



CONNECTING BC:

A TEN-YEAR VISION AND INVESTMENT PLAN
FOR PUBLIC TRANSIT THROUGHOUT BC

Executive Summary

Marc Lee, CCPA-BC



CCPA
CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
BC Office

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

British Columbians deserve to be able to get to where they need to go quickly, conveniently and affordably, no matter where in the province they live. And meeting our climate goals demands modern, sustainable, zero-carbon transit — with great service that can offer a compelling alternative to personal cars. But after years of neglect and privatization, today's transit system is plagued with overcrowding, delays and big gaps in service.

Our current provincial government has made important new transit investments. Now it's time for the next step: a new province-wide vision, uniting local and regional transit into an integrated whole.

Connecting BC is a 10-year public transit investment plan for our province that will:

- Recognize First Nations title and rights
- Make transit affordable, accessible and inclusive
- Move BC toward sustainable, zero-carbon transit
- Eliminate privatization for better wages/benefits for workers and better services for users
- Make riding on transit a great experience
- Use new transit infrastructure and services to shape BC's growth
- Ensure the provincial leadership needed to get it right

The result? Stronger, more vibrant communities. Thousands of well-paying jobs and healthier local economies. And a big step forward toward the goal of a clean BC.

The Plan



1. Connect BC communities everywhere through a new province-wide express bus service. With Greyhound pulling out of BC in 2018, getting around BC by transit can range from impossible to wildly inconvenient, with multiple fares spanning different public and private operators. A province-wide public transit network will improve mobility for people in small towns, rural areas and remote First Nations communities — making it easier to get health care and other services, visit family or go on vacation. And stronger transit connections across BC would have a big impact on tourism.



2. Double the number of buses in BC Transit local services within five years and triple it within ten, for more frequent, reliable local transit services in communities throughout BC. With more regular, extensive services that people know they can rely on, ridership will grow over time as people shift their habits. Targeted, customized services including community shuttle services, on-demand rides, car sharing and bike sharing can supplement fixed routes for the “first/last mile” challenges.



3. Expand HandyDART service province-wide with an upgraded electric fleet. Stop contracting with private companies for services and using taxis instead of buses. Instead, expanding HandyDART — including in small towns, rural and First Nations communities — will bring new minibuses, cars and vans, and new public facilities and maintenance centres to communities across BC.



4. Develop new regional rail connections across the South Coast and Vancouver Island along historic rail corridors, in partnership with First Nations communities along the rail lines. A major investment in regional rail will transform development and travel patterns, and facilitate better connections between regions. These investments include:

- Building on the proven success of the West Coast Express, expanding it from weekday commuter service to regular daily service, and extending the service area to Abbotsford
- Repurposing the historic Interurban corridor from Langley to Chilliwack via Abbotsford. Over time, this will reshape development patterns and transportation patterns region-wide, adding denser housing, shops, services and amenities around new transit hubs
- Restoring rail service to Prince George via Squamish and Whistler, re-establishing a historical connection into the heart of BC's Interior and boosting Prince George as a transit hub
- Restoring the Vancouver Island Rail Corridor for both passenger and freight services



5. Add new passenger ferry options between Vancouver, the Gulf Islands, Sunshine Coast and Vancouver Island. Just as roads can't infinitely be expanded to accommodate more cars, BC's ferries have been hamstrung by seeing them almost exclusively as car transportation. New passenger ferries will dramatically increase capacity for BC Ferries at much lower cost, while providing a superior passenger experience.



6. Accelerate TransLink's 10-year Access for Everyone plan for Metro Vancouver. With more than half BC's population, Metro Vancouver is a critical hub for economic activity, post-secondary education, research and development, tourism and culture in BC. Rolling out most investments in TransLink's plan over the next five years instead of 10 will help clear congestion and begin shifting housing and other development. And it will set the stage for implementing next-level rapid transit options across the region, such as Burrard Inlet Rapid Transit, LRT in Surrey, and new routes along Hastings Street and 41st/49th Avenues in Vancouver.



7. Expand existing free transit programs to youth aged 13 to 18. This will help young British Columbians develop the habit of using transit, a crucial cultural change in shifting transportation patterns. Free transit programs should also expand to cover people on social assistance who are not already included in the BC Bus Pass program.



8. Integrate all these transit pieces into a seamless, coordinated and coherent transit experience — with one-ticket access and synchronized service and information infrastructure, so riders can make connections efficiently and reliably across systems and get the updates they need for their whole trip quickly and easily.

Building a cleaner, brighter future for BC communities



Great jobs: The investments in this plan will have a major impact on jobs, creating:

- An average of 16,800 jobs per year in construction of public transit infrastructure projects, such as a new rapid transit bridge across Burrard Inlet, electric bus charging terminals, and multiple bus, rail and ferry terminals and stations
- An average of 23,700 jobs per year in operations, including drivers, supervisors, mechanics, maintenance crews, security and more.

Pathways into these jobs will be prioritized for those traditionally under-represented in the trades, including Indigenous and racialized workers, and women and gender diverse people. And because the plan will bring thousands of workers who are currently contracted out or working for private transportation companies back under the public umbrella, it will upgrade those jobs with higher wages and better benefits and working conditions.



Stronger, healthier communities: Those effects will ripple through the economy, raising GDP and employment. And there will be wide-ranging social, economic and environmental benefits. By making transit more available in more communities, this plan will help increase affordability. It will reduce travel times for all — including freight and private vehicles — while lowering health care costs and improving air quality.



Smarter growth: BC's expanded transit network will reshape development patterns, orienting them toward transit and increasing density. It will spur the transition of suburban areas into more complete communities and help revitalize town centres.



A cleaner province: These investments are central to dramatically reducing the one-third of BC's greenhouse gas emissions that come from transportation.

THE INVESTMENT

This plan requires:

- \$15.4 billion over 10 years to improve the frequency, speed and reliability of existing transit and introduce new services to build a province-wide network, and
- An accelerated \$6.8 billion in funding already promised by the BC government for transit projects in Metro Vancouver.

By comparison, the BC government spends more than \$4 billion per year on transportation capital spending (including roads and transit) alone. There is \$9 billion in highway projects (spanning multiple years) on the BC Budget docket, plus about \$650 million per year for other maintenance and operation of roads and bridges.

Non-transit spending — highways, bridges and tunnels — is fully funded by the BC government. As this plan's transit investment will relieve pressure on that infrastructure, a large portion of the plan could be funded by repurposing some of that budget.

Finally, our plan calls on the BC government to increase its annual subsidy to all transit services in BC from \$350 million today to \$1.5 billion at the end of the plan's 10-year scope.

British Columbia can accomplish a full transformation of public transit and transportation province-wide within one decade. And with it will come greater access to education, health care and employment, stronger public sector jobs, lower carbon emissions and healthier British Columbians.

Let's not keep BC riders waiting. It's time to invest in the transit British Columbians deserve.