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A Business Case for Improving Interregional Bus Services

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Abstract

Interregional (also called intercity, long-distance, rural and coach) bus service quality is currently poor and declining in North America. This is unfair and inefficient. Inadequate public transportation deprives non-drivers of independent mobility and therefore economic opportunities and dignity, forces drivers to spend time and money chauffeuring non-drivers, reduces rural economic development, and increases traffic problems. This poor service is often explained as a lack of demand, but where bus service is convenient and affordable it achieves significant ridership. The real problem is inadequate support; public agencies plan, operate and fund air, highway, rail, ferry and urban transit, but interregional bus service was previously provided by private companies so there is little tradition of public support. This study examines the costs and benefits of interregional bus service improvements. It concludes that there is a strong business case for providing basic service on major corridors and high-quality service on congested highways. Case studies demonstrate that governments can efficiently provide interregional bus services.

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Introduction

Interregional (also called intercity, long-distance, rural or coach) bus service is the neglected stepchild of the transportation family. There are clearly defined responsibilities for planning, operating and funding sidewalks, bikeways, local roads, public highways, ferry, rail and local transit services, but not for interregional bus, as summarized below.

Table 1 **Transportation Planning, Operating and Funding Responsibilities**

	Active Modes	Automobile	Ferry	Rail	Bus
Local	Local Gov.	Local/Region Gov.	BC Ferries	Transit agencies	Transit Agencies
Interregional	State/Prov. Gov.	State/Prov. Gov.	BC Ferries	Rail Corps.	???

Planning, operating and funding responsibilities are clearly defined for active modes (walking and bicycling), automobile, rail and local transit services, but interregional bus is an orphan.

As a result, governments invest hundreds of dollars annually per capita on roadways and urban transit services, and require property owners to spend even larger amounts to subsidize off-street parking. Interregional and rural public transit investments are much smaller so rural non-drivers receive much less per capita investment. Non-drivers can walk, bike, take transit or taxis for local trips, but without interregional transit services they lack convenient and affordable access to other communities.

Table 2 **Transportation Infrastructure Investments**

	Urban	Rural
Drivers	Roads and parking facilities.	Large investments in rural roads.
Non-Drivers	Moderate investments in urban transit	Minimal investments in rural transit.

Governments spending and mandates results in large per capita investments in roads, parking facilities and urban transit, but rural non-drivers receive less than their fair share.

This is unfair and inefficient. It deprives non-drivers of independent mobility and therefore economic opportunities and dignity, forces drivers to chauffeur non-drivers, reduces economic development, and it increases traffic problems and crashes. It creates large disparities between drivers and non-drivers, and between urban and rural residents. There are significant unmet demands for interregional transit, and serving those demands would provide large benefits to travellers and communities,

British Columbia (BC) provides good examples of this problem. Most BC highways have no, or infrequent and expensive, interregional transit. This recently became the butt of jokes when contestants in the BBC's *Race Across the World* were required to travel with no car and limited funds from Victoria to Port Hardy, a corridor that lacks public transit; they had to hitchhike (Chan 2023). This inadequacy is no joke for countless non-drivers who lack convenient and affordable travel options between BC communities. The process to develop new services is painfully unresponsive, inefficient and slow, typically taking more than a decade between when needs are identified and new services begin.

This report investigates these issues. It examines interregional public transport demands and the degree that those demands are currently being served, discusses the costs of inadequate interregional transit services, defines optimal interregional transit service levels, describes examples of successful intercity transit services, and recommends policies for optimal interregional transit planning and funding.

Interregional Public Transit Demands

Interregional travel includes trips for work, healthcare, shopping, tourism, and various social and recreational activities. Many of these trips are high value, providing unique and important benefits. They represent about 3% of total trips and about 30% of total passenger-kilometers (Aultman-Hall 2018).

Currently, most long-distance travel is by auto or air, but those modes cannot satisfy all users. In a typical community, 20-40% of travellers cannot, should not or prefer not to drive (Table 3 and Figure 1), and will use public transport if it is convenient, comfortable and affordable. This is demonstrated on corridors with suitable service, such as the #61 bus between Sooke and Victoria, which has 43 daily trips with $2.50 per trip fares, serves 13% of total and 22% of peak-period trips (CRD 2017). Similarly, transit serves 20-40% of trips between Vancouver and Fraser Valley towns such as Langley and Pitt Meadows (TranslInk 2011).

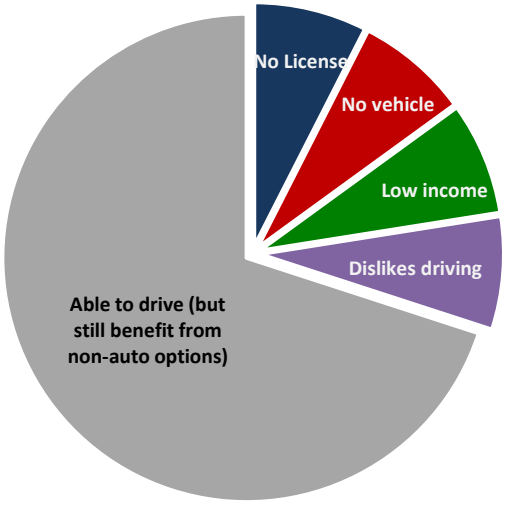
Table 3 **Interregional Transit Demands** (Litman 2023)

Type	Prevalence	Costs if not Served
Seniors who do not or should not drive.	5-10% of population.	Non-drivers lack mobility, require chauffeuring (special vehicle travel to transport a non-driver), or costly options (taxis and ridehailing), or move to another community with better transport options.
People with impairments.	5-10% of population.	
Adolescents (12-20 years).	10-20% of population.	
Drivers who share vehicles.	5-15% of motorists.	
Drivers whose vehicles are inoperable or must be transported to another region for repair or sale.	Varies.	Requires chauffeuring, or costly taxi or ridehailing.
Lower-income households.	20-40% of households.	Lack mobility or bear excessive transport costs.
Tourists and visitors.	Varies.	Lack mobility or visit other areas.
Impaired or distracted travelers.	Varies.	Impaired and distracted driving, increased risk.

On a typical travel corridor, 20-40% of travelers cannot, should not, or prefer not to drive and will use public transit if it is convenient, comfortable and affordable. Failure to serve these demands imposes various costs.

Failure to serve those demands imposes many costs on non-drivers, their families and communities. It limits their ability to access healthcare and other essential services, shop for affordable food, obtain education and access jobs, and enjoy normal social and recreational activities. A lack of affordable travel options forces many lower-income households to spend more on vehicles than is affordable. It forces motorists to spend time and money chauffeuring non-drivers; such trips are particularly inefficient since they often involve empty backhauls (such as an empty return trip) so each mile of passenger travel generates two vehicle-miles of travel. It reduces the pool of employees available to businesses and economic activities such as tourism. A lack of non-auto travel options increases traffic problems including congestion, crashes and pollution emissions.

Figure 1 **Non-Auto Travel Demands** (Litman 2023)



A variety of travellers cannot or should not drive.

Policy makers claim to be concerned but have made little real progress. The House of Commons' 2023 report, *Improving Bus Connectivity in Canada*, found that rural communities "suffered severely" in recent years from declining bus service, which imposes serious harms, particularly on marginalized communities, and convenient, safe and affordable intercity bus services provides many benefits. The recent *Island Coastal Inter-Community Transportation Study* shows that many Vancouver Island residents want interregional transit services (Baker 2023).

Who Needs Interregional Bus Services?

- People with disabilities, including motorists who have difficulty driving at night or on highways.
- People who cannot afford a car, and motorists who want to reduce their expenses.
- Travellers who want to avoid the stress of driving.
- Motorists whose vehicles are temporarily inoperable or must be left at another community.
- Patients who must travel for specialized treatments.
- People travelling to another city for sport, cultural or social events.
- Law abiding drinkers.
- Tourists travelling without a car.
- Students travelling to school and college.
- Motorists who want to avoid chauffeuring non-drivers.

In 2006 the *Highway of Tears Symposium* investigated the high rate of missing and murdered women on the Yellowhead Highway between Prince Rupert and Prince George (CSFS 2006). The following is the first of the Symposium's 33 recommendations:

> That a shuttle bus transportation system be established between each town and city located along the entire length of Highway 16, defined as the Highway of Tears. Except for the Greyhound Bus Line that services the Highway 16 corridor from Prince George to Prince Rupert, (twice a day from Prince George to Prince Rupert, and a once per day return trip), no other public transportation system exists. A shuttle bus transportation system would focus on the pickup and drop off of young female passengers at all First Nation communities, towns and cities located along the entire length of the highway between Prince George and Prince Rupert. During the spring, summer, fall, and perhaps even winter months of operation, these shuttle buses must also stop and pick-up every young woman they encounter walking or hitchhiking between those First Nation communities, towns, and cities on this Highway. The number of shuttle buses required would be exactly seven (7) to cover the entire 724-kilometre length of the Highway of Tears.

However, this and other recommendations were not implemented. This inaction was widely criticized. In 2016 the Canadian federal government launched a *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, with $54 million funding. The inquiry also concluded that inadequate interregional transit is a major risk factor to low-income, isolated communities. In 2017 BC Transit started three new bus routes on that corridor, which carried about 5,000 passengers during the first year of service. Greyhound Canada announced in 2018 that it would stop servicing routes along the Highway of Tears and other Canadan routes. In 2023 the provincial government committed an additional $5 million to support that service. All of those decisions were ad hac, in response to political pressures rather than the result of a systematic planning and funding process to provide adequate and sustainable interregional public transport on major travel corridors throughout the province.

Many factors can affect interregional transit demands including its convenience, comfort, perceived safety, price, integration with other transportation system components, and incentives such as parking prices. Interregional transit ridership tends to increase if it integrates well with local transportation services, and if it is encouraged with transportation demand management incentives.

Interregional Transit Benefits

By most metrics including operating costs, crash rates and energy consumption, buses are the most efficient travel mode (Litman 2021; Woldeamanuel 2012). High-quality interregional transit services can provide significant benefits to users, motorists and communities, as summarized the table below.

Table 4 **Interregional Transit Benefits**

Users	Motorists	Communities
• Independent mobility and opportunity for non-drivers. • Reduced driver stress. • Vehicle cost savings. • Increased safety and security. • Improved home location options.	• Reduced chauffeuring burdens. • Increased safety due to reduced higher-risk driving. • Reduced traffic and parking congestion. • Improved mobility options when they cannot drive.	• Supports industries such as tourism. • Retains and attracts residents. • Reduces traffic problems. • Increases safety (reduced crashes) and security (reduced crime).

Serving multimodal travel demand can provide various direct and indirect benefits.

British Columbia's *CleanBC Roadmap* has targets to reduce light duty vehicle travel 25% and increase walking, bicycling and transit mode shares to 30% by 2030 and 50% by 2050 (BC Government 2021). Although justified primarily to reduce climate emissions, achieving these targets would provide many benefits including congestion reductions, infrastructure savings, affordability, independent mobility for non-drivers, traffic safety and improved public health, all goals in the BC Minister of Transportation's *Mandate Letter*. Interregional bus services support and are supported by vehicle travel reduction efforts. For example, they support commute trip reduction by providing an efficient option for long-distance commutes, and support campus transport management programs by reducing the need for students to have cars that they would otherwise require for travelling home during breaks.

Improved interregional bus service can provide downstream benefits by reducing traffic on other roads. For example, if improved Island Highway transit attracts 20% of commuter trips, as on Highway 14 between Sooke and Victoria, this would reduce about 2,500 peak-period vehicle trips on local streets and free up 2,500 urban parking spaces, saving millions of dollars in infrastructure costs. It can leverage additional benefits by allowing some households to reduce their vehicle ownership. For example, a family might need two vehicles if both adults commute by car but only one if they frequently use transit. Similarly, better interregional transit can allow families to avoid owning vehicles needed for occasional trips, such as travel to ferry terminals and airports, seniors who require specialized medical treatments, and university students who travel home on weekends and breaks.

Transit can provide large safety benefits by reducing congestion and higher-risk driving (APTA 2016). For example, young men who pay high vehicle insurance premiums, seniors who dislike driving on busy highways and alcohol drinkers are particularly likely to use buses rather than drive, provided they are convenient and affordable. Traffic safety strategies such as graduated driver's licenses, senior driver testing and anti-impaired driving campaigns become more effective and acceptable if implemented with transit improvements that provide viable alternatives to driving. As a result, auto-to-transit mode shifts can leverage proportionately larger crash reductions. For example, if the Island Highway achieves Highway 14 transit mode shares (13% total and 22% peak-period trips), crashes should decline at least 13% and probably much more due to reduced congestion and less driving by higher risk groups.

Current Conditions

Interregional bus services were once common, affordable and profitable, but during the last half-century they experienced a death spiral of declining ridership, service, profits and public support (House of Commons 2023; USDOT 2005). Despite growing demand these services and their support infrastructure (such as bus stations) are inadequate and declining (Schwieterman, Chesney, and Das 2024). Major bus companies such as Greyhound and Trailways reduced or eliminated services. They are replaced by budget bus services (called "curb buses" because they lack stations) that operate only on a few high-volumes routes, leaving many routes without public transport.

Figure 2 **Vancouver Island Commercial Bus Service** (Island Link Bus Service)

Maps such as this imply that nearly all Vancouver Island communities have convenient bus connections. In fact, most of these routes are seasonal with less than daily service during off-peak periods and inadequate capacity during peak periods. These services are expensive, usually costing far more than driving.

Information on interregional bus service is difficult to obtain and unreliable. Travel websites often provide outdated or incomplete information, showing discontinued or seasonal routes. The figure above shows current Vancouver Island commercial bus services which implies that most Island communities are accessible by public transport, but this service is seasonal, with less than daily service during off-season and inadequate capacity for the high levels of demand during peak periods. Commercial buses are expensive, generally costing more than driving, and often inconvenient with limited stops, poor connections, uncomfortable waiting areas and limited baggage capacity (many of the buses do not accommodate bicycles or other large sports equipment).

The map below illustrates bus service availability and quality in British Columbia. Although most BC communities have local transit, connections between them tends to be infrequent, expensive and inconvenient. Most routes less than daily service (LOS E) most of the year, and fares usually cost more than fuel for driving the same trip. Information is difficult to obtain and unreliable; no website provides information on all interregional bus services, and the information provided is often outdated. Few communities have bus stations so passengers often have difficulty finding stops and must wait without security, weather protection or clean washrooms.

Figure 3 **BC Transit Services** (BC Transit, Ebus, Mountain Man, Riderexpress, Sunshine Coast)

This map shows which British Columbia communities and highways have transit services. About 90 communities have local services, but connections between them tend to be infrequent, expensive and inconvenient. Most interregional bus routes are level of service (LOS) E, with less than daily trips during off-seasons, and inadequate capacity (buses are often full) during peak periods. Fares are generally much higher than the costs of driving. Information is unreliable (many websites are outdated), reservation and purchase options are limited (some services require cash payments), and few communities have amenities such as bus stations.

(See Table 6 for more information on interregional transit levels of service.)

Current Planning and Funding

Currently, BC and most other North American jurisdictions have no standard process for planning and supporting interregional bus services. The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) plans and finances highways, BC Transit plans and supports local transit services, BC Ferries plans and operates ferries, Via Rail provides passenger rail on some corridors, and Transport Canada regulates motor carriers (including intercity buses) and aviation, but no agency is responsible for analyzing demands, or planning and funding interregional bus services, as summarized in Table 3.

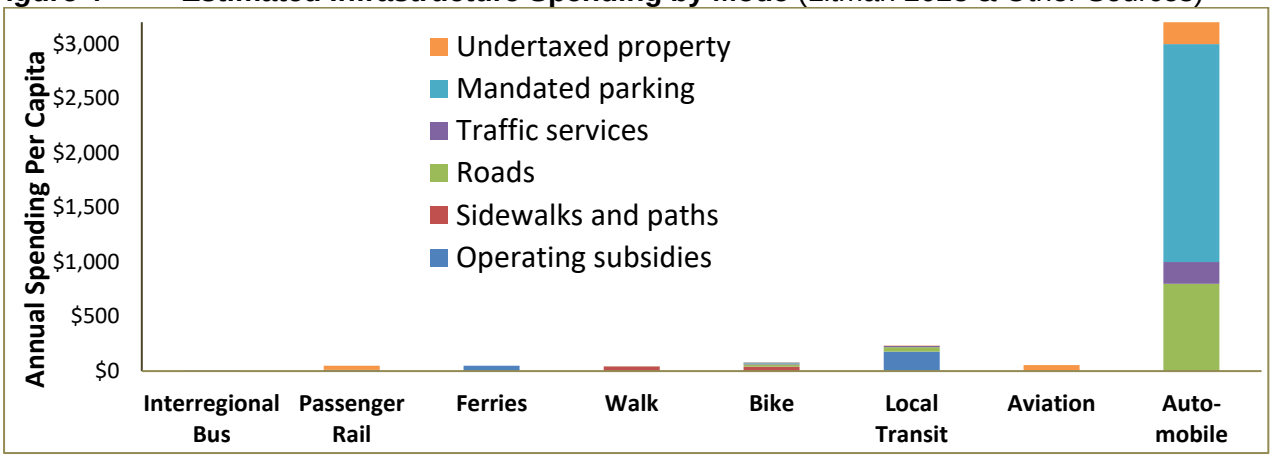
Table 5 **Interregional Transportation Planning and Funding**

	Interregional Bus	**Passenger Rail**	**Ferry Services**	**Auto Travel**	**Local Transit**	**Aviation**
Lead Agency	***None***	*Via Rail*	*BC Ferries*	*MoTI*	*BC Transit*	*Transport CA*
Demand analysis	*Minimal*	Some corridors.	Extensive surveys, public consultation and models			
Planning	*Minimal*	Major corridors.	Extensive planning by local, regional, provincial and federal agencies.			
Funding and subsidies	*Minimal, due to special concerns.*	Moderate.	Moderate, large for smaller routes.	Large for roads and parking.	Moderate.	Moderate.
Integration (terminals, information)	*Minimal. Few bus stations, limited information.*	Some cities have nice rail stations.	Terminals and good user information.	Roads, parking and traffic services.	Transit networks in most cities.	Extensive support for airports.

Interregional bus services receive less analysis, planning, funding and integration than other modes.

When somebody purchases an automobile, they expect governments to provide roads and mandate that property owners provide off-street parking for their use. Governments also plan and subsidize local transit and ferry services, ports and airports. The figure below compares estimated annual infrastructure investments and subsidies for various modes. Although some costs are difficult to determine, by any reasonable assumptions interregional bus receives less investment and support than other modes.

Figure 4 **Estimated Infrastructure Spending by Mode** (Litman 2023 & Other Sources)



Interregional bus services receive less public investment (too small to see in this graph) than other modes.

Because there is no standard planning process, interregional transit improvements are only implemented in response to political concerns. Regional districts must identify needs, initiate planning and be willing to bear much of the costs although they only perceive a portion of the benefits provided by long-distance bus services that carry many through passengers.

The resulting process is unresponsive, inefficient and slow. For example, a 2006 conference identified hitchhiking as a major risk on Highway 16 (the "Highway of Tears") and its first recommendation was to provide more interregional bus services, but BC Transit took until 2023 to provide that service. In 2012 the Cowichan Valley and Nanaimo regional districts transit services to connect their communities but it took a decade to plan #70 service, as illustrated to the right. Similarly, developing Tofino-Ucluelet bus service took 15 years, between 2009 when local officials first requested it until 2024 when the service started. A 2017 study found sufficient transit demands on the Sea to Sky corridor between Vancouver, Squamish and Whistler, and TransLink's *Transport 2050* plan calls for improved bus services to the Fraser Valley, but these projects have yet to be implemented (Chan 2023). When MoTI commissioned studies to identify and evaluate highway congestion reduction strategies, it did not consider frequent and affordable bus service, or benefits to non-drives.

These examples indicate that current planning and funding practices fail to identify, develop and fund interregional bus services to the degree justified by demands or benefits. There is a lack of urgency or commitment.

Figure 5 **#70 Planning Timeline** (CVRD and NRD 2021)

BC Transit took a decade and hundreds of thousands of dollars to plan the #70 bus route between Duncan and Nanaimo.

Explaining the Lack of Interregional Bus Planning

Interregional bus services were previously provided by commercial operators, which policy makers assumed simply needed regulation for safety and fairness. As a result, there is little tradition of government planning and support.

Conventional transportation planning is biased in ways that exaggerate highway improvement benefits and undervalue transit improvement (Litman 2021). Transit planning suffers from the common misconception that it receives excessive subsidies. Many people assume that motorists pay their share of infrastructure costs through fuel taxes and road tolls, which may be true for major highways but not for local roads and traffic services funded by local taxes, or the costs of government-mandated parking facilities. Although a larger share of public transit infrastructure costs are subsidized than for automobile travel, since motorists drive more average miles than transit passengers use transit, motorists receive far more average annual subsidy than transit passenger (Litman 2023).

Transportation agencies often argue that there is little demand for interregional bus services based on current ridership levels, but where interregional bus services is frequent, affordable and convenient it achieves high levels of ridership. Public transit experiences strong economies of scale: the more people use it the more efficient and profitable it can be, creating a positive cycle of more service, increased convenience and social acceptability, resulting in more ridership. As a result, underestimating demand creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of underinvestment, poor services and low ridership.

These practices reflect *elite bias*, the tendency of decision-makers to focus on the problems and needs they personally experience. Most policy makers and planning practitioners are busy, middle-class drivers unfamiliar with the problems facing low-income non-drivers. As a result, planning tends to be less responsive and efficient for interregional bus services than for other modes.

Optimal Interregional Transit Planning and Support

This section describes ways to determine fair and efficient interregional transit planning and funding.

1. User Demands and Community Goals

This determines optimal transit quality and funding levels based on user demands and community goals. As previously described, typically 20-40% of travellers cannot, should not or prefer not to drive and will use public transit if it is frequent, comfortable and affordable. Serving these demands can help achieve community goals including basic mobility and economic opportunity for non-drivers, reducing traffic problems, increasing safety, reducing emissions and supporting rural economic development. All these benefits and goals should be considered when evaluating interregional public transit services.

2. Social Equity

Equitable transport planning strives to minimize disparities in public investments and accessibility between different groups, such as between drivers and non-drivers or urban and rural residents. Transit investments are justified to ensure that all travellers, including non-drivers, receive their fair share of public resources. For example, if 10% of travellers are non-drivers, non-auto modes should receive at least 10% of public investments, and more if needed to give non-drivers access to essential services such as healthcare, healthy food, education, and employment. As previously described, interregional transit currently receives much less public support than other modes, less than the portion of travellers who cannot or should not drive and would use such services if they were convenient and affordable. This is unfair, particularly for non-drivers who live in or visit rural communities and is inefficient if it forces non-drivers to use suboptimal modes such as hitchhiking, chauffeuring or costly air travel.

3. Performance Targets

From this perspective a mode should receive sufficient support to achieve a targetted level of service (LOS). Transportation planners often use LOS ratings to identify problems, set performance targets and evaluate potential improvements. LOS ratings have been defined for most modes including local public transit but not specifically for interregional bus services (TRB 2013).

The table below shows level of service ratings suitable for interregional transit evaluations. High quality service (LOS A or B) can attract discretionary travellers who would otherwise drive and so is justified on congested roadways. LOS C provides independent mobility for non-drivers. LOS D and E don't allow travellers to visit another community and return the same day, and so are inadequate for most trips.

Table 6 **Interregional Transit Levels of Service** (Guillemette, et al. 2019; Litman 2024)

Level of Service	Frequency & Speed	Affordability	Comfort & Amenities	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 travellers who would otherwise drive.	15-25%
B	11-24 daily trips.	Cheaper than driving.	Stations with washrooms.	High. Suitable for most trips.	12-20%
C	5-10 daily trips.	Slightly cheaper than driving	Uncrowded. All passengers seated.	Moderate. Suitable for many trips.	6-12%
D	1-4 daily trips.	Comparable to driving.	Clean and comfortable.	Low. Suitable for some trips.	3-6%
E	Less than daily.	More costly than driving.	Safe vehicles and stations.	Low. Suitable for few trips.	1-3%
F	No service.	Much more costly than driving.	No amenities.	Non-drivers lack independent mobility.	0%

This table defines interregional transit service quality and mode share targets.

4. Mode Shift Targets and Incentives

Some jurisdictions, including BC, have targets to reduce automobile travel and increase walking, bicycling and transit travel. To achieve these targets some transportation agencies are applying a sustainable transportation hierarchy, which means that planning decisions favor affordable and resource-efficient modes, such as walking, bicycling and public transit, over resource-intensive modes such as automobile and air travel. These targets and priorities justify shifting resources currently devoted to roads, parking facilities and airports to public transit including interregional bus services.

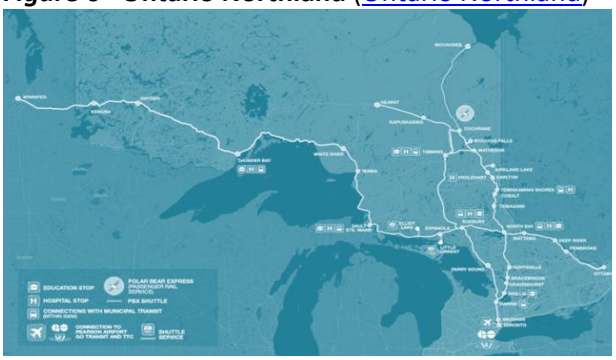
These incentives are important because increased ridership makes public transit more efficient and socially acceptable. For example, if on a corridor transit only has less than 1% mode share, as on the #66 bus route, only LOS D (1-4 daily trips) may be justified, but if transportation demand management (TDM) incentives such as bus priority lanes, commute trip reduction programs and fare subsidies increase the mode share to 15-25%, as on the #61 bus route, LOS A or B (more than ten daily trips with amenities) may be justified. Transit ridership incentives are therefore important to maximize economic returns and benefits from transportation infrastructure investments since they improve transit system efficiencies, build public support, and reduce roadway traffic problems.

Examples of Success

1. Canadian Intercity Bus Services (HOC 2023)

Ontario Northland, a provincial agency created in 1902, provides public transport services numerous communities, as illustrated below. In 2022 its buses carried 281,790 passengers and 34,707 packages, and its trains carried 46,201 passengers. Of its $148 million annual budget, $95 million is from sales and $54 million (36%) is provincial subsidy. Between 1946 and 2017 the *Saskatchewan Transportation Company* provided intercity passenger and freight transport to 243 communities. It required $17 million annual subsidy.

Figure 6 **Ontario Northland** (Ontario Northland)



Ontario Northland, a provincial agency, provides bus services that connect numerous communities.

2. Virginia Breeze Bus Lines

Virginia's Department of Rail and Public Transit (DRPT) provides interregional bus services. The first route, the Valley Flyer, connects various communities with the Dulles International Airport. With fares as low as $15, the Flyer quickly exceeded ridership expectations. With this proven success the DRPT expanded the program to include three more routes, as illustrated right.

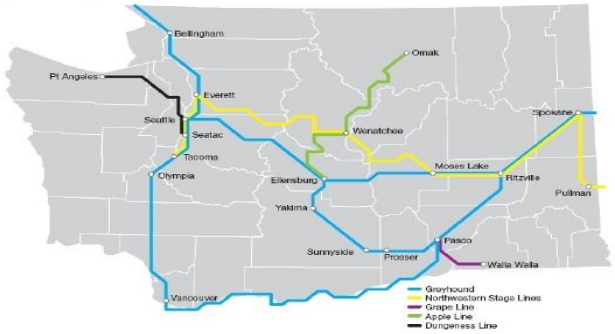
Figure 7 **Virginia State Bus Routes (**Gordon 2022)

Virginia's Department of Rail and Public Transit provides bus service on major travel corridors. Ridership exceeds expectations.

3. Travel Washington Intercity and Rural Mobility Programs (Lynott 2014)

Declining intercity bus service left many Washington communities without connections to other towns and cities. In response the state created the *Travel Washington Intercity Bus Program* which contracts with private companies to provide bus services on major routes, as illustrated right. The State DOT works with communities to design the program and select service providers. Program Manager, Steve Abernathy, says that this approach has garnered strong community support. "When the Gold Line (northeastern Washington) was announced, communities were falling over each other to see who could bring the most to the ribbon cutting."

Figure 8 **Washington Intercity Bus Network**



Washington Intercity Bus and Rural Transit Assistance programs support and fund interregional bus routes.

Other state programs to help rural communities plan, coordinate and fund public, private non-profit, private for-profit and Tribal transit services. As a result, most rural counties have coordinated transit services. For example, the Olympic Transit Loop consists of six coordinated local transit services that connect small communities, Indian reservations and tourist destinations around the Olympic Peninsula.

Island Highway Example (BIT 2024)

The Island Highway between central and south Vancouver Island is busy and often congested, carrying about 30,000 daily travellers, yet has minimal and expensive transit service, with only four daily buses between Victoria and Duncan and only seven daily buses between Duncan and Nanaimo. As a result, transit currently serves a tiny portion of travel on this corridor, as illustrated below.

Figure 9 **Current Central to South Vancouver Island Transit Services**

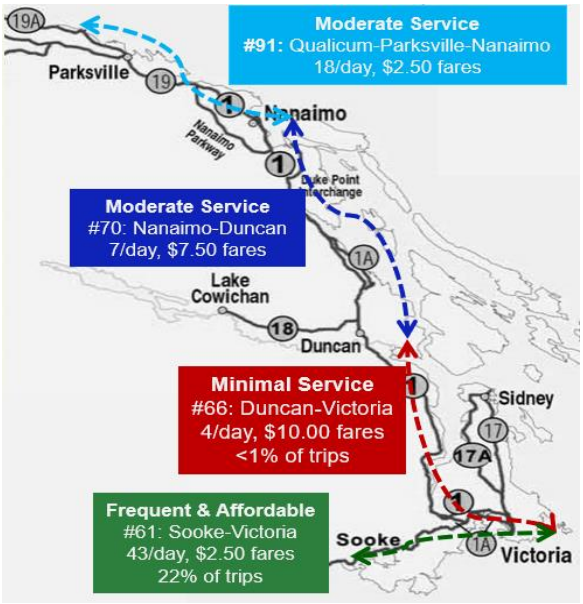
Transit service between central and southern Vancouver Island is currently infrequent and expensive, particularly between Duncan and Victoria.

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

Nanaimo-Duncan (#70, 50 kms, 70 minutes), 7 daily trips with $7.50 fares. Serves less than 1% transit mode share. *(LOS C)*

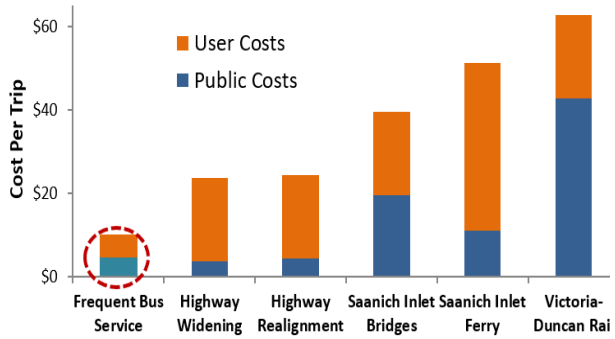
Duncan-Victoria (#66, 60 kms, 75 minutes), 4 daily trips with $10 one-way fares. Less than 1% transit mode share. *(LOS D)*

Sooke-Victoria (#61, 40 kms, 70 minutes), 43 daily trips with $2.50 fares. Serves over 20% of peak-period trips. (LOS A)



Although the province has targets to reduce vehicle travel, double transit travel, increase affordability and safety, and support rural economic development, this has yet to translate into more Vancouver Island transit service. MoTI is spending hundreds of millions of dollars to expand the Island Highway but does not consider, plan or fund frequent and affordable bus service despite its cost efficiency and many benefits, as illustrated in Figure 10.

Figure 10 **Highway Improvement Cost Efficiency**



Frequent and affordable bus service is the most cost-effective solution to Island Highway traffic problems but

BC's Ministry of Transportation collects little data on non-auto demands, does not support multimodal planning, and devotes a tiny portion of its budget to non-auto programs. It has no standard process for analyzing, planning or funding interregional transit service; any new service must be requested by regional officials, planned by BC Transit, and funded by the province. This reflects institutional biases: the way transport problems are defined (focusing on vehicle traffic conditions), the scope of impacts considered (many roadway expansion costs and transit benefits are overlooked or undervalued), and the funding process (highway planning simply allocates pre-budgeted funds but transit improvements require new provincial funding) all favor highway expansions over new transit services.

Conclusions and Recommendations

For non-drivers to have independent mobility they need an integrated system that includes safe walking and bicycling conditions, local transit services, plus interregional connections. Frequent and affordable interregional bus services ensure that all travellers, including non-drivers, enjoy independence and dignity and receive a fair share of public investments. Current planning tends to overlook and undervalue many interregional bus benefits which results in underinvestment, as summarized below. This causes disparities between drivers and non-drivers, and between urban and rural non-drivers.

Table 7 **Interregional Bus Benefits**

Benefit Category	Degree Considered in Current Planning
Users	
More independent mobility and opportunity for non-drivers	Seldom included in formal economic evaluation
Financial savings compared with private automobile or taxi travel	Generally overlooked
Reduced crash and assault risk	Generally overlooked
Reduced impaired driving	Generally overlooked
Motorists	
Reduced chauffeuring burdens	Generally overlooked
Reduced high-risk (youth, senior, impaired) driving	Generally overlooked
Reduced traffic and parking congestion	Generally overlooked
Provides a mobility option when they cannot drive.	Generally overlooked
Local Economy	
Supports industries such as tourism	Seldom included in formal economic evaluation
Retains and attracts more residents	Seldom included in formal economic evaluation
Helps attract major employers such as colleges	Seldom included in formal economic evaluation

Many benefits of interregional bus services tend to be overlooked or undervalued in current planning.

This underinvestment leads to low transit mode shares. Where public transit service is convenient and affordable it typically serves 10-30% of trips, reflecting true demands. Transit experiences economies of scale. For example, higher load factors increase transit cost recovery, and busways provide more value if transit ridership increases. To optimize our transportation system transportation agencies must correct planning and funding biases which undervalue and underinvest in transit.

The key message: *A highway is incomplete unless it has convenient and affordable public transit services.*

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