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Provincial Sustainable Transportation Policy Recommendations

14 July 2024

Summary

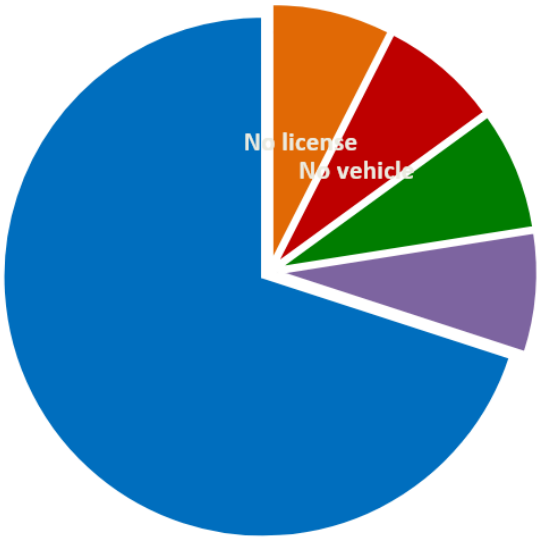
This document describes provincial policies that can help create a more efficient, fair and sustainable transportation system in British Columbia.

Context

Provincial governments significantly affect how people can and do travel. During the current budget year the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) is spending about $3.4 billion (about $685 per capita) highways, while BC Transit and TransLink are spending about $1.1 billion (about $215 per capita) on urban transit services. Provincial policies also affect local government transportation planning and investment decisions, including local expenditures on sidewalks, bikeways, and roads, plus parking requirements imposed on property owners.

In a typical community, 20-40% of travellers cannot, should not or prefer not to drive, as illustrated below, and will use public transit if it is convenient and affordable. Serving these demands benefits everybody, including the travellers who use non-auto modes, and motorists who experience less traffic and parking congestion and reduced chauffeuring burdens.

Travellers Who Cannot, Should Not or Prefer Not to Drive



In a typical community, 20-40% of travellers cannot, should not, or prefer not to drive and will use public transit if it is frequent, affordable and integrated. These include people with disabilities, seniors, adolescents, motorists whose vehicles are unavailable, out-of-town tourists, travellers to ferry terminals and airports, and motorists who dislike high-speed highway driving.

If highways lack public transit, these groups are unable to travel, drive unsafely, spend more than they can afford on driving, or require chauffeuring.

Although BC Transit provides services in more than one hundred communities, most of those have little or no transit connections to other areas. As a result, in most communities non-drivers do not get their fair share of provincial infrastructure investments and lack access to critical access; they cannot travel independently to medical services, stores or friends.

In the big picture, interregional transit improvements are part of an integrated sustainable transportation system that makes it easy to get around without driving. The following provincial policies can help create more equitable, efficient and sustainable transportation in British Columbia.

1. **Establish an evidence-based plan for achieving mode-shift targets.**

British Columbia's *CleanBC Roadmap* has targets to reduce light duty vehicle travel 25% and increase non-auto mode shares to 30% by 2030 and 50% by 2050, and several local and regional governments have similar targets. The provincial government should establish an evidence-based plan to achieve these targets. This will help achieve many economic, social and environmental goals including affordability, road and parking facility cost savings, more independent mobility for non-drivers, improved economic opportunity and productivity, increased, improved public health, plus reduced pollution emissions and sprawl-related costs. Achieving these targets can provide net savings to households, businesses and governments by reducing the amount they must spend on vehicles, roads and parking facilities.

2. **More frequent and affordable service on the #66 and #70 routes.**

The Island Highway between Victoria and Nanaimo carries more than 25,000 vehicles per day but the #66 route (Victoria-Duncan) currently has only four daily trips with no reverse commute, evening or Sunday service, with $10 one-way fares, and the #70 route (Duncan-Nanaimo) has only nine daily trips with $7.50 fares. Because service is infrequent and expensive less than 1% of trips on this corridor are by public transit. In contrast, the #61 route between Sooke and Victoria has 43 daily trips and $2.50 fares. Because service is frequent and affordable, 13% of total trips and 22% of peak-period trips on this corridor are by transit.

To increase fairness and reduce Island Highway traffic problems BIT requests that #66 and #70 increase to at least hourly service with $5 maximum fares, with "enhanced" provincial funding as in the *Five Point Action Plan* on Highway 16. Under BC Transit's traditional funding structure regional governments pay about half of costs even for long-distance routes that carry many through passengers, but under enhanced cost-sharing local governments will only bear 20%, in recognition that interregional requires more provincial support than local services.

3. **Develop a new MoTI department to plan and fund interregional bus services.**

The BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure has responsibility for planning, funding and operating roadway improvements, BC Transit has responsibility for planning, funding and operating urban transit service improvements and BC Ferries has responsibility for planning, funding and operating ferry service improvements, but there is no clear responsibility for planning and funding interregional bus services.

The few interregional bus routes that have been developed, such as #70 between Duncan and Nanaimo, the *Five Points Plan* for Highway 16, and new bus service between Tofino and Ucluelet all required local leadership, all took more than a decade between when needs were recognized and service began, and all required unique funding agreements. The province has no standard process to identify, plan and fund interregional bus services.

Other jurisdictions, including Ontario, Washington State and Virginia, have such programs (Litman 2024). For example, Washington State has a *Rural Mobility Grant Program* and a *Travel Washington Intercity Bus Program*. As a result of these resources, most rural counties in Washington State have coordinated public transit services, which provide travel within and between communities. It is possible to travel around the Olympic Peninsula using the Olympic Transit Loop, which consists of six different but coordinated local public transit agencies.

Washington Intercity Bus Network (https://bit.ly/3rJcl9n)

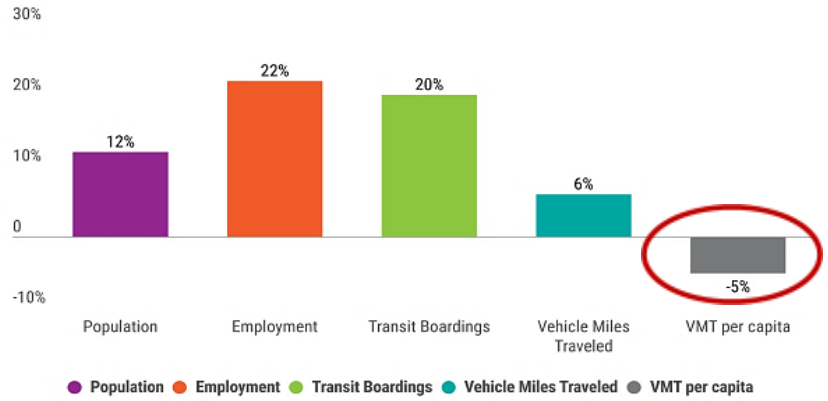
Washington State supports an intercity bus network that serves rural areas and smaller towns. This improves rural mobility and reduces some automobile travel.

4. **Establish a provincial TDM program**

Transportation demand management (TDM) includes various policies and programs that encourage travellers to choose more efficient travel options, including shifts from peak to off-peak travel, and from automobile to more resource-efficient modes. There are many types of TDM programs including commute trip reduction (CTR), school transport management and transportation management associations.

Washington State's TDM Program is a good example. The state's Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) law, established in 1991, requires large urban employers to develop commute trip reduction plans, and the state supports local, regional and state programs to improve active and public transport services. This has reduced Puget Sound region vehicle travel. From 2010 to 2018 regional VMT increased just 6%, much less than the 12% population and 22% employment growth; transit boardings increased 20%, and per capita vehicle travel declined 5%, as illustrated below.

Puget Sound Population and Travel Changes, 2010-2018 (PSRC 2022)



Between 2010 and 2018, Puget Sound's population and employment grew substantially, while per capita vehicle miles travelled (VMT) declined 5%.

This resulted from the region's investments in non-auto modes, commute trip reduction programs and Smart Growth development policies.

Even larger changes occurred in larger cities. Between 2010 and 2020 Seattle gained more than 65,000 homes, 150,000 residents and 160,000 jobs, but vehicle trips declined more than 5%, vehicle emissions decreased 4%, and downtown automobile commute mode share declined from 35% to 26%. These changes resulted from a combination of active and public transport improvements, the state CTR program and Smart Growth development policies (SDOT 2020).

5. **Invest in Active Travel**

Current practices devote the majority of provincial transportation planning and funding resources to motorized mode, leaving little for active mode improvements. For example, active transportation program spending represents less than 1% of MoTI's total spending, and even considering trails, paths and active mode highway overpasses active modes receive a far smaller share of investments than their share of total trips (about 15%) and frequent users (about half of all residents). Active mode improvements help achieve social equity, public health and environmental goals.

6. **Improve Integration between transportation and land use planning**

British Columbia now requires urban governments to upzone in transit-oriented neighborhoods. This is justified on many grounds; it can help increase affordability, social equity, public health and economic productivity, but without transportation policy reforms it will increase traffic and parking congestion, crash risk and local pollution. To avoid these problems, as densities increase, per capita automobile trips must decline. This requires more planning and funding for non-auto travel in upzoned urban areas.

For example, the provincial government can help local governments inventory and evaluate sidewalks and bikeways, and provide more funding for local public transit planning and services. Expand busways, for example, complete the bus lanes between Victoria and the Western Communities. Develop mobility hubs – bus stations that also include taxi/ridehailing stops, bike- and carsharing services, secure bike storage, and other transport services.

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