



What We Want and Don't

British Columbia needs a planning process that can quickly and efficiently develop interregional transit services which serve community needs and support strategic goals.

15 February 2024

What We Want

BIT advocates for frequent and affordable interregional and rural public transit on Vancouver Island. We want non-drivers to receive their fair share of transport infrastructure investments. Specifically, by 2025 we want at least hourly bus service between central and south Vancouver Island, with \$5 maximum fares so trips between Nanaimo and Victoria would cost \$10 or less.

We want governments to recognize the important roles that public transit plays in an efficient and fair transportation system, and establish a planning process to quickly provide transit services on all major travel corridors. We want policies that can achieve targets to increase transit travel. Specifically, we want:

- BC Transit and the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) to establish an interregional transit support program.
- A planning system that can quickly, efficiently and responsively create new interregional and rural bus routes.
- Adequate interregional transit funding to achieve targets and equitably satisfy non-drivers' mobility needs.
- MoTI to consider frequent and affordable bus service as a solution to traffic problems such as on the Malahat Highway.

What We Don't Want

We don't want to leave people behind! We don't want governments to ignore their responsibility to provide multimodal travel options. We don't want slow and ineffective transit planning.

Specifically, we don't want the delay and waste described in the [Interregional Transit Service Discussion Document](#), illustrated to the right. In 2012 the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) identified Duncan-Nanaimo as a priority transit route but took a decade to plan #70 service, which began in 2022, due to a slow and costly process.

We don't want governments to continue to overlook and underfund basic bus service. In 2023 the BC government invested only \$5 million in new rural bus services but \$18 million on E&N rail corridor planning and more than \$2 billion annually on interregional highways.

#70 Planning Timeline



BC Transit took a decade and hundreds of thousands of dollars to plan the #70 Nanaimo-Duncan bus route. More efficient planning is needed to achieve our goals.

What Is Needed

To be responsive British Columbia must establish a quick, nimble and responsive interregional transit planning process. It should ensure that every major highway has public transit, with service levels that reflect community needs, strategic goals and fairness for non-drivers.

The table below shows an interregional transit level of service (LOS) rating system that can be used to define service quality targets comparable to those for highway. Major congested corridor such as Nanaimo-Victoria, should have LOS A or B (hourly or better) in order to attract travellers who would otherwise drive; the Sooke-Victoria and Fraser Valley corridors achieve more than 20% peak-period transit mode share, demonstrating that this is achievable. Less busy routes, such as between Nanaimo Port, Alberni and Campbell River, should have LOS C or D (multiple daily trips). Rural areas may have LOS E (multiple weekly trips).

Interregional Public Transit Level of Service Ratings

Level of Service	Frequency & Speed	Affordability	Comfort & Amenities	Overall Utility	Transit Mode Share Targets
A	25+ daily trips, as fast as driving.	Much cheaper than driving	Very good. Free internet, on-board washrooms, etc.	Very high. Attracts discretionary travellers who could drive.	15-25%
B	10-24 daily trips.	Cheaper than driving.	Attractive stations with washrooms.	High. Suitable for most trips.	12-20%
C	5-9 daily trips.	Slightly cheaper than auto.	Uncrowded. All passengers seated.	Moderate. Suitable for many trips.	6-12%
D	1-4 daily trips.	Costs comparable to driving.	Clean and comfortable.	Low. Suitable for some trips.	3-6%
E	Less than daily trips.	Slightly more costly than driving.	Vehicles and stations are safe.	Low. Suitable for few trips.	1-3%
F	No transit service.	Much more costly than driving	No amenities.	Non-drivers lack independent mobility.	0%

This table defines transit service quality factors and their mode share targets. To provide independent mobility for non-drivers and attract discretionary travellers who would otherwise drive generally requires LOS A or B.

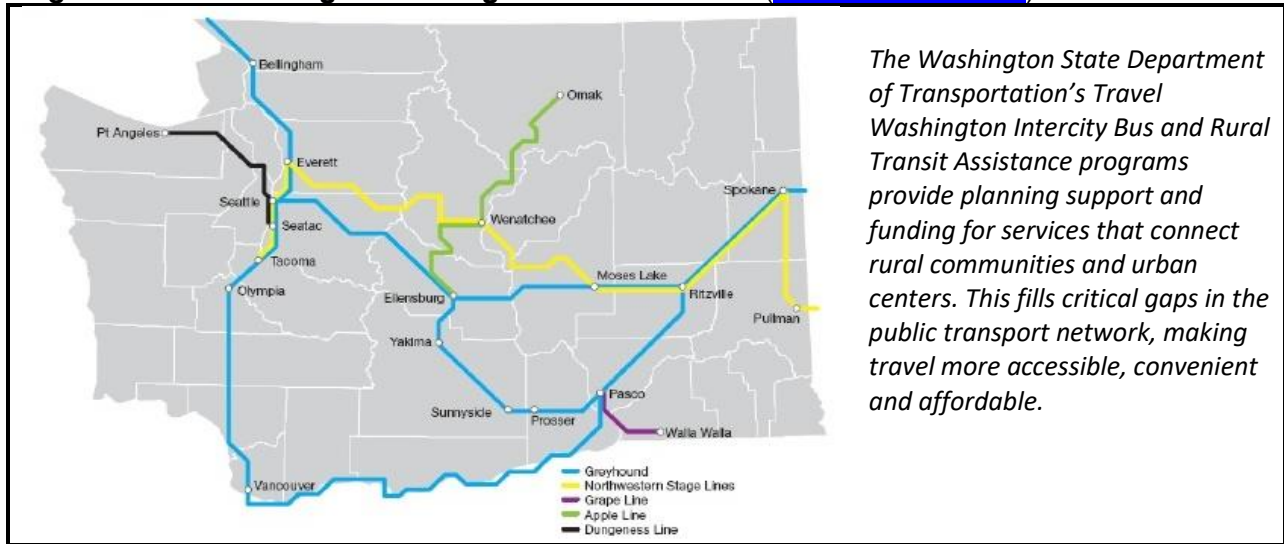
BC needs a quick and efficient process by which transportation agencies can establish service quality targets, identify potential routes, establish funding and implement service. Planning should respond to future needs; for example, if buses are regularly crowded peak-period service should increase, and if mode shares are below targets transit agencies should identify service improvements and TDM incentives to build ridership.

BC needs funding systems that recognizes the provincial-wide benefits that interregional transit provides, including affordable basic mobility for non-drivers, reduced roadway traffic problems, and progress toward provincial travel and emission reduction targets, and so deserves significant provincial support.

Examples of Success

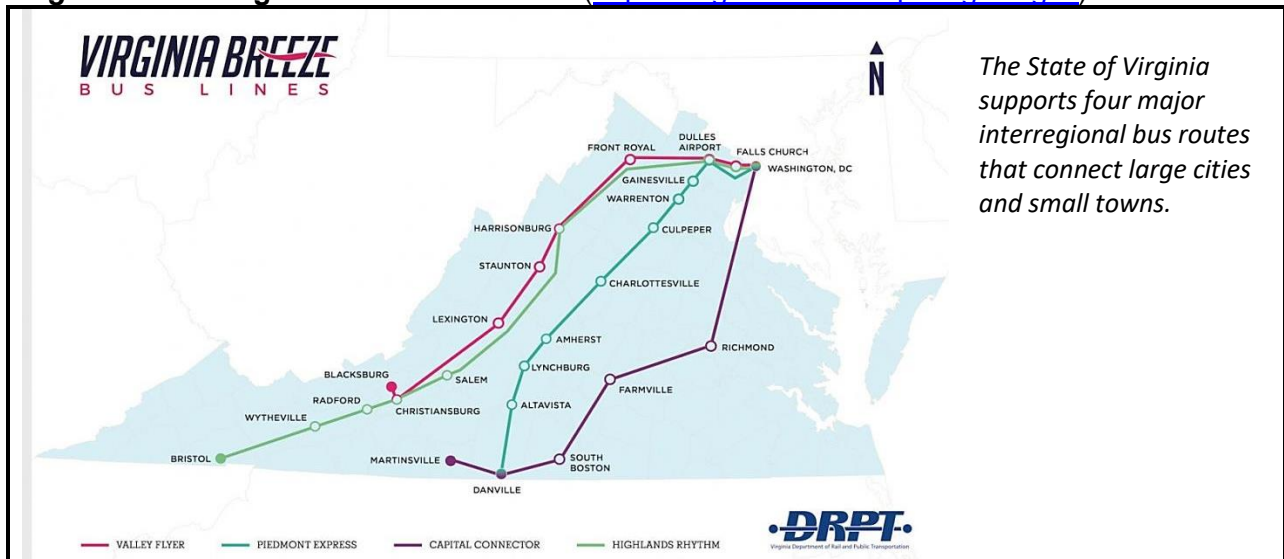
Other jurisdictions are better at providing rural and interregional public transit services. For example, the Washington State Department of Transportation's Travel Washington Intercity Bus and Rural Transit Assistance programs provide planning support and funding for services that connect rural communities to major transportation hubs and urban centers.

Figure 1 Washington Interregional Bus Network (<https://bit.ly/3rJcl9n>)



The state of Virginia supports four interregional bus services, as illustrated below.

Figure 2 Virginia Breeze Bus Lines (<https://virginiabreeze.drpt.virginia.gov>)



Other provinces and states have similar programs to support interregional public transit.

An Action Plan

Rural and interregional (long-distance) public transit receive little support in British Columbia. The province has no interregional transit service performance targets, planning programs or ongoing funding. Public transit planning is initiated by regional districts and local BC Transit boards which perceive only a small portion of the total benefits provided by long-distance transit services that operate outside their jurisdictions.

In 1979 the BC Ministry of Highways became the Ministry of Transportation and Highways (MoTI), which expanded its responsibilities to include all travel modes, including rural and interregional transit, but little actually changed. The Ministry still collects little data on non-auto travel demands or travel conditions, and devotes a tiny portion of its budget to non-auto modes. This is unfair and inefficient: it ignores the needs of travellers who cannot, should not or prefer not to drive, and fails to support cost-effective multimodal improvements, such as frequent and affordable transit to reduce Island Highway congestion and high crash problems.

To establish frequent and affordable bus service between central and south Vancouver Island by 2025 will require the following actions:

1. Service requests by regional districts and regional BC Transit boards (Spring 2024)
2. BC Transit develops a specific proposal with funding estimates (Summer 2024)
3. Region and BC Transit develop an operational and funding plan (Fall 2024)
4. Include that funding plan in the 2025 provincial budget (Winter 2025).

Advocates should lobby regional district and regional BC Transit board members to request this service, and provincial officials including MLAs and the Minister of Transportation to fund it. The MoTI has good reasons to finance frequent and affordable public transit service on this corridor as a fast and cost-effective way to reduce Malahat Highway traffic problems and achieve other provincial goals including fairness and affordability, traffic safety, emission reductions and rural economic development.

To establish more and better integrated transit service on other Vancouver Island roads and British Columbia highways, the provincial government should establish targets for interregional public transit services, create a department dedicated to interregional transit planning, integrate public transport services, and provide reliable funding, as in other jurisdictions.

Conclusions

British Columbians need a multimodal transportation system that serves everyone's mobility needs, including interregional travellers who cannot, should not or prefer not to drive. More frequent and affordable intercity bus service is essential for achieving these goals.

There is currently no effective process for developing interregional public transit services. Creating frequent and affordable public transit on Vancouver Island will require lobbying local officials to request such services and provincial officials to plan and fund it.

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