transportation Act*. FPAC 2014. <https://mcmillan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2014-12-18-FPAC-Submission-2015-CTA-Review.pdf>

[6] *Passenger Rail Service from North Vancouver to Prince George*. Resolution B14 (2018) presented by District of Lillooet and endorsed by UBCM: <https://www.ubcm.ca/convention-resolutions/resolutions/resolutions-database/passenger-rail-service-north-vancouver>

[7] *Compass Report 2025*. Western Transportation Advisory Council.

https://www.westac.com/application/files/3917/3765/2288/2025_Compass_Report.pdf

[8] *Compass Report 2026*. Western Transportation Advisory Council.

https://www.westac.com/application/files/4317/6972/3227/2026_Compass_Report_Final.pdf

[9] *BC First Nations Transportation Action Plan*. BC Assembly of First Nations.

<https://www.bcafn.ca/sites/default/files/2025-11/DRAFT%20BC%20First%20Nations%20Transportation%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

[10] Tshiuetin Rail Transportation Inc.

<https://cib-bic.ca/en/projects/trade-and-transport/tshiuetin-railway/>

[11] *The Critical Role of Shortline Railways in Canadian Supply Chains*. Railway Association of Canada, 2022. <https://www.railcan.ca/canadas-shortline/>

https://www.railcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/RAC-Shortline_Report-2022-EN.pdf

[12] *Rethinking Canada's Rail Discontinuance Policies – Formal Rail Bank Needed*. Transport

Action Canada 2024. <https://ontario.transportation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Rethinking-Canadas-rail-infrastructure-policy-final-1.pdf>