



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Staff Report

To: Council
From: Director of Operational Services
Subject: BC Transit – Transit Priorities Update

File No.: 5335-20
Date: April 2, 2025

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to present Council with an update on work for the improvements to the Comox Valley Regional Transit System, highlighting key exchanges within the City and provide a recommendation for endorsement of BC Transit and the Comox Valley Regional District's exchange designs as to enable the commencement of public engagement and construction.

BACKGROUND:

In January 2022, the CVRD presented Council with the Comox Valley Transit Infrastructure Study. The study proposes five new Transit Exchange locations and looks for opportunities to prioritize transit operations along the Frequent Transit Network (FTN), to support service increases and ridership growth. This includes recommendations for transit priority measures, as well as corridor assessments where transit operations are impacted by queuing and delay.

On January 17, 2022, Council resolved:

"THAT based on the January 17, 2022 staff report, "Comox Valley Transit Infrastructure Study," Council approve OPTION 1 and provide a Letter of Support in Principle to the CVRD for only the transit exchanges and transit priority measures at the intersection of Ryan Road and Old Island Highway, and at Old Island HWY and Comox Road; and,

THAT Council request that the CVRD modify the Comox Valley Transit Infrastructure Study to move the transit priority measure at Old Island HWY and Comox Road to the short term, and, add traffic signal coordination along Old Island HWY from Ryan Road, across the 5th Street bridge to Cliffe Avenue and 8th Street,

AND THAT Council direct staff to proceed with the conceptual design in Appendix A, upon completion of the 5th Street Bridge Rehabilitation Project."

The Regional District's Transit Infrastructure Study recommends a new transit exchange in South Courtenay and a relocated transit exchange in the Downtown core. The CVRD, in conjunction with Urban Systems, created preliminary options and evaluation criteria in order to recommend successful exchange locations. The study assessed locations based on rider experience, safety, community, and transit operations. These categories include the walking distance to key destinations, ease of connections, opportunities to accommodate transit amenities, the level of safe, comfortable pedestrian and cyclist access, traffic safety, and transit travel time and delays.

Based on these criteria, the study recommended a new South Courtenay transit exchange on southbound Cliffe Avenue north of Anfield Road, adjacent to the Anfield Centre (Walmart). The existing transit stop in the Anfield Centre parking lot will remain for access to businesses. This new exchange location offered easier access for transit operations, and passenger connections, and reduced route deviation and delays.

Additionally, the study recommended a new downtown exchange on England Avenue between Cumberland Road and 8th Street to replace the existing downtown transit exchange on Cliffe Avenue at 4th Street, adjacent to the Courtenay and District Museum & Palaeontology Centre. This location offered good proximity to the centre of downtown Courtenay, and has good sidewalk coverage and crossing opportunities, as well as good natural surveillance.

Lastly, the Regional District study looked for opportunities to enhance or prioritize transit operations along the frequent transit network corridor (FTN) with the objective of making the FTN service competitive with vehicle travel by continually increasing service levels, coupled with reduced transit travel times and improved service reliability. The study identified transit priority measures in the form of traffic signal queue jumps, both at Ryan Road and the Old Island HWY and Old Island HWY and Comox Road intersections.

DISCUSSION:

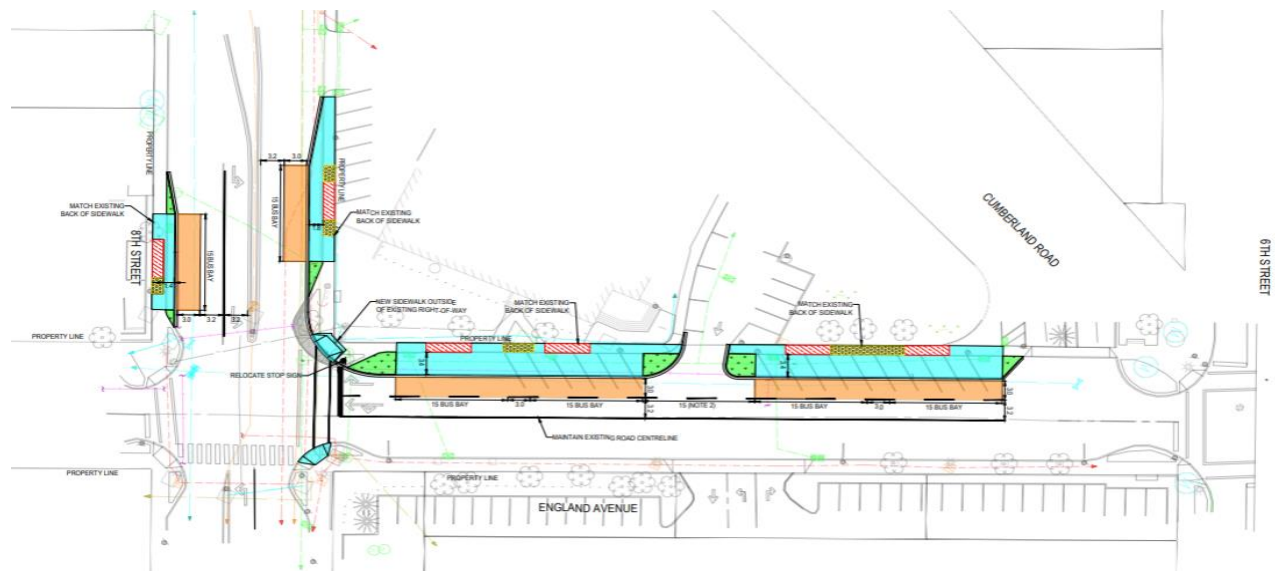
Since December 2023, BC Transit and the Comox Valley Regional District have hired a design consultant and have been working with City staff to develop and refine the detailed designs for the two exchanges within the City of Courtenay jurisdiction.

Downtown Courtenay Exchange

In the early conceptual design and route planning stages, BC Transit staff identified that the proposed routing should avoid England Avenue between 4th and 5th Streets as it would conflict with the downtown events; e.g. DCBIA Events, Farmer's Market, etc. Considering these potential impacts, BC Transit developed new routing to avoid this block and ensure efficient routing through downtown that aimed to maintain some service near the existing exchange at Cliffe Avenue at 4th Street. BC Transit also identified a preference for circulating buses in a clockwise manner around a City block to avoid left turns and minimize the risk of delays. As a result of these decisions, the current design for Downtown Courtenay Exchange contains four new bus bays on the west side of England Avenue near 8th Street in front of the Courthouse with two additional bays for route 1 along each side of 8th Street near England Avenue.

As a result of this preliminary work, BC Transit has proposed a revised exchange layout for the *Downtown Courtenay Exchange* location as depicted in **figure 1**.

Figure 1: Downtown Courtenay Exchange – Preliminary Design:



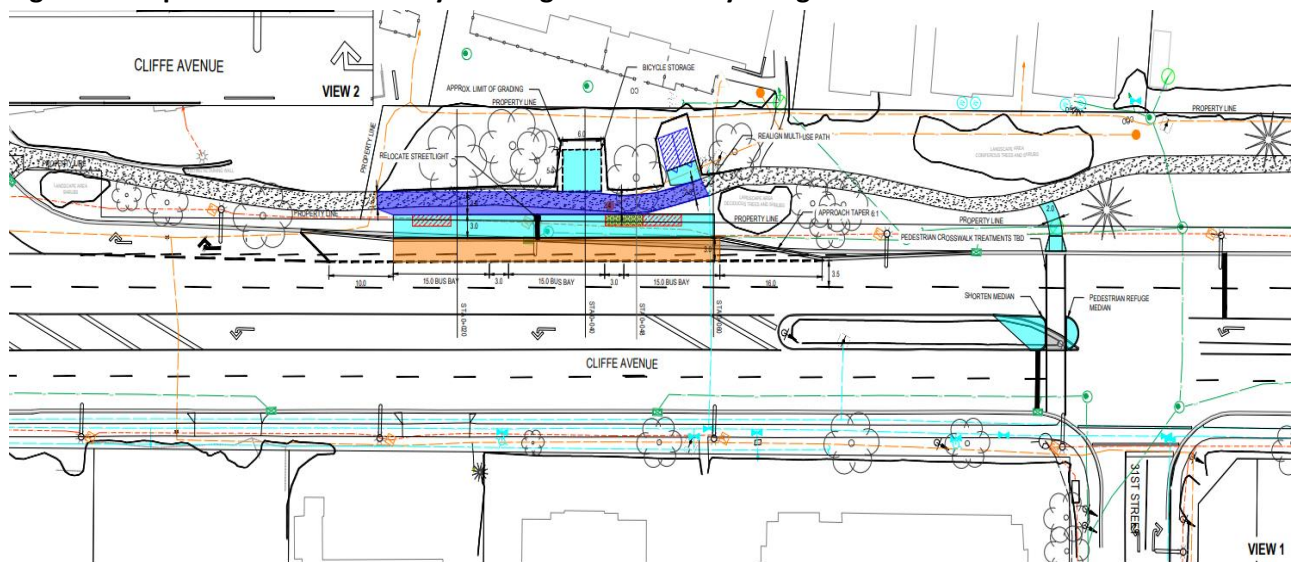
South Courtenay Exchange

The location of the South Courtenay Exchange has also been adjusted from initial designs to be slightly to the north of the mall access road entering Anfield Centre, closer to the 31st Street intersection, with the addition of a new pedestrian crossing on Cliffe Avenue at 31st Street. BC Transit, CVRD, and the City identified this as a preferred option as there is additional City land (parkland dedication along Cliffe Avenue) in this area, which could provide the required space for the development of the bus bays for the exchanges, as well as transit amenities; i.e. dedicated operator washroom, realignment of the multi-use pathway impacted by this project, the sidewalk, and the new transit shelters.

Concerning future constructability and land use planning; the proposed uses are compliant with the current zoning i.e. Parkland dedication, however, due to the shallow depth of the parkland lot, a development variance permit will be required for the siting of any structures, such as the washroom or covered bike racks, under the current Public Assembly Two Zone. To ensure the multi-use pathway parkland values are retained and align with the City's strategic documents such as the Official Community Plan (2022) and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2019), a review of the detailed design for the South Courtenay Exchange is required before they are finalized. Additionally, any assets that are of exclusive use by BC Transit (e.g. washrooms only for bus drivers) would require a Licence of Occupation.

As a result of this preliminary work, BC Transit has proposed a revised exchange layout for the *South Courtenay Exchange* location as depicted in **figure 2**.

Figure 2: Proposed South Courtenay Exchange – Preliminary Design:



The study further identified opportunities for enhanced transit priority measures, in the form of a traffic signal queue jump, at Ryan Road and the Old Island HWY, as well as at Old Island HWY and Comox Road. Transit queue jumps combine short dedicated transit lanes with either a leading bus interval or active signal priority, to allow buses to enter traffic flow in a priority position. Queue jumps at these two locations give transit priority by permitting them to enter the intersections ahead of regular traffic. These improvements are proposed to proceed as prescribed in **figure 3**.

Figure 3: Transit Priority Measures – Preliminary Concept:



If supported, BC Transit has proposed to start the public engagement and marketing process, this will occur throughout 2025 in alignment with a detailed design phase, with construction occurring in 2026.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

In support of the transportation mode target of 30% of trips are made by walking, cycling and transit by 2030, these transit improvements implement a number of OCP policies:

- ST 3: Support and participate in a regional approach to multi-modal transportation planning, delivery of infrastructure and services in accordance with this Plan.
- ST 7: Continue to work with the Comox Valley Regional District and BC Transit on the implementation of the Transit Future Plan, including;
 - A. Implementation of the Comox Valley Frequent Transit Corridor;
 - B. Location and design of transit exchanges in the City; and
 - C. Coordinating the Frequent Transit Network and development within the city to promote transit-supportive land use densities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Following the completion of the Transit Exchange Options Evaluation report, BC Transit developed and submitted its funding application through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) in February 2023. The application covers five exchange locations (Downtown Courtenay, South Courtenay, Downtown Comox, North Island College and Oyster River) and two transit priority locations (Ryan Road at Old Island HWY and Old Island HWY at Comox Road). In December 2023, funding approval was granted for nearly \$10 million to construct these five exchanges and two transit priority locations (40% federal government, 40% provincial government and 20% Comox Valley Regional District).

While the Transit exchanges and priority measures are funded through the Regional District, the in-perpetuity maintenance costs of the exchanges will be attributable to the City operating budget going forward. Currently, the City provides annual maintenance funding for all transit-related assets within its jurisdictional boundary. The addition of these new exchange locations, including amenities will require a modest increase in annual budgetary funds to support ongoing maintenance obligations relative to current service delivery models. City staff did request an additional amenity contribution for the downtown location in the form of secure bike storage, however, due to budget limitations the request was not supported.

Finally, traffic signal infrastructure along the Old Island HWY corridor will need to be replaced in order to successfully deploy the proposed queue-jumping lines. To support these improvements, BC Transit is proposing a 50% cost-sharing agreement with the City to the estimated value of \$30,000. BC Transit has requested that the City consider its ability to contribute capital funding toward these infrastructure improvements.

ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS:

The installation of a new bus exchange, transit priority measures, pedestrian improvements, and cycling infrastructure on any City street where they do not currently exist is an increased level of service and is considered an upgrade under the umbrella of asset management. Increasing the level of service can include additional capital costs to implement the service and in turn, increase annual maintenance costs to operate. Council has adopted an Asset Management Policy and Bylaw to reflect this.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

Under the Council Strategic Priorities 2023-2026, Municipal Infrastructure (Page 13);
This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Municipal Infrastructure - Continued regional collaboration: Regional Growth Strategy, Liquid Waste Management Plan, South Sewer Conveyance, organics/solid waste, air quality, and regional parks

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public communications and engagement for the transit exchanges will be led by BC Transit in coordination with the CVRD. A communications and engagement plan have been prepared by BC Transit and preliminary information has been shared with key project partners. Engagement falls within the inform and consult levels of engagement where consult will be pursued with key interest holders when input will help in adapting and adjusting enhancements, such as with the Comox Valley Accessibility Committee. Key communication tools include a BC Transit project webpage with a project overview for all 5 regional transit exchanges and an opportunity for the public to pose comments and ask questions. <https://engage.bctransit.com/comox-valley>

Additionally, the BC Transit plans to engage directly with property owners within proximity of the transit exchanges and with the Downtown Courtenay Business Improvement Association (DCBIA) directly. Downtown business owners will receive informative letters, including information about how the transit exchanges are being coordinated with the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Planning process, which will allow the public to share place-making ideas on some details of the Downtown Courtenay Transit Exchange.

OPTIONS:

1. THAT Council endorse the proposed improvements to the Comox Valley Regional Transit System's key exchanges within the City and provide support for BC Transit and the Comox Valley Regional District's design, public engagement and construction processes; and

THAT Council direct staff to seek funding support from the Comox Valley Regional District Transit Service in support of the construction and upgrades to City-owned traffic signal infrastructure, required to support transit queue jump lanes.

2. THAT Council endorse the proposed improvements to the Comox Valley Regional Transit System's key exchanges within the City and provide support for BC Transit and the Comox Valley Regional District's design, public engagement and construction processes; and

THAT Council provides financial support up to a maximum contribution amount of \$30,000 in the form of Capital Funding for the construction and upgrade of City-owned traffic signal infrastructure, required to support transit queue jump lanes.

3. THAT Council provide alternate direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. BC Transit Update – Comox Valley Exchange Project

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