



Better Island Transit
FREQUENT AND AFFORDABLE PUBLIC
TRANSPORTATION FOR VANCOUVER ISLAND

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Frequent and Affordable Vancouver Island Bus Service

*Why and How to Provide Convenient and Inexpensive Public Transit
Connecting Central and South Vancouver Island*

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The Island Highway between central and south Vancouver Island is a busy and often congested roadway, carrying about 30,000 daily travellers, yet it has minimal and expensive public transit service. As a result, transit serves a tiny portion of travel on this corridor.

This is unfair and inefficient. Non-drivers lack independent mobility and a lack of travel options increases total vehicle traffic, congestion, crashes and pollution.

Better Island Transit advocates for frequent (at least hourly) and affordable (fares no more than \$5 between major cities) bus service. This would provide many economic, social and environmental benefits, and costs less than other highway improvement options.

The Problem

The Island Highway between central and southern Vancouver Island is one of British Columbia's busiest and most critical roadways. It carries about 30,000 daily travellers. It is narrow and congested, and there are frequent demands for improvement. Surveys indicate that many Islanders want better travel options.

Public transit service on that corridor is currently infrequent and expensive. Between Duncan and Victoria there are only four daily early morning departures from Duncan which return late afternoons; there are no off-peak or reverse commute trips, weekend service is minimal, and the \$10 fares are four times a local fare. Because transit is inconvenient and expensive it cannot meet most travellers' needs and serves only a tiny portion of trips on that corridor.

In contrast, the #61 bus between Sooke and Victoria has 43 daily trips with \$2.50 per trip fares, and carries more than 20% of trips on that corridor. Figure 1 compares these routes.

Figure 1 Current Central to South Vancouver Island Transit Services

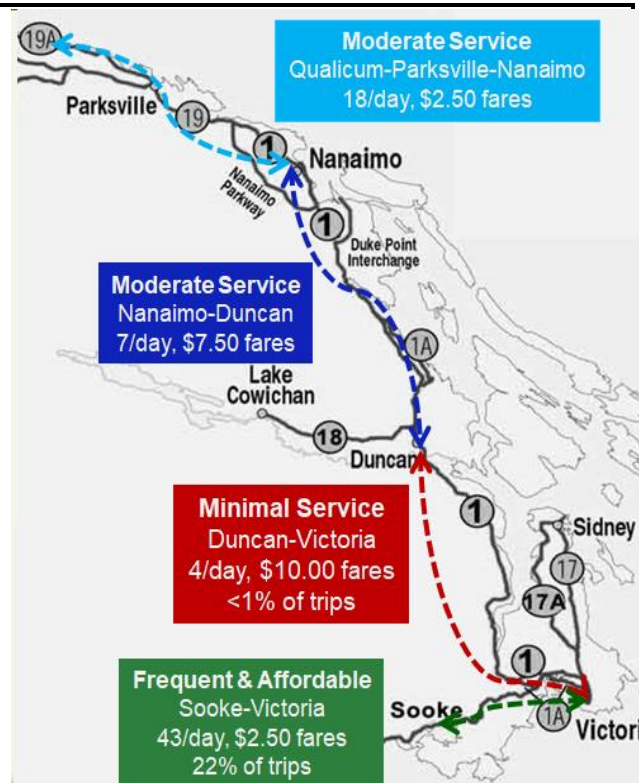
Transit service between central and southern Vancouver Island is currently infrequent and expensive, particularly between Duncan and Victoria.

Qualicum Beach-Parksville-Nanaimo (#91, 50 kms, 52 minutes) has 18 daily trips with \$2.50 one-way fares. Transit serves less than 1% of trips on that corridor.

Nanaimo-Duncan (#70, 50 kms, 70 minutes) has 7 daily trips with \$7.50 fares. Less than 1% transit mode share.

Duncan-Victoria (#66, 60 kms, 75 minutes) 4 daily trips with \$10 one-way fares. Less than 1% transit mode share.

Sooke-Victoria (#61, 40 kms, 70 minutes) 43 daily trips with \$2.50 fares. Over 20% peak-period transit mode share. Similarly, transit has 20-40% mode share between Fraser Valley towns such as Langley and Pitt Meadows and Vancouver.



Why Provide Frequent and Affordable Bus Service?

Many residents and visitors cannot, should not, or prefer not to drive, and will use public transport if it is convenient and affordable, particularly for longer and stressful trips. Inadequate transit harms everybody: it deprives non-drivers of independent mobility, it increases congestion, crashes and pollution, and forces drivers to chauffeur non-drivers.

Who Would Use Intercity Transit Service?

- People with disabilities, including motorists who have difficulty driving at night on busy highways.
- People who cannot afford a car, and motorists who want to reduce vehicle wear and operating costs.
- Commuters who want to avoid the stress of driving.
- Patients who must travel for specialized treatments.
- Motorists whose vehicles are temporarily inoperable or must be transported to another community.
- People travelling to other communities sport, cultural or social events.
- Law abiding drinkers.
- Tourists visiting Vancouver Island without a car.
- Students travelling to school and college.
- Motorists who want to avoid chauffeuring non-drivers.

The table below summarizes user and community benefits.

Table 1 **Frequent and Affordable Bus Service Benefits**

User Benefits	Community Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced driver stress. Many commuters want to avoid long-distance highway trips. • More independent mobility for non-drivers including people with disabilities, youths and healthcare patients. • Affordability (savings to lower-income households). • Rural economic development and tourism. • Reduced chauffeuring burdens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced highway and surface street congestion. • Parking cost savings. • Increased traffic safety. • Affordable access to public services such as healthcare. • Energy conservation and emission reductions. • Rural economic development (tourism). • Reduces sprawl costs.

Frequent and affordable bus service can provide many benefits to users and communities.

The recent *Island Coastal Inter-Community Transportation Study* (MNP 2023) shows that many Vancouver Island residents want intercity transit services, but that study excluded the CRD. The Province is investing in some rural transit services but not between Victoria and Nanaimo (Baker 2023; MoTI 2023). Current demographic and economic trends (aging population, high fuel prices, health and environmental concerns) are increasing non-auto travel demands and the benefits of serving those demands.

Many jurisdictions have targets to reduce driving and increase non-auto travel as described in the box below. The provincial government is currently considering several high-cost Island Highway expansion projects although they contradict these goals by inducing more vehicle traffic and failing to improve non-auto modes. Currently, BC Transit and MoTI provide minimal support for intercity transit planning; they leave it to regional governments that have limited resources and only perceive a portion of the benefits. More provincial leadership is justified.

Transportation Goals and Targets

- CRD and CVRD: 15% transit mode shares ([Moth 2020](#)).
- [CleanBC Roadmap](#): reduce light duty vehicle travel 25%, and increase non-auto mode shares to 30% by 2030 and 50% by 2050.
- [2022 MoTI Mandate Letter](#): provide clean, fast, and efficient transportation in order to increase affordability, safety, and healthcare access. Specifically, it highlights these actions:
 - Make public transit a priority.
 - Ensure that rural, remote and Indigenous communities have safe and reliable transportation services.
 - Support communities to build and improve active transportation networks.
 - Build greener and more livable communities.
 - Work with cabinet colleagues, communities and regions to support the planning of transit projects.
 - Complete the Transit Oriented Development framework.
- [2021 BC Transit Mandate Letter](#): enhance the public services people rely on and make life more affordable and create a cleaner, lower-carbon economy.

The Proposal: Frequent and Affordable Bus Service

Below are cost estimates for increased Duncan-Victoria bus service. Basic service with hourly departures from 6:00 am until midnight would require about one million additional dollars.

Table 2 Basic Service

Daily round-trips	18
Annual bus-hours, assuming 70-80 minute trips with 20-30 minute layover (18 x 365 x 2)	13,140
Cost per bus-hour (BC Transit 2020/2021 Service Plan, p. 13)	\$120
Total annual operating costs (62,780 x \$120)	\$1,576,800
Cost recovery rate (15%)	\$236,520
Annual subsidy required	\$1,340,280
Subsidy increase over current service levels.	\$1,042,400

This level of service would require about \$1 million more annual subsidy than current service levels.

Frequent service comparable to that between Sooke and Victoria would require about \$6 million additional annual funding, less than 3% of CRD and CVRD transit spending.

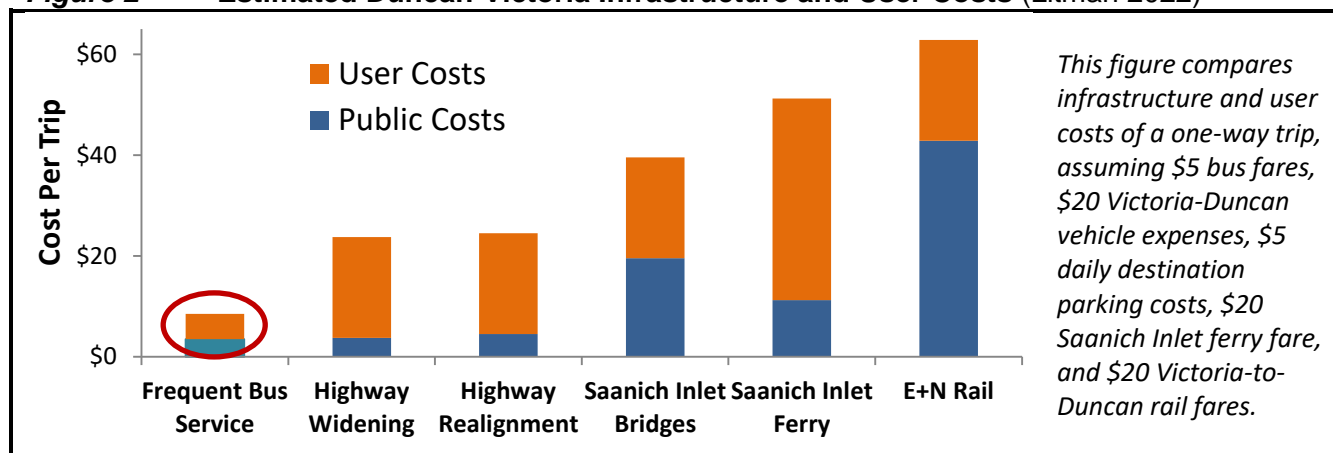
Table 3 Frequent Service

Daily round-trips	43
Annual bus-hours, assuming 70-80 minute trips with 20-30 minute layover (86 x 365 x 2)	62,780
Cost per bus-hour (BC Transit 2020/2021 Service Plan, p. 13)	\$120
Total annual operating costs (62,780 x \$120)	\$7,533,600
Cost recovery rate (15%)	\$1,130,040
Annual subsidy required	\$6,403,560
Subsidy increase over current service levels.	\$6,105,680

Frequent service would require about \$6.1 million in additional annual subsidy.

Figure 2 compares frequent and affordable bus service with other potential highway improvements. It is by far the most cost effective overall. Highway improvements may seem cheaper considering just infrastructure costs, but not including vehicle and parking costs.

Figure 2 Estimated Duncan-Victoria Infrastructure and User Costs (Litman 2022)



Conclusions

Vancouver Island currently has infrequent and expensive public transit that serves a tiny portion of demands. BC Transit and MoTI provide minimal support for intercity transit planning. Provincial goals to improve rural mobility, reduce automobile travel and double public transit travel justify provincial leadership in planning more intercity transit and significantly increasing – up to doubling – provincial funding to increase and improve transit service quality.

Frequent and affordable bus service connecting Victoria with central Vancouver Island would provide many user and community benefits including a low-stress alternative to driving, independent mobility for non-drivers, plus reduced congestion, crashes emission. It is far more cost effective, faster to implement, and provides more total benefits than other highway improvements. These improvements should be BC Transit and MoTI priorities for 2024.

For More Information

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