

Comox Valley Island Rail Corridor Strategy Background Report



Prepared for
Comox Valley Regional District

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SYSTEMS

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Island Rail Corridor crossing at McLeod Road, Union Bay

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1.0 OVERVIEW

The Province of British Columbia is supporting each region on Vancouver Island where the Island Rail Corridor, previously the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway (E&N Railway), is present to undertake strategic planning studies. The goal of these exercises is to work with regional partners to establish a shared long-term vision for the Corridor, including ensuring that the vision for each region is compatible across regional boundaries. This includes collaboration with First Nations to understand the historic impact of the Corridor on their traditional lands and ensure that any future use reflects a shared vision.

Specific to the Comox Valley, the CVRD is partnering with K'ómoks First Nation (K'ómoks) to create a strategic vision and action plan for the section of the Corridor between the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) boundary and Courtenay. This initiative is not intended to determine the sole function of the Corridor, rather it is to confirm the immense value and potential of the Corridor to the K'ómoks and communities within the Comox Valley and highlight the broader range of opportunities it can help support. Developing this vision will take time and while provincial funding has been provided for this work, timelines, and the process for working together must be established together by K'ómoks and the CVRD, using a collaborative process which respects the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA).

This background report is intended to inform discussions between K'ómoks First Nation and the CVRD by providing a variety of potential functions that could be considered. The CVRD acknowledges this report includes only the input from other local governments and local government stakeholder groups. Of importance, K'ómoks First Nation is considering its own research into the historical impact and activities concerning the establishment of the Island Rail Corridor. It is also acknowledged that the focus of this exercise is on potential activities and uses for the Corridor. This work does not address ownership and management of the Island Rail Corridor lands.

This background report includes consideration of potential transportation functions – including rail services and active transportation – as well as other non-transportation opportunities that could vary considerably. A key goal of this study is to consider the broad range of possible functions, the functional parameters of each, the opportunity to realize multiple objectives and maximize community benefit, and to inform the development of a shared vision for the future.

Similar planning processes are being carried out in the four (4) other regions on Vancouver Island which the Island Rail Corridor crosses – Capital Regional District, Cowichan Valley Regional District, Regional District of Nanaimo, Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District. The process and findings from each region are being coordinated through the support of the B.C. Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure (MoTI) and in cooperation with Island Corridor Foundation (ICF).

1.1 Purpose

This document (Background Report) is intended as the first phase of a more comprehensive process to be undertaken. This document is intended to both provide a baseline understanding of the Comox Valley community and section of the Island Rail Corridor within the CVRD, as well as serve as a point of reference for the development of a shared vision for the Corridor.

This document specifically summarizes the following along the Island Rail Corridor:

- ➔ History of the Island Rail Corridor in the Comox Valley
- ➔ Relevant local, regional, and provincial planning context
- ➔ Demographic characteristics of communities along the Corridor
- ➔ Property ownership and current and future land use in the vicinity of the Island Rail Corridor
- ➔ Key parameters and constraints along the Island Rail Corridor within the CVRD
- ➔ Potential future opportunities for corridor use

Courtenay Station, nearby Cumberland Road (Downtown Courtenay)



2.0 CORRIDOR CONTEXT

2.1 Corridor Overview (Vancouver Island)

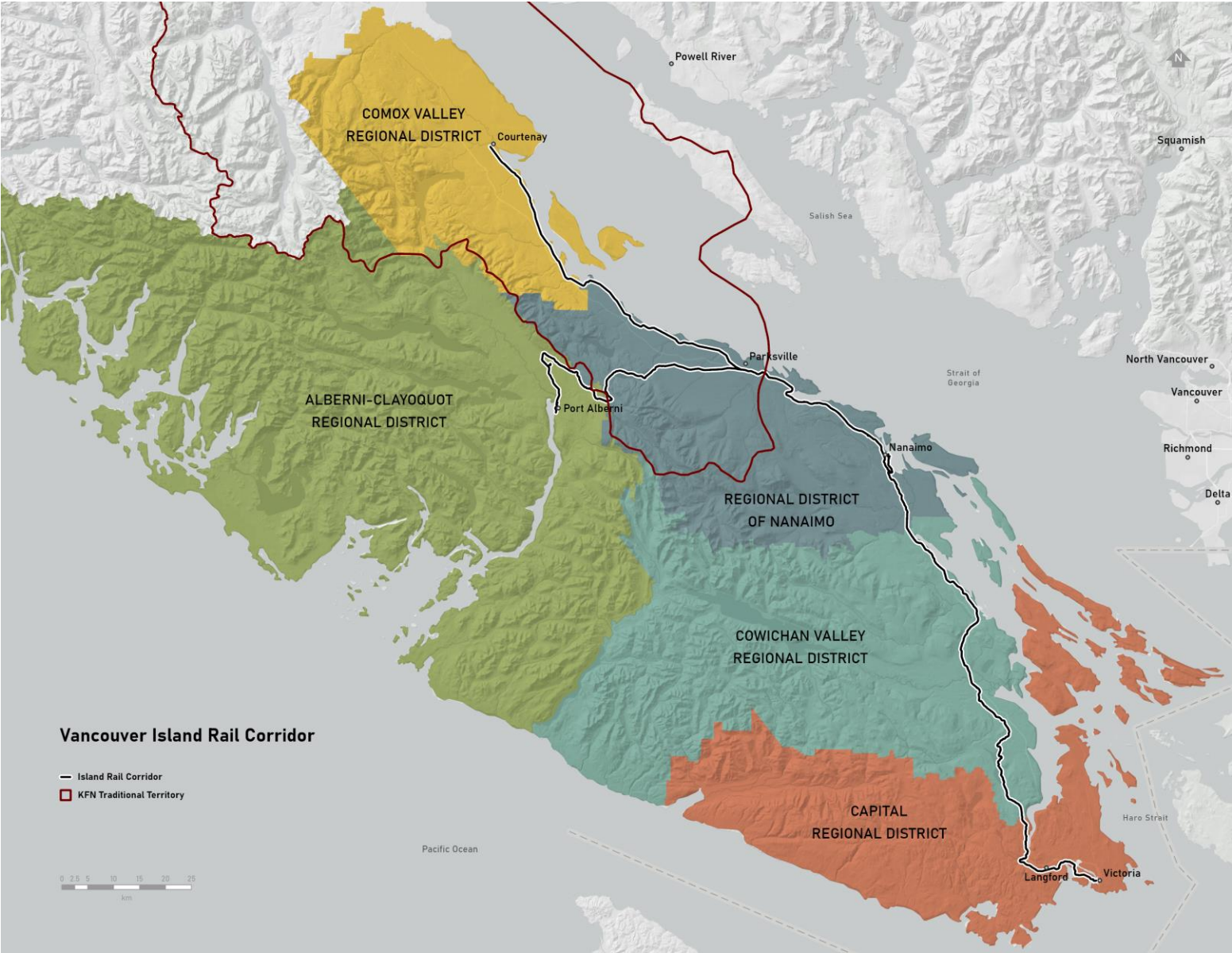
The Island Rail Corridor extends 289 km across Southern and Central Vancouver Island through the territories of fourteen First Nations and five regional districts, along with several local governments, listed below and shown in **Figure 1**. While the respective municipalities are not directly involved in the ICF ownership and management of the Corridor, they are critical contributors to the overall planning and visioning process.

First Nations (14)	Regional Districts (5)	Municipalities (13)
K'ómoks First Nation	Comox Valley Regional District	City of Courtenay
Cowichan Tribes	Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District	City of Duncan
Esquimalt Nation		Township of Esquimalt
Halalt First Nation	Capital Regional District	Town of Ladysmith
Hupačasath First Nation	Cowichan Valley Regional District	City of Langford
Malahat Nation	Regional District of Nanaimo	District of Lantzville
Qualicum First Nation		City of Nanaimo
Penelakut First Nation		Municipality of North Cowichan
Snaw-Naw-As First Nation		City of Parksville
Songhees Nation		City of Port Alberni
Snuneymuxw First Nation		Town of Qualicum Beach
Stz'uminus First Nation		City of Victoria
Ts'uubaa-asatx First Nation		Town of View Royal
Tseshaht First Nation		

The Island Rail Corridor is divided into two subdivisions:

- ➔ Victoria Subdivision – Between Victoria and Courtenay, with the short Wellcox Spur connecting to the barge ramp in Downtown Nanaimo., approximately 225 km.
- ➔ Port Alberni Subdivision – From Parksville to Port Alberni, approximately 64 km.

FIGURE 1. ISLAND RAIL CORRIDOR OVERVIEW MAP



2.2 Corridor Overview (Comox Valley)

The Island Rail Corridor extends 33 km north-south through Electoral Area A of the CVRD and the City of Courtenay. Composed of 24 individual properties owned by the ICF, the Corridor has a total area of approximately 109 ha.

Similar to other sections of the Island Rail Corridor, the typical width of the Corridor in the Comox Valley is 30.5 m (100 feet). Wider sections are found at watercourse crossings, station areas, and in the “Y” system for trains to turn around in Courtenay,¹ which widen up to 65 m. Rail infrastructure is found on most of the Corridor, except the 300m section north of 5th Street in Courtenay.

Supporting infrastructure along the Corridor includes 11 bridge crossings, 10 of which cross watercourses and one is a grade-separated road crossing at Buckley Bay Road. The location and condition of these bridges are discussed further in **Section 4**. Nineteen (19) public road crossings occur at-grade, with crossings ranging from busy highways and arterial roads such as Highway 19A and 29th Street to small local roads, as is highlighted in **Figure 2**. Numerous other driveways and private roads cross the Corridor, particularly in the rural areas of Electoral Area A.

When passenger rail service operated there were four stations in the CVRD, - Courtenay, Union Bay, Buckley Bay and Mud Bay. Only Courtenay was a regular stop along the route and is the only intact station in the region currently. The three smaller stations were “flag stops”, meaning that the train would only stop when requested.

Originally intended to extend north to Campbell River, Courtenay is the northern terminus of the Island Rail Corridor. As the de facto “end-of-the-line”, decision-making for the future of the Island Rail Corridor is dependent on directions established in other regions south of the Comox Valley.

CORRIDOR FACTS

Corridor Length

33 km

Number of Corridor Properties

24

Typical Corridor Width

30.5 m

Widest Corridor Segment

65 m

Bridge Crossings

11

Public At-grade Crossings

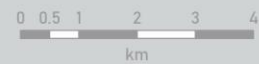
19

Station Sites

Courtenay
Union Bay

Buckley Bay
Mud Bay

¹ Accessed at: www.islandrail.ca/icfstation/courtenay



All lands on this map are located in the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation.

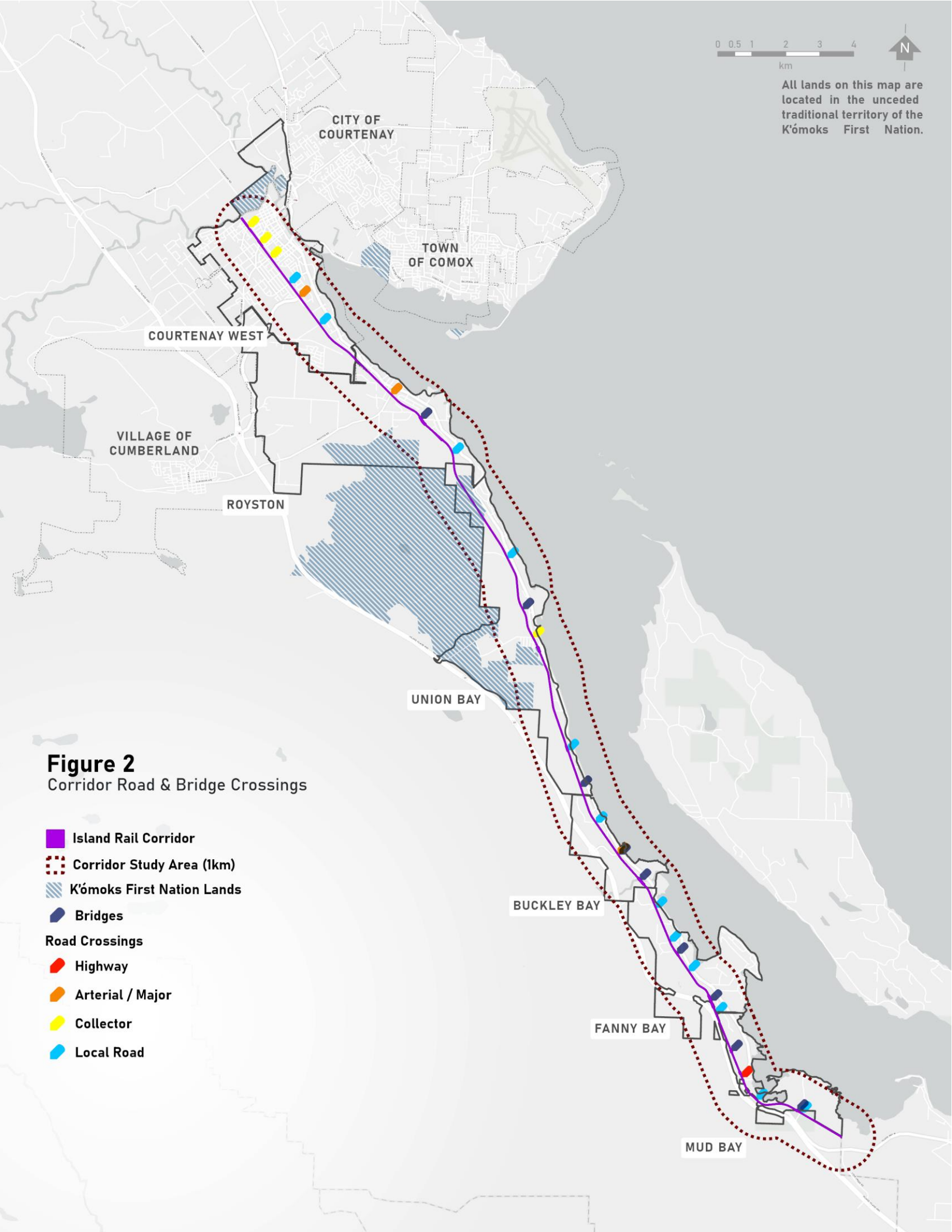


Figure 2
Corridor Road & Bridge Crossings

- Island Rail Corridor
- Corridor Study Area (1km)
- K'ómoks First Nation Lands
- Bridges
- Road Crossings
 - Highway
 - Arterial / Major
 - Collector
 - Local Road

Corridor Uses

Uses of the Island Rail Corridor have varied from its establishment to the present day. This section outlines the past and present uses of the Corridor on Vancouver Island and in the Comox Valley.

Freight Rail

Goods movement along the Island Rail Corridor has been a key use for most of the Corridor's history. Traditional freight uses have focused along the Port-Alberni Subdivision to Nanaimo, where the Pacifica Paper mill acted as a key client.² In the late 20th century, approximately 8,000 carloads moved along the Corridor. Like other rail lines, goods moved along the Island Rail Corridor were generally heavy and low-value products. Shipping to and from Vancouver Island was typically facilitated by rail barge between Nanaimo and Delta for connections to continental rail lines, or through transloading facilities.

When the paper mill was sold in 2001 and rail use decreased, the economic viability of freight rail operations declined. Improvements to other transportation and goods movement infrastructure on Vancouver Island, such as improvements to Highways 1 and 19, also reduced the competitive advantage of rail freight.

At this point, freight rail customers on other portions of the Corridor were limited. By 2010, a report from IBI Group suggested that only four major shipping customers remained on Vancouver Island including one in the Comox Valley.³

Passenger Rail

Passenger rail service operated between Victoria and Courtenay along the Island Rail Corridor until 2011. The daily inter-city service made regular stops at six major stations (including Victoria, Duncan, Nanaimo, Parksville, Qualicum, and Courtenay) and numerous other flag stops located in smaller communities along the Corridor such as Union Bay, Buckley Bay, and Mud Bay. This service last ran in 2011 due to safety concerns along the length of the Corridor as track conditions deteriorated.

Multi-Use Trails

Several portions of the Island Rail Corridor today feature trails alongside the railway. In the CVRD, the Rotary Trail in the City of Courtenay extends approximately 2.5 km alongside the existing railway. In other regions, a further trail has been implemented in the Capital Regional District, Regional District of Nanaimo, and Cowichan Valley Regional District, with current development ongoing in the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District.

Each of these trails allows for a mix of active transportation users, including pedestrians and cyclists, and in many cases have become important recreational and commuter connections in these communities. Trail development along the Island Rail Corridor exclusively follows the “rails-with-trails” model preserving both the rail and active transportation functions. Other trails on Vancouver Island have converted former rail beds to exclusively active transportation use, such as the Galloping Goose and Cowichan Valley Trail.

² Accessed at: www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/reports-and-reference/reports-and-studies/vancouver-island-south-coast/island-rail-corridor/island-rail-corridor-freight-analysis-appendix-d-2022-12-05.pdf

³ Accessed at: www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/reports-and-reference/reports-and-studies/vancouver-island-south-coast/en-railway/en_evaluation_freight_freight_analysis.pdf

2.3 Island Rail Corridor History

The complicated history of the Island Rail Corridor plays a crucial role in understanding Vancouver Island today. Originally, constructing a north-south railway on Vancouver Island was one of the conditions for B.C. to join Canadian Confederation as part of the British North America Act.⁴ The Act required the Government of Canada to construct the railway from Victoria to Campbell River. To facilitate the railway, the Government of British Columbia was required to convey land to the Government of Canada, a tract of land “not to exceed 20 miles on each side of the said line”, as formalized in the *Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway Act* of 1875.

A contractor for railway construction was found in 1884, the coal baron Robert Dunsmuir, at which point the land conveyance began. The first transfer of land was done under the *Settlement Act*, with two further grants made in 1905 and 1910. The combined grants met the requirements of the *Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway Act* totalling 2 million acres of land from Esquimalt to north of Campbell River, approximately 25% of Vancouver Island. Together, these lands are known as the E&N Land Grant.

The original railway extended from Esquimalt to Nanaimo, under the ownership of the Dunsmuir family who utilized the land grants to extract coal and timber from the surrounding lands. In 1905, the railway was sold to Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), which extended the Victoria Subdivision from Parksville to Courtenay. The extension was completed in 1914. Ultimately, the Campbell River terminus envisioned in the *Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway Act* was never achieved due to the start of the First World War.

CPR maintained ownership and continued corridor operations until the late 20th century when passenger and freight rail operations were passed to VIA Rail and RailAmerica, respectively. RailAmerica operated the freight route between Nanaimo and Port Alberni, before declining freight traffic and profitability forced the secession of operations in 2006. Passenger rail operations from Victoria to Courtenay persisted until 2011 when safety concerns due to track conditions resulted in the suspension of service. Under the ICF, Southern Railway of British Columbia has been responsible for rail operations on Vancouver Island.

Today, due to the deteriorating condition of most of the Island Rail Corridor’s infrastructure, the only remaining operational portion of the Corridor is between the rail barge terminal in Downtown Nanaimo and Superior Propane in North Nanaimo. This segment is approximately 11 km, approximately 4% of the total length of the Island Rail Corridor.

In the Comox Valley, the railway expansion resulted in several new or growing settlements. In Courtenay, land was cleared, and buildings erected in anticipation of the arrival of the railway. Rail service greatly reduced the time it took for natural resources from the Valley to other markets, boosting the region’s trade potential and economic growth. Three minor rail spurs were developed in the City of Courtenay to directly service local businesses, two south of Cumberland Road, and one north of 5th Street, all of which have been removed or are no longer operational.⁵ The suspension of passenger and freight service along the Island Rail Corridor similarly affected the Comox Valley, with most goods movement and personal travel moving to Highway 19A and eventually Highway 19.

⁴ Retrieved from: www.islandrail.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Initial-Business-Case-FINAL.pdf

⁵ Retrieved from: www.courtenay.ca/assets/Community/Heritage/2018-EandNTrain-24x36-web.pdf

First Nations + Corridor History

When the Island Rail Corridor was established, neither the Federal nor Provincial governments recognized the rights of First Nations, including K'ómoks First Nation.⁶ The grants deeply and negatively impacted First Nations and their traditional territories and represent a significant step in the disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples in the Comox Valley and on Vancouver Island. Equally, no consultation was undertaken, nor any compensation offered for any of the lands taken. As a result, these historic injustices associated with the Island Rail Corridor remain a critical issue for First Nations in the CVRD and along the Corridor.

The ICF recognizes and acknowledges the aboriginal title and rights of First Nations along the Corridor, in which the organization holds a fee simple interest, as described in the organization's Declaration on Aboriginal Title.⁷ This includes the potential right of reversion to the First Nations if the Corridor is not used for railway purposes. The issues originating from the land grants must be justly and equitably settled by the governments of Canada and British Columbia in keeping with the recommendations and commitments of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.

Given the history and nature of these issues, and the role that other levels of government must play in their settlement, this document does not address the necessary consultation, accommodation, and reconciliation process. Administering this process is primarily the responsibility of the Provincial and Federal governments and must be resolved regardless of the work completed by the CVRD. The CVRD also recognizes that it has a significant role to play in facilitating reconciliation at the local and regional levels, building trust with K'ómoks First Nation, and partnering with KFN to achieve mutually desired outcomes concerning the Island Rail Corridor. The CVRD acknowledges that consultation, accommodation, and reconciliation as it relates to the history of the Corridor is the responsibility of the Provincial and Federal governments. The CVRD is committed to reconciliation at the local level, including building a relationship with the K'ómoks First Nation that is built on trust and includes collaboration on areas of joint interest. The development of a joint vision for the Island Rail Corridor is an important part of this work.

⁶ Retrieved from: www.islandrail.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Initial-Business-Case-FINAL.pdf

⁷ Retrieved from: www.islandrail.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/ICF_Declaration_on_Aboriginal_Title1.pdf

2.4 Partner Profiles

In addition to the First Nations and regional governments involved in visioning processes along the Island Rail Corridor, several other organizations and government agencies will be important partners in any future use of the Corridor. These partners and their existing and/or potential roles are identified in this section.

Island Corridor Foundation

The Island Corridor Foundation (ICF) is a non-profit organization established in 2003 which owns the Island Rail Corridor. The ICF is a partnership between various local governments and First Nations communities along the railway. It is governed by six directors representing the Regional Districts and six directors who represent First Nations. Membership is limited to local and First Nation governments whose boundaries and territories are wholly or partly within the geographic area of the Corridor.

The ICF seeks to secure a stable and prosperous future for the Island Rail Corridor that benefits all Vancouver Island residents, through championing rail as well as rail-with-trail uses. The organization's goals include:

- ➔ Acquire, preserve, and develop the Island Rail Corridor.
- ➔ Maintain the Island Rail Corridor as a continuous special use connection for all communities, while respecting and supporting First Nations interests and traditional lands and uses.
- ➔ Contribute to safe and environmentally sound passenger and freight rail services along the Corridor.
- ➔ Create trails, and facilitate opportunities for parks, gardens, greenways, and other public areas for use of members of the public along the length of the Island Rail Corridor.
- ➔ Conserve the environmental and spiritual features and functions of the Island Rail Corridor in respect of the land, water, and natural resources for the general benefit of the public.
- ➔ Preserve archaeological resources, historic landmarks, structures, artifacts and historic routes along the Island Rail Corridor for historical purposes and for ongoing and future use by the community.
- ➔ Encourage a flexible infrastructure along the Island Rail Corridor which will encourage a wide range of economic and trade activity for the benefit of all communities lying adjacent to the Island Corridor.

In 2006, ICF secured Asset Donation Agreements with the Canadian Pacific Railway and RailAmerica to acquire full ownership of the Island Rail Corridor. Since then, the ICF has worked with corridor communities to study the viability of future rail service along the Island Rail Corridor, while also utilizing the Corridor for active transportation infrastructure in multiple jurisdictions.

Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

The B.C. Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) plans and improves transportation networks, builds new infrastructure, provides transportation services, and implements transportation policies, to allow for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods throughout British Columbia. It is also responsible for Crown Corporations such as BC Railway Company, BC Transit, and BC Transportation Financing Authority.

MoTI has been continuously involved in studying the condition and viability of the Island Rail Corridor since the corridor was transferred to the ICF in 2006. Alongside the ICF, MoTI is facilitating and supporting engagement with local governments and First Nations on future possible uses and interests of the Island Rail Corridor. MoTI would continue to be a key partner for many future uses to secure sustainable funding for further studies, and corridor improvements and operations.

Southern Railway of Vancouver Island

The ICF chose the Southern Railway of Vancouver Island (SVI) to continue rail operations within the Island Rail Corridor following ICF's acquisition of the Corridor. SVI is a division of Southern Railway of British Columbia Limited (SRY) a major short-line operator in British Columbia's Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley areas. SRY is an affiliate of the privately held Washington Group of Companies.

SVI provides rail freight services to some customers on Vancouver Island via transload operation based in Wellcox Yard, offering connections to other North American railroads (CN, CP, BNSF and UP) through Annacis Island in Delta, BC. As the rail operator for the ICF, SVI could operate any potential rail operations which may arise, this includes expanding transload operations, freight, tourism, passenger, or commuter trains.

2.5 Foundational Questions

Due to the number of partners and interests in the Island Rail Corridor as well as the cost of improvements and required upgrades, the complexity of decision-making along the Corridor has been an ongoing challenge for the continued use of the Corridor for any purpose. As such, it is important to identify some of these key or “foundational” questions that will determine how the Island Rail Corridor is used in the future. These questions will not be answered in this phase of the CVRD’s Island Rail Corridor Strategy, as they ultimately depend on the results of ongoing conversations with partners within and beyond the CVRD.

Ownership

The long-term ownership and governance model of the Island Rail Corridor is a fundamental issue due to its implications for decision-making about future corridor uses. Under the ICF, ownership is shared between numerous local and First Nations governments, with different interests in the Corridor. Should ownership change, the new owners would have the opportunity to benefit from future corridor activities but also be required to take on the risks and liabilities and capital and operational costs associated with those activities. Therefore, many of the existing complexities of decision-making for the Island Rail Corridor may continue, depending on the final ownership model.

Risk & Liability

Ownership of the Island Rail Corridor comes with risks and liabilities that place significant burdens on the owner to manage and mitigate. These risks and liabilities are inherent to ownership and could be a significant constraint on decision-making on future corridor uses due to the age, condition, and complexity of the Island Rail Corridor.

Capital + Operational Costs

Technical studies have shown that there are substantial costs to improve, maintain, and operate future activities within the Island Rail Corridor. These costs could be prohibitive to some or all desired uses, depending on the ownership model and the funds available to the owner. As such, funding partnerships with the Provincial and Federal governments will likely be required to support any future use over the short-, medium-, or long-term.

Corridor-Wide Decision-Making

Up- and downstream decisions along the Island Rail Corridor will impact potential future uses of the Corridor and have implications for what is possible in the CVRD. For example, if a neighbouring community or region decides that rail service is not envisioned along portions of the Island Rail Corridor under their jurisdiction, the viability of rail service to other communities is reduced or perhaps unachievable. This means that the CVRD and its partners’ decision-making on a vision for the Island Rail Corridor and potential future corridor uses will be heavily informed by the visions developed in the same ongoing processes. This is particularly true of the results of the visioning process in the Regional District of Nanaimo, the immediate neighbour of the CVRD.



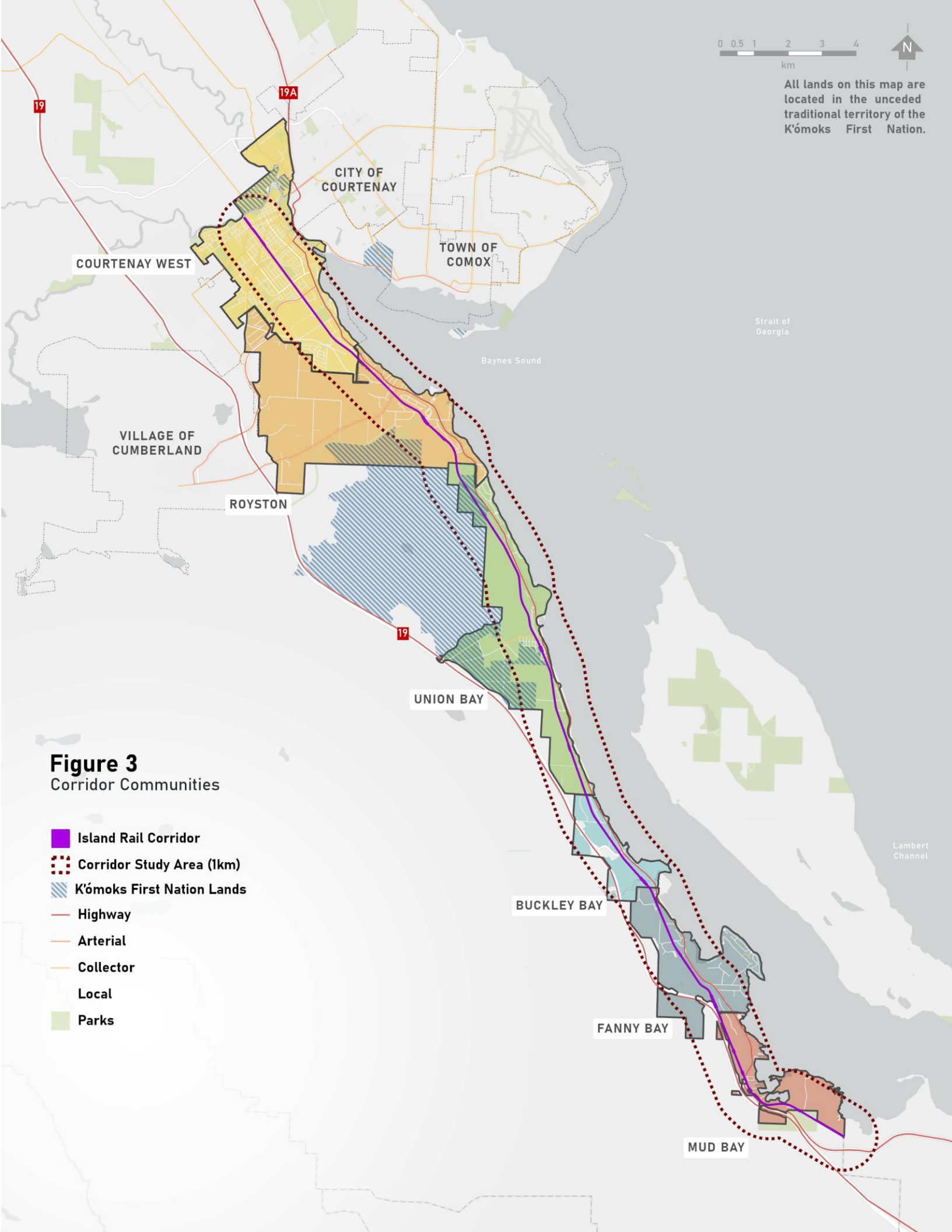
3.0 COMMUNITY PROFILES

The Island Rail Corridor in the Comox Valley Regional District passes through several communities from the City of Courtenay, through Electoral Area A to the Regional District of Nanaimo. These “Corridor Communities” vary in size and their present-day relationship to the corridor. Understanding the characteristics of these communities, including their history, current population, and key local destinations, is critical to understanding the Island Rail Corridor today and how it may be used in the future.

This section provides a brief overview of the broader region and the six communities found along the Island Rail Corridor. Since many of these communities do not have distinct boundaries, census geographies have been used to partially define the areas, as shown in **Figure 3**, that may be most directly impacted by past, present, and future use of the Island Rail Corridor. Due to the size of some of the Corridor Communities, Census data may not be available for all information presented for larger communities.

The following Corridor Communities are described subsequent in this section:

- ➔ Comox Valley (entire regional district)
- ➔ Courtenay West
- ➔ Royston
- ➔ Union Bay
- ➔ Buckley Bay
- ➔ Fanny Bay
- ➔ Mud Bay



0 0.5 1 2 3 4
km



All lands on this map are located in the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation.

Figure 3
Corridor Communities

- Island Rail Corridor
- Corridor Study Area (1km)
- K'ómoks First Nation Lands
- Highway
- Arterial
- Collector
- Local
- Parks

3.1 Comox Valley Regional District

The CVRD includes three member municipalities (City of Courtenay, Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland) and three electoral areas (Baynes Sound, Lazo North, and Puntledge), covering an area of over 1,725 km² in the traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation.

With a population that is projected to increase by 50% over the next 20 years, growth and development objectives aim for a more compact settlement pattern, with 90% directed in Core Settlement Areas and Municipal Areas. Most of the region's population is concentrated in the member municipalities and the rural areas adjacent to the municipalities. These communities are also the primary commercial, employment, and institutional centres for the CVRD, including large employers like CFB Comox, North Island College, and North Island Hospital – Comox Valley.

The diverse settlement patterns and geography in the region mean that travel within the CVRD is primarily by vehicle. Targeted investment in active transportation infrastructure and transit has provided opportunities for multi-modal travel. Transit service is provided regionally with the system focused and aligned with the region's key centres.





The Island Rail Corridor runs through the southern portion of the CVRD, from Parksville Station in the RDN to Courtenay Station (terminus). Before reaching Courtenay, the railway passes through several small, coastal communities including Mud Bay, Fanny Bay, Buckley Bay, Union Bay, and Royston, described in this section.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Population	Dwellings	Pop. Growth (2016-2021)
72,445	42,412	8.9%

Median Age	Median Household Income
50.8	\$70,000

Mode Share

			
86%	2%	6%	3%

Regional Destinations

CFB Comox
Downtown Courtenay
North Island College
North Island Hospital Comox Valley

3.2 Courtenay West

The City of Courtenay is the urban hub of the Comox Valley, home to a diverse community and growing population. Per their OCP, Courtenay's population is forecasted to grow by 27% to a total of 32,502 people by 2051. Given the size and geography of Courtenay, this profile focuses on the areas of Courtenay west of the Puntledge River, within approximately 1 km of the Island Rail Corridor, called "Courtenay West" for this work. This area is home to 14,841 people as of 2021, or 53% of Courtenay's total population. This includes areas of South Courtenay incorporated into the City of Courtenay as part of a boundary extension in 2014.





Courtenay is the primary employment centre in the region, with many employment-dense areas overlapping with areas of higher population density near the Island Rail Corridor, including Downtown Courtenay. Existing land use is a mix of low- and medium-density residential, light industrial, commercial, and community uses. The Courtenay OCP identifies opportunities for further intensification in nearby mixed-use neighbourhood centres, including immediately adjacent to the Corridor between 5th and 17th Streets.

The Corridor crosses Courtenay West from the municipal boundary to the Puntledge River, including undeveloped parcels north of 5th Street. The Courtenay Station is the terminus of the Corridor, located between Cumberland Road and 5th Street. It was given heritage status in 2002,⁸ with the Rotary Club making significant improvements to the exterior to support preservation efforts; however, the station remains unoccupied.

Due to the relatively high population densities and Courtenay's developed street network, Courtenay West features several at-grade road and pathway crossings, including high-traffic roads such as Cumberland Road, 17th Street, 26th Street, and 29th Street.

The Rotary Trail was developed as a parallel multi-use pathway within the Corridor between 2011 and 2015.⁹ The Rotary Trail extends approximately 2.5 km from 5th Street to 29th Street and is an example of the "rails-with-trails" opportunity sought in other Island communities.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Population	Dwellings	Pop. Growth (2016-2021)	
14,841	7,086	15.6%	
Median Age	Median Household Income		
48.8	\$65,500		
Mode Share			
			
84%	2%	8%	3%

Local Destinations

Downtown Courtenay
Rotary Trail
Bill Moore Memorial Park

LOCAL CORRIDOR PROFILE

Corridor Length	Number of Corridor Properties
4.4 km	9
Station Sites	Major Crossings
Courtenay Station	5 th Street
	Cumberland Road
	17 th Street
	26 th Street
	29 th Street

⁸ Accessed at: www.courtenay.ca/EN/main/community/heritage/architecture/courtenay-train-station.html

⁹ Accessed at: www.islandrail.ca/trails/trails-within-the-comox-valley

3.3 Royston

Royston is an unincorporated community and historic village that is in Electoral Area A, along the southwestern boundary of the City of Courtenay. Royston's history is closely tied to its former port, which provided access for the logging industry and other natural resources sectors in the Comox Valley. Today, the community has the largest population of an unincorporated area in the region and is designated for future growth as a "Settlement Expansion Area" in the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS).

Royston has grown steadily in recent years, with its close relationship with Courtenay providing opportunities for access to services, employment opportunities, and commercial centres. Some local commercial and community uses are located along Highway 19A near the intersection with Royston Road. Unlike the other unincorporated Corridor Communities, Royston has transit service providing connections to both Courtenay and Cumberland.

The Island Rail Corridor passes through the entirety of Royston, predominately through residential areas. The nearby Trent River Trestle (approximately 90 m) is a significant crossing on the Island Rail Corridor and has been recommended in technical analyses to undergo immediate repairs if it is to accommodate future passenger and freight loads. The at-grade crossing of Royston Road is another critical crossing due to high-traffic conditions along the road and the number of pedestrians travelling to Royston Elementary School.

A second railway, the former Wellington Colliery Railway, connected Royston to Cumberland. This railway has since been removed and replaced with the Royston to Cumberland Railway Trail. Another active transportation connection, the Royston Seaside Trail, is also intended to be extended to connect to the Courtenay Riverway, providing access along the Puntledge River to Downtown Courtenay.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Population	Dwellings	Pop. Growth (2016-2021)
2,791	1,219	6.9%

Median Age	Median Household Income
51.6	\$79,500

Mode Share



88%



2%



5%



4%

Local Destinations

Royston Elementary School

Royston Community Club

Royston Seaside Trail

Royston to Cumberland Railway Trail

LOCAL CORRIDOR PROFILE

Corridor Length	Number of Corridor Properties
4.4 km	3

Station Sites
N/A

Major Crossings
Trent River
Royston Road





3.4 Union Bay

Union Bay is a small seaside community in Electoral Area A. Formerly a major shipping port, it is located between Royston and Buckley Bay. Union Bay is a low-density community, with most land classified under residential, mixed residential, or rural land use designations. Some limited commercial development is found in the community along Highway 19A. Compared to some adjacent communities, destinations within Union Bay can be reached by predominately by walking or cycling. While BC Transit Route 14 (Union Bay Shuttle) stops in Union Bay and Royston before reaching Courtenay, stops in Union Bay and Royston are by request only, with weekday service north of Royston every 2 to 5 hours.

Union Bay could undergo significant growth and change in coming years, with a proposed sewer expansion project to serve nearby K'ómoks First Nation Treaty Settlement Lands, as well as the Union Bay Estates development. Union Bay Estates is a 789-acre master-planned community set to feature shopping, dining, hotels, office space and a mix of multi-family residential, condos and single-family homes along the waterfront. The first phase of this development is currently underway along the waterfront, with future phases planned to be clustered inland along, or closer to, the Island Rail Corridor.

In 1914, the railhead for the northward extension of the E&N Railway reached Union Bay. Union Bay remained a flag stop when passenger rail operations ceased in 2011. Despite featuring a significant portion of the total Island Rail Corridor, Union Bay has fewer major watercourse and road crossings than other Corridor Communities, including Hindoo Creek, Hart Creek, and McLeod Road.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Population	Dwellings	Pop. Growth (2016-2021)	
1,140	563	4.4%	
Median Age	Median Household Income		
58.4	\$73,000		
Mode Share			
			
92%	N/A	5%	N/A

Local Destinations

Union Bay Community Club
Union Bay Public Library
K'ómoks First Nation Treaty Settlement Lands (Future)
Union Bay Estates (Future)

LOCAL CORRIDOR PROFILE

Corridor Length	Number of Corridor Properties
10.6 km	5
Station Sites	Major Crossings
Union Bay Station	Hindoo Creek Hart (Washer) Creek McLeod Road

3.5 Buckley Bay

Buckley Bay is a small seaside community located between Union Bay and Fanny Bay. It is classified as a “Rural Settlement Area” under the RGS. Most of its land is under rural or country residential land use designations and will likely not experience significant growth in coming years, despite high growth per the most recent Census. The Island Rail Corridor passes near the primary subdivision in Buckley Bay around Mystery Beach Road and otherwise mostly passes through undeveloped land.

Buckley Bay is a minor transportation hub as the departure point for the BC Ferries crossing to Denman Island and Hornby Island. With an interchange at Buckley Bay Road and Highway 19, the community is also an important area of transition between the two major highways in the Comox Valley, providing access to other communities both north and south along Highway 19A. Generally, most of the major north-south corridors, including the Island Rail Corridor, the highways, and major electrical right-of-way.

During the years of inter-city passenger service, the Buckley Bay station operated as a flag stop. Two important railway crossings are found in Buckley Bay. The first is the Tsable River Trestle, which is approximately 184 m long, among Vancouver Island’s longest bridges. The other is the crossing of Buckley Bay Road, the only grade-separated road crossing along the Island Rail Corridor in the CVRD. Both crossings will be important considerations for future use of the Corridor around Buckley Bay.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Population	Dwellings	Pop. Growth (2016-2021)
228	111	11.8%

Median Age	Median Household Income
61.6	N/A

Mode Share

			
92%	N/A	N/A	N/A

Local Destinations

Buckley Bay Ferry Terminal

LOCAL CORRIDOR PROFILE

Corridor Length	Number of Corridor Properties
3.2 km	3

Station Sites	Major Crossings
Buckley Bay Station	Tsable River
	Buckley Bay Road

3.6 Fanny Bay

Fanny Bay is a small seaside community to the south of Buckley Bay, classified as a CVRD “Rural Settlement Area” as part of Electoral Area A. The community is home to Fanny Bay Oysters, growers, processors, and exporters of farmed shellfish, particularly oysters, for domestic and global markets. Population growth in Fanny Bay has typically been slow, without major changes in land use patterns. There is currently no transit access in the community, so most trips are dependent on the use of a car to access employment, commercial, or other community destinations in the region.

The Island Rail Corridor passes through the entire length of the community, primarily through residential or undeveloped rural areas. Residential development in Fanny Bay is clustered in multiple subdivisions, the largest of which is located on Ships Point approximately 1.5 km away from the Island Rail Corridor. Water and fire protection services at Ships Point are provided by the Ships Point Improvement District.

There was no stop in Fanny Bay on the former inter-city passenger rail service. There are several watercourse crossings along the Island Rail Corridor near Fanny Bay, including Cowie and Wilfred Creeks.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Population	Dwellings	Pop. Growth (2016-2021)
921	509	3.1%

Median Age	Median Household Income
60.8	\$63,600

Mode Share



80%



N/A



7%



N/A

Local Destinations

Fanny Bay Community Association
Beachcombers Academy
Fanny Bay Wharf
Ships Point Park

LOCAL CORRIDOR PROFILE

Corridor Length	Number of Corridor Properties
4.5 km	5

Station Sites	Major Crossings
N/A	Cowie (Mill) Creek Wilfred (Coal) Creek

3.7 Mud Bay

Mud Bay is the southernmost community in CVRD Electoral Area A, bordering Deep Bay in the Regional District of Nanaimo. The community is classified as a “Rural Settlement Area”, meaning existing low-density residential uses are unlikely to be intensified, and is among the smallest Corridor Communities, with the lowest residential densities. Commercial and community amenities are limited in Mud Bay, such as schools or grocery stores. Like other small communities in the Comox Valley, the lack of transit access to Mud Bay means reaching employment, commercial, or community destinations is most likely done by car.

Before passing through Mud Bay, the Island Rail Corridor crosses through Rosewall Creek Provincial Park, Highway 19A, and then passes through rural, residential, and agricultural lands on the way north to Fanny Bay. The limited residential development in Mud Bay is clustered around Highway 19A, with the Rosewall Log Sort being a prominent industrial use abutted by the Island Rail Corridor. The only provincial park bisected by the Island Rail Corridor, Rosewall Creek Provincial Park, is located south of Mud Bay.

As part of inter-city passenger rail service, there was a small, flag stop located in Mud Bay. Important corridor crossings within this area include four creeks, including Rosewall, Waterloo, McNaughton, and Cook Creeks, and an at-grade crossing of Highway 19A.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Population

230

Dwellings

84

Median Age

55.6

Median Household Income

N/A

Mode Share



72%



N/A



N/A



N/A

Local Destinations

Rosewall Creek Provincial Park

LOCAL CORRIDOR PROFILE

Corridor Length

3.9 km

Number of Corridor Properties

3

Station Sites

Mud Bay Station

Major Crossings

Highway 19A

Rosewall Creek

Waterloo Creek

McNaughton Creek

Cook Creek



4.0 CORRIDOR LANDS OVERVIEW

4.1 Land Use & Ownership

This section highlights the general current land use and property ownership characteristics of the lands adjacent to and within the vicinity of the Island Rail Corridor. This includes a high-level understanding of zoning classifications in each of the Corridor Communities, along with the generalized ownership classifications available through property information on ParcelMapBC.

For this analysis, and subsequent analyses highlighted in this report, a one-kilometre study area was defined from the edge of the Island Rail Corridor to provide a focus area for information that is most relevant to the Corridor. This buffer was selected to represent a reasonable walking distance from the Island Rail Corridor, and all parcels and zoning information have been clipped to this area. The term “Adjacent” is used for properties that immediately abut and share frontage with the properties that make up the Corridor.

Land Use

Zoning information from the Rural Comox Valley Zoning Bylaw, no 520, 2019 and the City of Courtenay Zoning Bylaw no. 2500, 2007, were compiled to understand how properties are used adjacent to the Island Corridor and within the study area. To provide a summary of the local zoning despite differences in the bylaws, zones were consolidated based on classes of uses composed of zones with similar land use characteristics. These classes are shown in **Figure 4** and **Table 1** below. Note that these classes do not contain marine zones such as the aquaculture (AQ) zone from the Rural Comox Valley Zoning Bylaw.

TABLE 1. ISLAND RAIL CORRIDOR ZONING CLASSES

Zoning Class	Zones from Courtenay Zoning Bylaw & Rural Comox Valley Zoning Bylaw
Commercial	C-1, C-1A, C-1-1, C-2, C-2A, C-3, C-5, TC-2
Commercial Development	CD-4, CD-6, CD-8, CD-9, CD-14, CD-21, CD-25, CD-26, CD-28, CD-29, CD-34, K-CD
Industrial	I-1, I-2, I-3, I-4, I-5, IH, IL, IM, SP-1, SPAF
Multiple Use	MU-1, MU-2, MU-4
Public Use	PA-1, PA-2, PA-3, A-1
Low-Density Residential	R-1, R-1A, R-1C, R-1D, R-1E, R-1S, R-2, R-2A, R-2B, RM
Medium-Density Residential	R-3, R-3A, R-3B, R-5
High-Density Residential	R-4, R-4A, R-4B
Rural Residential	CR-1, R-RU
Rural Resource	RU-8, RU-20, RU-20DB, RU-ALR, UR-40ha, TU-1, UAF

The total land within one kilometre of the Corridor is approximately 3,513 ha. As shown in Table 2, most of the land (53%) is dedicated to Rural Resource uses, such as agriculture or forestry. Other zoning classes with greater than 10% of the total lands include Rural Residential (18%), Low-Density Residential (14%), and Comprehensive Development (10%). Overall, this shows the relatively sparsely developed and rural nature of the majority of the Island Rail Corridor, but also the prominence of some larger planned developments such as the Union Bay Estates in Electoral Area A.

When looking at the zoning classes that are immediately adjacent to the Corridor, the trends are relatively consistent. Rural Resource uses remain the most prominent (54%), followed by a greater share of Rural Residential (23%) and Comprehensive Development (12%).

TABLE 2. ZONING CLASS BY TOTAL AREA WITHIN 1 KM AND ADJACENT TO ISLAND RAIL CORRIDOR

	Total Area within 1 km	Proportion within 1 km	Proportion Adjacent
Commercial	78.6	2.2%	0.4%
Comprehensive Development	347.4	9.9%	12.4%
Industrial	127.3	3.6%	3.0%
Multiple Use	24.4	0.7%	0.0%
Public Use	107.9	3.1%	1.2%
Low-Density Residential	496.1	14.1%	5.6%
Medium-Density Residential	23.4	0.7%	0.1%
High-Density Residential	13.6	0.4%	0.0%
Rural Residential	645.5	18.4%	23.3%
Rural Resource	1853.5	52.8%	53.9%



All lands on this map are located in the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation.

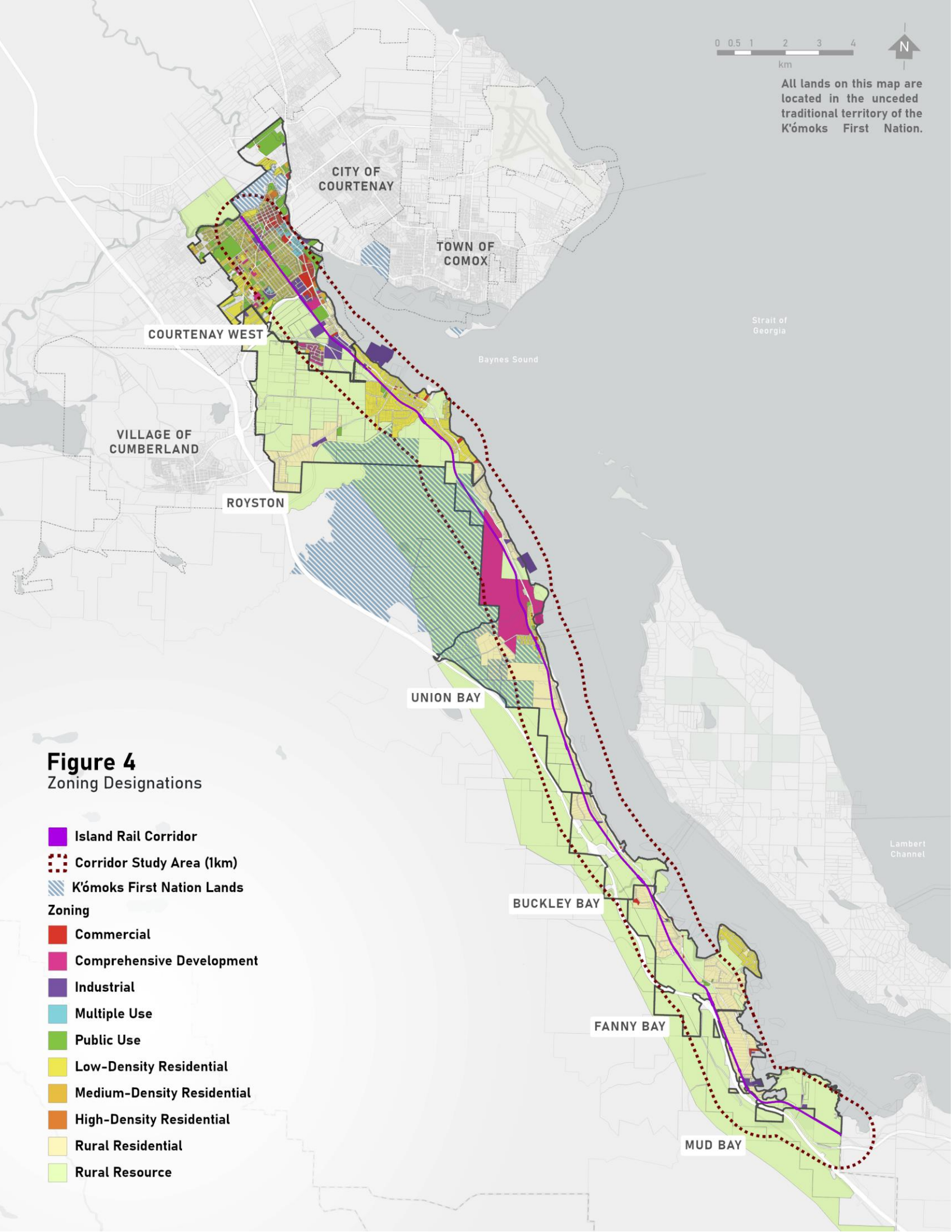


Figure 4
Zoning Designations

-  Island Rail Corridor
-  Corridor Study Area (1km)
-  K'ómoks First Nation Lands
- Zoning**
-  Commercial
-  Comprehensive Development
-  Industrial
-  Multiple Use
-  Public Use
-  Low-Density Residential
-  Medium-Density Residential
-  High-Density Residential
-  Rural Residential
-  Rural Resource

Key trends in local zoning for each of the Corridor Communities are summarized below:

Courtenay West (755 ha total)

- A broad mix of land uses are found within the study area boundary in Courtenay with the greatest shares in Low-Density Residential (27%), Rural Resource (22%), Public Use (13%), and Industrial (12%).
- Adjacent to the corridor Industrial uses are most prominent (31%), followed by Rural Resource lands (26%), and Public Use (18%).
- The only lands zoned for Medium- and High-Density Residential uses are found in Courtenay, about 5% of the lands within one kilometre of the Corridor.

Royston (443 ha total)

- Lands within one kilometre of the Island Rail Corridor are predominantly Low-Density Residential (60%) and Rural Resource (34%) uses.
- Adjacent to the Corridor, most lands are zoned for Low-Density Residential (77%) and Rural Resource (21%) uses.

Union Bay (993 ha total)

- The proportion of lands zoned for Rural Resource (42%), Comprehensive Development (31%), and Rural Residential (21%) use is consistent for both the one-kilometre study area extent and Corridor-adjacent lands in Union Bay.
- Union Bay Estates represents all the lands zoned for Comprehensive Development. Once realized, this development will drastically change the actual use of lands in Union Bay.

Buckley Bay (167 ha total)

- Most lands in Buckley Bay are zoned for Rural Resource (61%) and Rural Residential (38%) use, with limited Industrial and Commercial areas in the community. The same proportions hold for those lands adjacent to the Corridor.

Fanny Bay (470 ha total)

- Like most other rural Corridor Communities, lands in Fanny Bay are zoned primarily for Rural Resource (57%) and Rural Residential (41%) use, with some Public Use, Industrial, and Commercial areas located around Highway 19A. The same proportions hold for those lands adjacent to the Corridor.

Mud Bay (685 ha total)

- Rural Resource uses are the main zoning class in Mud Bay (79%), with the remaining lands zoned for Rural Residential (19%) and Industrial (2%).

Property Ownership

Property information available through ParcelMapBC was collected to understand the number of properties adjacent to the Island Rail Corridor and within the study area extent. This includes summarizing general property ownership classes in the dataset, as shown in **Figure 5** and **Table 3** below. Note that the area figures are clipped to the study area extent, and therefore may not represent the entire extent of parcels beyond one kilometre from the Corridor. Ten general ownership classifications are identified in the property data, including the following:

- ➔ Private
- ➔ Municipal
- ➔ Crown Provincial
- ➔ Untitled Provincial
- ➔ First Nations
- ➔ Federal
- ➔ Crown Agency
- ➔ Mixed Ownership
- ➔ Unclassified

Throughout the whole study area, there are 6,308 parcels, with 603 immediately adjacent to the Corridor, approximately 10%. Available parcel data suggests that this area is approximately 3,539 ha in total, with the parcels adjacent to the Corridor accounting for 1,758 ha, about half of total area.

Property ownership within the study area is mostly private lands with 83% of all properties and 80% of the total area being privately owned. Municipal ownership is the second most common ownership type within one kilometre of the Corridor at 6% of all properties and 5% of the total area. Provincial ownership makes up less than 1% of all properties in the study area, and 5% of total area.

Among properties adjacent to the Corridor, a higher proportion are privately owned (86%), with fewer properties owned by municipal (3.3%) and provincial governments (3%). Federal (0.5%) and First Nations (0.5%) have a slightly higher share of the total properties.

TABLE 3. OWNERSHIP BY TOTAL AREA WITHIN 1 KM AND ADJACENT TO THE ISLAND RAIL CORRIDOR

Ownership Classification	Total Properties	Within 1 km of Corridor			Adjacent to Corridor	
		Proportion	Total Area	Proportion	Total Properties	Proportion
Private	5210	82.6%	2845.3	80.4%	519	86.1%
Municipal	380	6.0%	175.2	5.0%	20	3.3%
Crown Provincial	52	0.8%	175.1	4.9%	18	3.0%
First Nations	3	0.0%	80.3	2.3%	3	0.5%
Federal	10	0.2%	92.5	2.6%	3	0.5%
Crown Agency	24	0.4%	90.1	2.5%	2	0.3%
Mixed Ownership	2	0.0%	4.7	0.1%	1	0.2%
Unclassified	627	9.9%	75.5	2.1%	37	6.1%



All lands on this map are located in the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation.

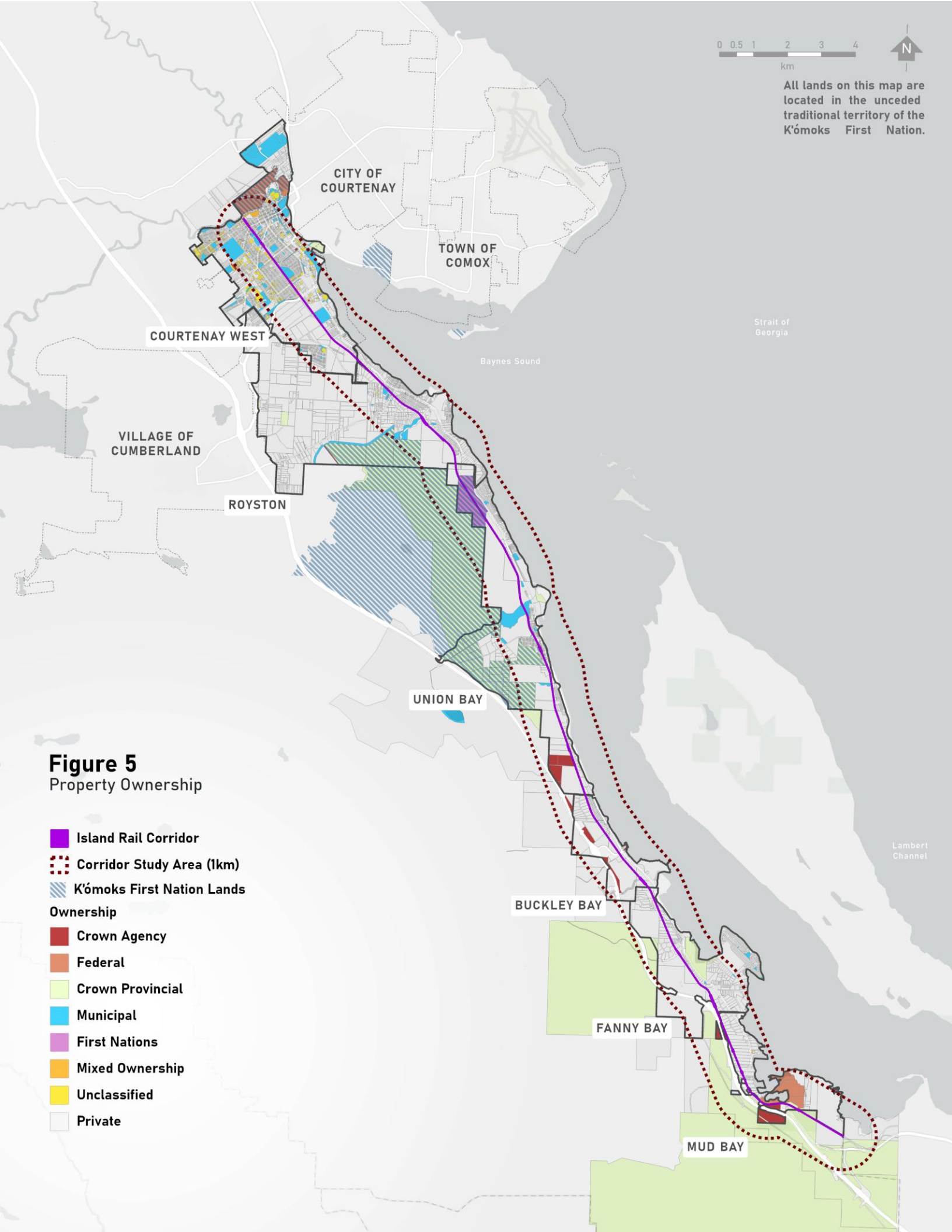


Figure 5
Property Ownership

- Island Rail Corridor
 - Corridor Study Area (1km)
 - K'ómoks First Nation Lands
- Ownership
- Crown Agency
 - Federal
 - Crown Provincial
 - Municipal
 - First Nations
 - Mixed Ownership
 - Unclassified
 - Private

The greatest number of total properties within the study area are in Courtenay West, approximately two-thirds (66%). Royston (14%) and Union Bay (12%) also have a significant proportion of the properties within one kilometre of the Corridor, while the remaining 8% of all properties are found in Buckley Bay, Fanny Bay, and Mud Bay. The total area of properties is higher in the rural areas, given the nature of land use and subdivision in these communities compared to urban lands in Courtenay, which are 22% of the total area.

The number of adjacent properties to the Island Rail Corridor is more balanced across the study area. 207 properties in Courtenay West (34%) are adjacent to the Corridor, with 151 and 100 properties in Union Bay (25%) and Royston (17%) respectively.

Trends for property ownership within each Corridor Community are summarized below:

Courtenay West

- Courtenay West has the lowest share of private ownership for properties within the study area and adjacent to the Corridor (both 77%), with higher proportions of municipal and unclassified ownership.
- Municipal-owned properties make up 18% of properties adjacent to the Corridor, including Bill Moore Memorial Park and Millard Nature Park.

Royston

- Private ownership is most common in Royston for properties within one kilometre (99%) and adjacent to the Corridor (96%).
- Other ownership classes adjacent to the corridor also include municipal ownership (1%).

Union Bay

- Private ownership in Union Bay consists of 89% of all properties within the study area and 80% of properties adjacent to the Corridor. A lower proportion of the total area is owned privately (72%) and adjacent to the Corridor (77%).
- First Nations ownership is prominent, where the K'ómoks First Nation treaty settlement lands are located, representing 8.2% of the total area and 10.9% of the corridor adjacent area.

Buckley Bay

- Properties within one kilometre of the Island Rail Corridor in Buckley Bay are 90% privately owned, accounting for 93% of the total area. All the properties adjacent to the Corridor in Buckley Bay are privately owned.

Fanny Bay

- 96% of all properties in Fanny Bay within 1 km of the Corridor are privately owned, and the remaining 4% of properties are classified as municipal, crown agency, and unclassified ownership. All the properties adjacent to the Corridor in Fanny Bay are privately owned.

Mud Bay

- Private ownership is relatively low in Mud Bay within the study area (72%) and adjacent to the Corridor (84%).
- The total area of federal and crown agency ownership is prominent in Mud Bay both adjacent to the Corridor (14%) and the study area (27%), despite only consisting of nine total properties, four of which are Corridor-adjacent.

Corridor Encumbrances

Encumbrances refer to claims to a portion of the Island Rail Corridor made by a party other than the Island Corridor Foundation, the primary corridor property holder. It is noted that the dataset provided does not include standard charges on title such as mineral rights which are held by the Crown in Right of the Province of BC or in Right of Canada, or occasional references to the Agricultural Land Reserve.

A total of 145 encumbrances are noted for the section of the Island Rail Corridor in the Comox Valley. The largest number are located in Courtenay West (37%), followed by Fanny Bay (24%) and Union Bay (21%). When considered by density (or frequency), Courtenay West has by far the most encumbrances given its relatively short length (approximately 12 encumbrances per km).

Common encumbrance types include the following:

- Statutory rights-of-way (26%)
- Road crossings (17%)
- Pipe/sewer crossings (13%)
- Wire crossings (12%)
- Private property (10%)

4.2 Future Land Use

Future land use along the Island Rail Corridor is important to understanding how projected growth and the mix of land uses could influence future Corridor uses or activities. This section draws on future land use designations from the Regional Growth Strategy and Courtenay Official Community Plan to establish this context at a high level.

Note that recent legislative changes, such as Bill 44, will require Official Community Plans to be updated to allow for a greater mix of housing types by 2025, and the RGS is currently being reviewed and updated by the CVRD, so the land use directions summarized below may change in the future.

Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) and Rural OCP

The Comox Valley Regional District has a strong vision for future growth defined through the Regional Growth Strategy and the Rural OCP. As shown in **Figure 6**, most of the land use intensification will occur in the Municipal Areas in the City of Courtenay, Village of Cumberland, and Town of Comox. As previously described, growth areas outside of the member municipalities, include the Settlement Expansion Areas and Settlement Nodes. Together, the Municipal Areas, Settlement Expansion Areas, Settlement Nodes, and K'ómoks First Nation lands make up the Core Settlement Areas. 90% of housing is targeted for the Core Settlement Areas, and these areas will support major public amenities, frequent transit service, diverse transportation infrastructure, and efficient civil servicing.

The Settlement Nodes, like Union Bay, are intended to include higher density and intensification than other rural areas; however, it will be less than in the Municipal Areas and entirely contingent on full public services. General land use targets for the Settlement Nodes include 50% of housing being medium- or high-density.

Lower density, agricultural, and rural uses are also designated through the RGS and Rural OCP where growth and development may not occur or be minimal over the long term. These include the Rural Settlement Areas, Resource Areas, and Agricultural Areas. Only Agricultural Areas are found within the member municipalities, while the other designations are restricted to rural areas like in Electoral Area A.

City of Courtenay Official Community Plan (OCP)

Beyond the RGS, the City of Courtenay OCP designates primary and secondary growth areas within Courtenay West, with several found in the study area. These include primary growth areas in Downtown Courtenay and along Cliffe Avenue, and secondary growth areas such as the McPhee, Lake Trail, and Tin Town neighbourhood centres. The McPhee Neighbourhood Centre is immediately adjacent to the Corridor between 5th and 17th Streets.

The OCP describes the primary growth centres as the areas with the highest residential densities and diverse commercial and employment uses. These centres are located centrally in Courtenay to provide access and connectivity for people across the City. Secondary growth centres are typically areas that are designated to intensify existing residential uses around neighbourhood-scale commercial uses and services.

The following future land uses from the RGS, Rural Comox Valley OCP and Courtenay OCP are found among the Corridor Communities:

Courtenay West	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Municipal Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)➔ Settlement Expansion Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)➔ Agricultural Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)➔ Primary Municipal Growth Areas (Courtenay OCP)➔ Secondary Municipal Growth Areas (Courtenay OCP)
Royston	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Settlement Expansion Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)➔ Rural Settlement Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)➔ Agricultural Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)
Union Bay	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Settlement Nodes (RGS and Rural OCP)➔ Rural Settlement Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)➔ Agricultural Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)
Buckley Bay	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Rural Settlement Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)➔ Agricultural Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)➔ Resource Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)
Fanny Bay	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Rural Settlement Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)➔ Agricultural Areas (RGS and Rural OCP)➔ Resource Areas (RGS)
Mud Bay	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Rural Settlement Areas (RGS)➔ Agricultural Areas (RGS)

0 0.5 1 2 3 4
km



All lands on this map are located in the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation.

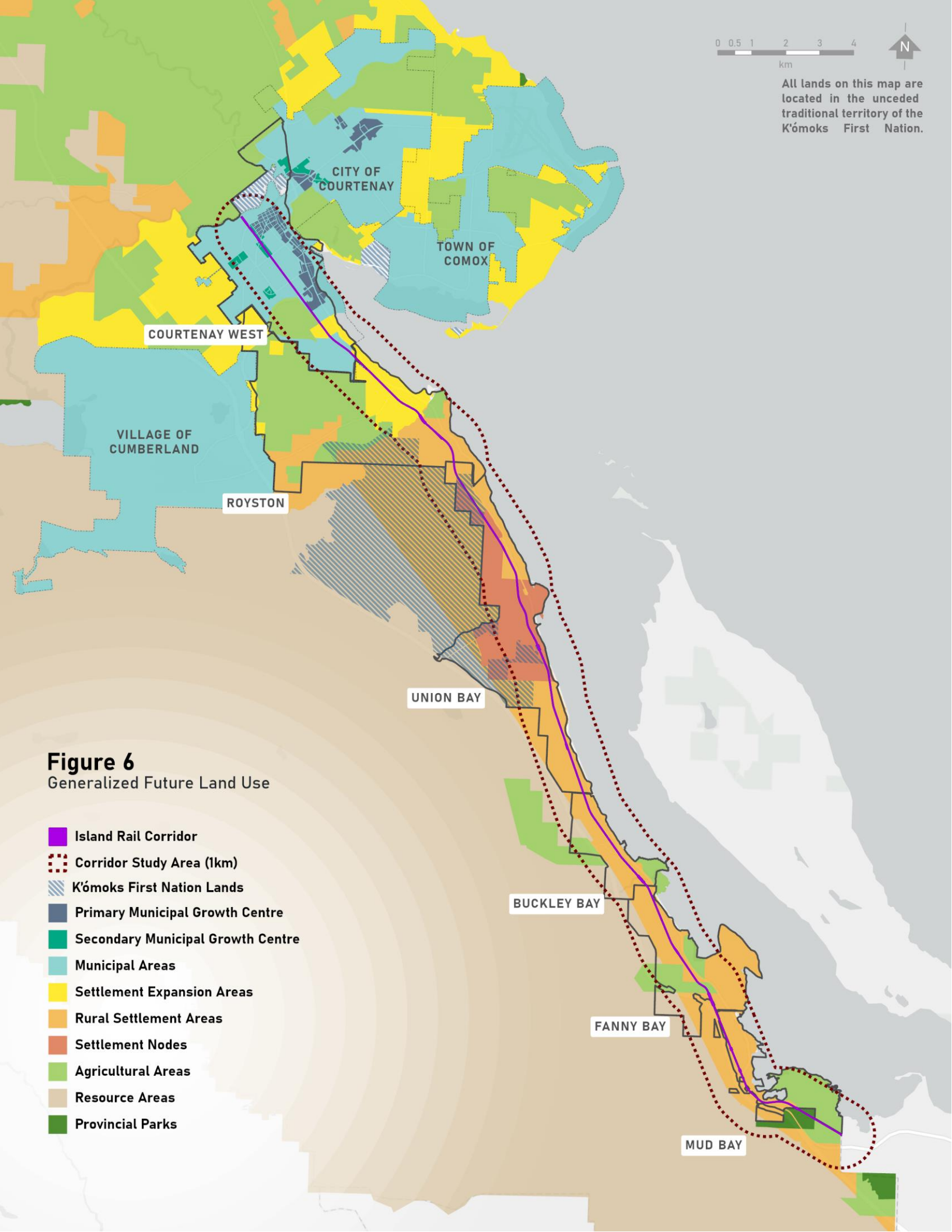


Figure 6

Generalized Future Land Use

- Island Rail Corridor
- Corridor Study Area (1km)
- K'ómoks First Nation Lands
- Primary Municipal Growth Centre
- Secondary Municipal Growth Centre
- Municipal Areas
- Settlement Expansion Areas
- Rural Settlement Areas
- Settlement Nodes
- Agricultural Areas
- Resource Areas
- Provincial Parks

4.3 Community Amenities

Access to community amenities near the Island Rail Corridor could be an important function of future corridor uses and contextualize the different corridor Communities. Amenities shown in **Figure 7** were generalized into several categories, including schools, community centres (such as community halls and service providers); community and neighbourhood parks and other recreational facilities; cultural facilities, including museums; and libraries.

Due to its higher population densities and land use mix, Courtenay West features the greatest number of community amenities. In Courtenay West, many amenities are grouped in Downtown Courtenay, with smaller clusters in Tin Town, near Courtenay Elementary, and along 29th Street.

Amenities in the other corridor communities are sparser, most often located on or near Highway 19A or at key intersections in each community. A high-level summary of the community amenities within 1 km of the Island Rail Corridor within each corridor Community is included in **Table 4**.

TABLE 4. COMMUNITY AMENITIES WITHIN 1 KM OF THE ISLAND RAIL CORRIDOR

	Schools	Libraries	Parks & Rec Facilities	Community Centres	Cultural Facilities
Courtenay West	9	1	15	20	6
Royston	1	-	2	1	-
Union Bay	-	1	3	1	1
Buckley Bay	-	-	2	-	-
Fanny Bay	1	-	1	1	-
Mud Bay	-	-	1	-	-



All lands on this map are located in the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation.

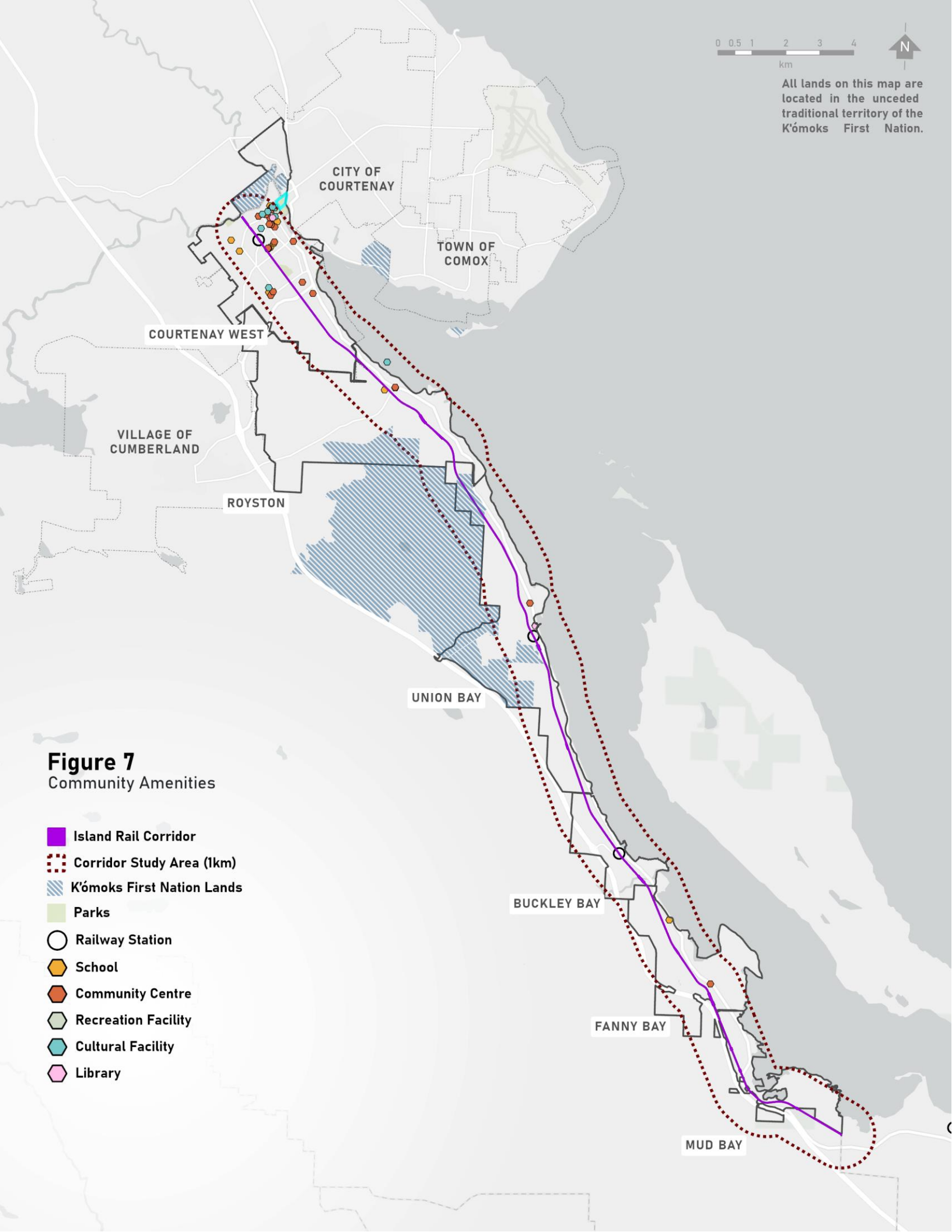


Figure 7
Community Amenities

- Island Rail Corridor
- Corridor Study Area (1km)
- K'ómoks First Nation Lands
- Parks
- Railway Station
- School
- Community Centre
- Recreation Facility
- Cultural Facility
- Library

4.4 Inter-Community Travel

Connections between the corridor Communities are an important consideration for the context of the Island Rail Corridor due to its historical and present use as a transportation corridor. Currently, the primary access between the various corridor Communities is via Highway 19A, along with Highway 19. As outlined in the previous section, transit connections are limited between the Corridor Communities, with service concentrated around the member municipalities. Regular transit service currently only connects Courtenay West to Royston through three routes. A shuttle service operated by BC Transit also connects Union Bay to Downtown Courtenay three times a day on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

To estimate travel times and distances between the Corridor Communities a central location in each was selected, as outlined below, from which distances were measured along the Island Rail Corridor.

- ➔ Courtenay West – Courtenay Train Station
- ➔ Royston – Royston Road
- ➔ Union Bay – McLeod Road
- ➔ Buckley Bay – Buckley Bay Road
- ➔ Fanny Bay – Jacob Road
- ➔ Mud Bay – Highway 19A

The total travel distance between the Courtenay Train Station and the intersection of Highway 19A and the Island Rail Corridor in Mud Bay is approximately 29.1 km, as shown in Table 5, which is estimated to be a 115-minute bicycle ride, assuming a continuous connection. The same trip in a car would take approximately 31 minutes and is approximately 2.5 km longer.

TABLE 5. CYCLING TRAVEL TIMES AND DISTANCES BETWEEN CORRIDOR COMMUNITIES

	Travel Distance Along Corridor	Estimated Cycling Time*	Driving Distance	Estimated Driving Time**
Courtenay West – Royston	6.0 km	23 mins	6.9 km	9 mins
Royston – Union Bay	8.6 km	35 mins	9.3 km	8 mins
Union Bay – Buckley Bay	6.9 km	27 mins	7.1 km	6 mins
Buckley Bay - Fanny Bay	4.1 km	16 mins	4.4 km	4 mins
Fanny Bay - Mud Bay	3.5 km	14 mins	3.9 km	4 mins
Total	29.1 km	115 mins	31.6 km	31 mins

*Average cycling travel speed estimated to be 15 km/h, and does not account for the travel speeds of electric-assist bicycles.

**Driving routes and times estimated based on driving times on Google Maps on Tuesday, April 16th at 8 am.

4.5 Parallel Corridors

The Island Rail Corridor is the major north-south corridors connecting Electoral Area A and the member municipalities. The two major highways, 19 and 19A, and the Comox Valley utility right-of-way extend from the Regional District of Nanaimo to Strathcona Regional District, with local active transportation connections provided by the Courtenay Riverway and Royston Seaside Trail. As shown in **Figure 8**, these corridors are closest near Buckley Bay, before diverging northward. Highway 19A most closely parallels the Island Rail Corridor for much of its extent and plays a key connecting role between the Corridor Communities.

Each of the parallel corridors is described in greater detail in **Table 6** below, along with some key considerations for these corridors to share uses or provide compatible functions with the Island Rail Corridor.

TABLE 6. PARALLEL CORRIDOR DESCRIPTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Parallel Corridors	Description	Considerations
Highway 19	Highway 19, also known as the Inland Island Highway, is the primary inter-regional highway connection in the CVRD since its completion in 1999. As such, Highway 19 is critical for vehicle and goods movement within the region and inter-regional connections to the north and south.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ High-speed, high traffic volumes and limited non-vehicular accommodations do not provide comfortable conditions for other travel modes. ➔ Significant grades on several hills on the Corridor. ➔ Introducing new infrastructure, such as active transportation facilities may not be achievable due to MoTI standards and cost. ➔ Space constraints over bridge crossings, with shoulders typically at 2-4 m wide (e.g., Tsable River, Trent River). ➔ Does not directly connect between the Core Settlement Areas, Corridor Communities, or other population centres.
Highway 19A	Highway 19A is the original highway connection between the CVRD and neighbouring regions and remains an important link between communities in the region, including all the Corridor Communities. The highway generally follows the coastline and parallels the Island Rail Corridor along much of its length.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Direct connectivity between Corridor Communities, including proximity to many local amenities and destinations. ➔ Right-of-way is constrained in some locations due to crossings and coastline. ➔ High speed traffic may not provide comfortable conditions for other travel modes. ➔ Introducing new infrastructure, such as active transportation facilities may not be achievable due to MoTI standards and cost.

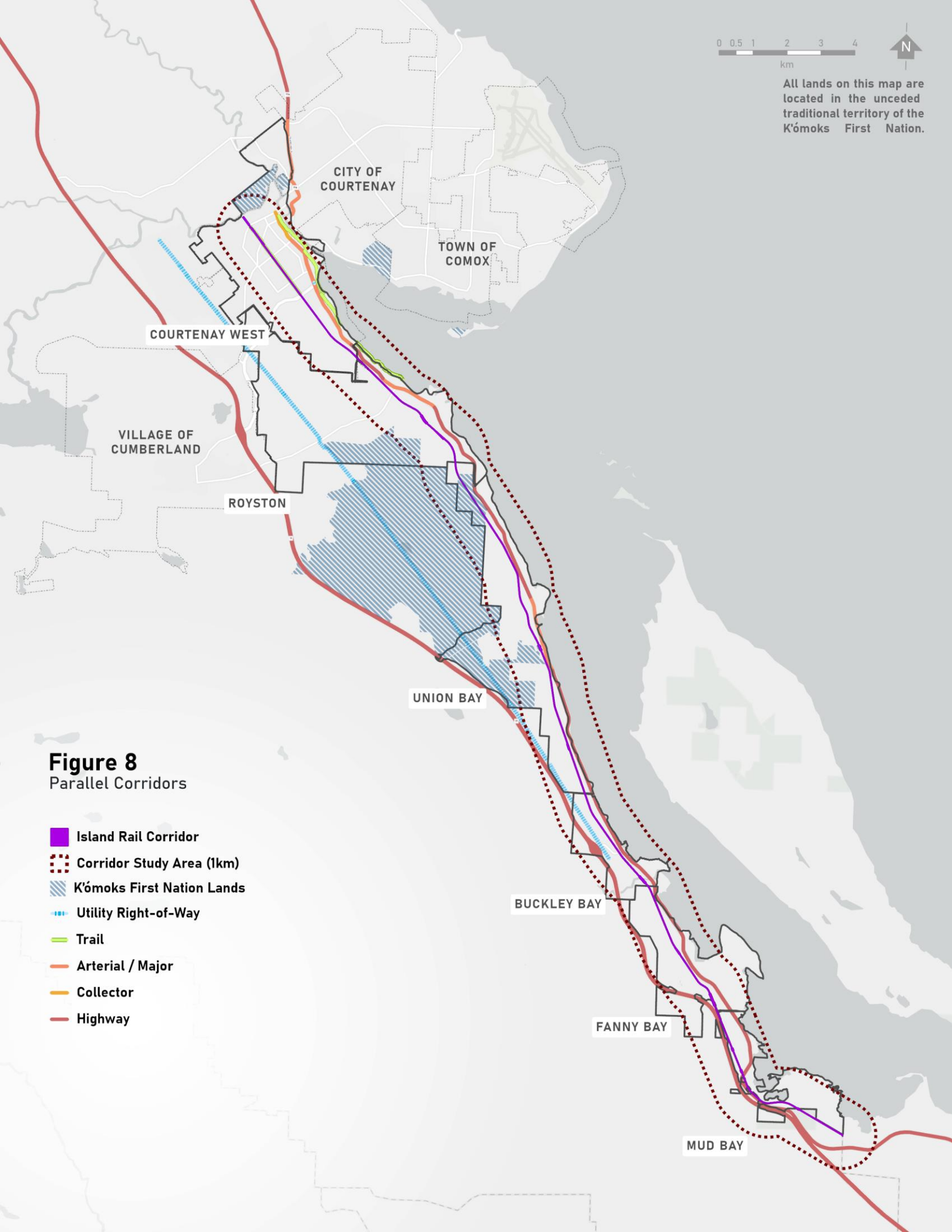
Comox Valley Utility Right-of-Way	This utility right-of-way extends north-south corridor across the CVRD. The primary function is currently for high voltage electrical conveyance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Right-of-way is ungraded with limited watercourse and road crossings. ➔ Does not directly connect between the Core Settlement Areas, Corridor Communities, or other population centres.
Courtenay Riverway & Royston Seaside Trail	The Courtenay Riverway and Royston Seaside Trails provide multi-use connections within their respective communities. Trail design is typically a 3.0m multi-use pathway, surfaced with crushed aggregate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Future connection of the two trails is planned, however implementation could be challenging due to the need for significant property acquisition.¹⁰ ➔ The pathways are not currently connected and there is limited potential for regional connectivity.

¹⁰ Accessed at: www.courtenay.ca/EN/main/city-hall/projects-gallery/south-courtenay-riverway-extension.html

0 0.5 1 2 3 4
km



All lands on this map are located in the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation.





Rotary Trall nearby 26th Street, Courtenay

5.0 TECHNICAL STUDIES

A range of past technical studies have been developed that provide valuable insight into the challenges and opportunities for the Island Rail Corridor in the Comox Valley. The following is a summary of past technical studies and key, pertinent information contained in each for consideration through the Corridor Strategy process.

A list of the documents reviewed is included on the following page.

Key Findings

Overarching findings from these studies that are relevant to the Comox Valley are summarized below. The most recent and/or pertinent technical studies are described in greater detail on the following pages in this section.

- ➔ Significant improvements are required along the entire Island Rail Corridor if passenger and/or freight rail service are to resume, including large investments required in the Comox Valley. The lack of consistent investment in the Corridor over the past three decades is a significant ongoing challenge.
- ➔ Cost estimates for overall improvements to the Island Rail Corridor (entire length) from the most recent condition assessment and economic analyses range from \$430M (2022 CAD) to \$730M (2020 CAD).
- ➔ Based on the *Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment* (2020), various railway assets in the Island Rail Corridor segment from Parksville to Courtenay are in poor and/or fair condition.
- ➔ Improvements to the Island Rail Corridor between Parksville and Courtenay to facilitate both passenger and freight rail are estimated to cost up to \$165M (2020 CAD).
- ➔ The various studies conducted on the Corridor conflict in their assessment of Island Rail Corridor improvements and the viability of future passenger and freight rail service. Most recently, passenger and freight rail services have both been determined to be viable, with significant investments in the Corridor and appropriate governance and economic conditions.
- ➔ Multiple future uses are identified in these studies including passenger and freight rail service, active transportation infrastructure, and land development within or surrounding the Corridor.

Document Review

The following documents were reviewed as part of the background research completed to understand past technical study and recommendations pertinent to the current initiative.

Corridor Condition Reports & Studies

Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment (2020), including appendices

Bridge Inspection and Assessment - E&N Railway, Vancouver Island, BC, Canada:
Phase 3 - Inspection Report Bridges from Mile 79.10 to Mile 135.10 (2012)

Evaluation of the E&N Railway Corridor: Foundation Report (2009)

Economic Analyses

Vancouver Island Rail Initial Business Case (2022)

Island Rail Corridor Freight Analysis (2022)

Request for VIA Service Enhancement on the Vancouver Island Rail Corridor (2011)

E&N Railway Corridor: Development Strategies for the Island Rail Corridor
Foundation (2009)

Island Corridor Foundation: Business Plan 2005-2009 (2004)

Active Transportation Studies & Guidelines

Island Rail Corridor – Rail-with-Trail Design Guidelines (2009)

Island Rail Corridor to an Active Transportation Trail Study – Feasibility Study (2023)

Engagement Summaries

Island Inter-Community Transportation Study (2023)

Island Rail Corridor Interests and Possible Uses Assessment – Fall 2022 First Nations
Engagement Summary Report (2022)

5.1 Corridor Condition Reports & Studies

Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment (2020)

This report, prepared by WSP, provides a detailed assessment and summary of the overall condition of the entire Island Rail Corridor.¹¹ The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure requested the report to understand current conditions and improvement costs for initial, intermediate, and ultimate improvements to the Corridor, building upon the previous condition reports for the Corridor. Cost estimates include the necessary infrastructure upgrades to safely accommodate both passenger and freight rail services, including the inter-city service between Victoria and Courtenay. Each of the timeframes allows for greater use of the rail Corridor, with higher volume, frequency and/or speed travel for freight and passenger uses.

The assessment summarizes overall asset conditions on a Good-Fair-Poor rating. Overall findings for the broader Island Rail Corridor include the following:

- ➔ The rail bed and track structure are generally in Poor to Fair condition.
- ➔ Bridge structures range from Poor to Good condition, and at-grade road crossings are generally in Fair condition.
- ➔ Vegetation within and adjacent to the Corridor is uncontrolled.
- ➔ Decaying railway ties affect track safety.
- ➔ Track performance is negatively affected by older technology.

The total cost estimates for improvements to the Island Rail Corridor, not including commuter rail service in the Capital Regional District, is approximately \$730M. Broken down by improvement phases, the total cost amounts to:

- ➔ Initial Phase: \$326M – Parksville to Courtenay: \$68,397,313
- ➔ Intermediate Phase: \$226M – Parksville to Courtenay: \$52,634,054
- ➔ Ultimate Phase: \$177M – Parksville to Courtenay: \$43,662,678

Looking more closely at the Island Rail Corridor in the Comox Valley, the assessment report provides condition and cost estimates for the Corridor segment between Parksville and Courtenay. While this segment is not solely within the CVRD, it does indicate general conditions and overall improvement needs. This is also one of the longest segments studied, 72 km total, or approximately 20% of the Victoria Subdivision. General conditions for the Parksville to Courtenay segment are summarized in Table 7 below.

¹¹ Accessed at: www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/reports-and-reference/reports-and-studies/vancouver-island-south-coast/en-railway/ircca-report-2020/ircca-_summary_report_master_v13.pdf

TABLE 7. ISLAND RAIL CORRIDOR CONDITION ASSESSMENT, PARKSVILLE TO COURTENAY

	Characteristics
Vegetation	Fair-Poor
Rail Ties	58% of all ties estimated to be defective (highest among all segments)
Track Ballast	Poor
Shoulder Condition	Poor
Average Head Loss	8.0 mm (average among all segments)
Bridge Conditions	Fair-Poor
Grade Crossings	Fair-Poor

Specific inspections were conducted for most bridges found along the Island Rail Corridor, including ten bridges in the CVRD.¹² Where inspections were not completed, findings from previous inspections were included for context. In some cases, inconsistent names for creeks were used in the conditions assessment report to those commonly used in the region. The names used in the conditions assessment report are shown in brackets. Cook Creek lies at the border with the Regional District of Nanaimo, so the crossings of the creek's north and south fork has also been included below.

Summarized findings and overall costs to improve these crossings to meet passenger and freight rail standards are shown in **Table 8**. Note that cost estimates for improvements to facilitate freight service are inclusive of improvements for passenger rail service.

The condition of at-grade crossings were also studied as part of the conditions assessment report.¹³ A total of 56 crossings were documented between Parksville and Courtenay, with specific field visits conducted for some of the major at-grade crossings in the CVRD such as 17th, 21st, and 29th Streets in Courtenay and Hatton, Holiday, Hastings, and Berray Roads in Electoral Area A, along with the crossing of Highway 19A in Mud Bay. Other at-grade crossings were also included in general cost estimates.

Overall, the condition of at-grade crossings along the Island Rail Corridor from Parksville to Nanaimo were generally considered to be in good repair. Still, most of the crossings would require improvements to allow for future rail service with an estimated average cost of \$226,000 per crossing and \$12,656,000 total. This is the highest average and total cost of any segment of the Island Rail Corridor.

¹² Accessed at: www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/reports-and-reference/reports-and-studies/vancouver-island-south-coast/en-railway/ircca-report-2020/appendix_c_-_bridge_condition_assessment_report.pdf

¹³ Accessed at: www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/reports-and-reference/reports-and-studies/vancouver-island-south-coast/en-railway/ircca-report-2020/appendix_b_-_crossing_condition_assessment_report.pdf

TABLE 8. ISLAND RAIL CORRIDOR BRIDGE CHARACTERISTICS IN THE CVRD

	Length	Construction Year	Inspection Year	Retrofit Required	50-Year Improvement Cost	
					Passenger Rail	Freight Rail
Cook Creek (South Fork)	9.4 m	1914	2011	No	\$70,000	
Cook Creek (North Fork)	9.1 m	1914	2019	No	\$99,500	
Rosewall Creek	21.6 m	1914	2011	Yes (freight-only)	\$130,000	\$170,000
Waterloo Creek	20.1 m	1928	2019	Yes (freight-only)	\$157,000	\$197,000
Wilfred (Coal) Creek	36 m	1914	2019	No	\$138,000	
Cowie (Mill) Creek	52.7 m	1925	2011	Yes (freight-only)	\$116,000	\$436,000
Tsable River	183.8 m	1914/1977	2019	Yes (freight-only)	\$6,433,000	\$10,535,000
Buckley Bay Road	19.8 m	1998	2011	No	\$42,000	
Hindoo Creek	6.4 m	1926/1977	2019	No	\$85,000	
Hart (Washer) Creek	33.8 m	1914/1926	2011	No	\$258,000	
Trent River	88.1 m	1914/1925	2019	No	\$739,000	

5.2 Economic Analyses

Vancouver Island Rail Initial Business Case (2022)

The Island Corridor Foundation produced a business case to reintroduce passenger and freight rail services on the Island Rail Corridor.¹⁴ Building upon recent conditions assessments completed for the Corridor, the business case outlines a framework for the strategic and economic rationale for rail on Vancouver Island, including meeting broader transportation, goods movement, economic, and environmental goals.

Using the cost estimates established in the *Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment* produced by WSP, the business case suggests a 'hybrid intermediate' option (compared to the intermediate option identified in the conditions assessment report) which would see the rail uses summarized in Table 9 along the Island Rail Corridor.

TABLE 9. POTENTIAL RAIL SERVICE CHARACTERISTICS PER THE VANCOUVER ISLAND RAIL INITIAL BUSINESS CASE (2022)

Characteristics	
Passenger Service	4 passenger trains per day up to 8 trains per day
Freight Service	4 freight trains (10-20 car trains) per day up to 4 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) or 133 cars per day total
Track Standard	Class 3 Track Standard (40 mph freight, 60 mph passenger)
Track Loading	Track Loading 286,000 lb car loading in heavy freight zones; 263,000 lb loading outside of heavy freight zones

The four rail services are included as part of the business case: commuter rail within the Capital Regional District, intercity rail into the CRD, regional trains between communities outside of the CRD, and freight rail throughout Vancouver Island, primarily operating between major ports. Total cost estimates for the improvements are \$431M (2022 CAD) including construction costs and rolling stock purchases. Operational costs were estimated to be \$12.8M in the first year of operation, growing to \$16.6M in the tenth year (2022 CAD). Revenue estimates range from \$12.7M in the most conservation scenario to \$23.4M in the optimistic case. Revenues are divided between passenger ticket sales, freight haulage, and contributions from VIA Rail.

Within the Comox Valley, the most impactful elements of the business case are the proposed passenger rail services. Under the scenarios developed by the ICF, rail access to Courtenay would be reintroduced for intercity service to Victoria and regional service to Qualicum Beach and Nanaimo. The combined services would provide three trains to and from Courtenay per day. Estimated travel

¹⁴ Accessed at: www.islandrail.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Initial-Business-Case-FINAL.pdf

time between Courtenay and Victoria is approximately 4 hours, and from Courtenay to Nanaimo 1 hour and 30 minutes.

The business case also proposes upgrades to seven intercity stations, including Courtenay. These costs were not included in the Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment and would include new platform, shelter, and ticket machine infrastructure estimated at \$250,000 per station. Station upgrades and stops in other CVRD communities are not included in the business case.

Island Rail Corridor Freight Analysis (2022)

This report, undertaken by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, provides an overview of freight rail potential on the Island Rail Corridor.¹⁵ The analysis focused on existing freight rail services and facilities, demand, potential benefits, and opportunities for businesses to utilize rail for freight movement along the Island Rail Corridor so that it may continue to function as a part of Vancouver Island's transportation system on Vancouver Island.

The study's primary findings include the following:

- ➔ Realizing freight rail traffic on Vancouver Island could be achieved with less investment than previously estimated, between 4,500 and 11,400 annual carloads over the medium term.
- ➔ Realizing freight rail service would shift many truck trips to rail, both on Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, providing a range of economic and environmental benefits, including saving approximately 1,700 to 3,700 tonnes of GHG emissions every year.
- ➔ Developing a rail connection to Duke Point would benefit both the local area and the Island Rail Corridor due to constraints on other shipping hubs such as Swartz Bay.
- ➔ Maintaining the Island Rail Corridor is important to the overall resiliency of the Island, given its limited highway network.

To provide the conditions necessary for successful freight rail, the study suggests several improvements including improving the overall corridor condition, developing interline rail movements, setting competitive transportation fees, providing direct rail access to industrial sites, increasing railcar availability, and developing third-party transloading facilities.

¹⁵ Accessed at: www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/reports-and-reference/reports-and-studies/vancouver-island-south-coast/island-rail-corridor/island-rail-corridor-freight-analysis-appendix-d-2022-12-05.pdf

5.3 Active Transportation Studies & Guidelines

Island Rail Corridor – Rail-with-Trail Design Guidelines (2009)

Design guidelines for multi-use trails alongside the existing railway throughout the Island Rail Corridor were prepared by the ICF in 2009 to guide future trail development.¹⁶ Guidelines are provided for three land use contexts: rural, suburban, and urban, which represent different levels of use, surface treatments, and other design characteristics. Key design characteristics for each are summarized in Table 10 below.

TABLE 10. DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR MULTI-USE TRAILS IN THE ISLAND RAIL CORRIDOR, BY CONTEXT

	Level of Use	Width	Surface	User Groups
Urban	High	3-4 m	Asphalt	Multi-use
Suburban	Moderate-High	3 m	Asphalt	Multi-use
Rural	Moderate-Low	2 m	Crushed Gravel	Multi-use, equestrian where feasible

Setbacks are another key design element considering the potential for trails beside rail. Desired setbacks are suggested to be a minimum of 3.24 m from the rail centreline, with preferred setbacks being 3.65 m. In constrained conditions, physical barriers such as a fence are to be provided similar to what is in place along sections of the Rotary Trail (see below).

Two typical cross-sections that integrate these design elements are provided in the guidelines, shown in Figure 9 and Figure 10 on the following page.



¹⁶ Accessed at: www.islandrail.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ICF-Trail-Guideline.pdf

FIGURE 9. TYPICAL CROSS-SECTION IN A CONSTRAINED CORRIDOR (15 METRE WIDTH)

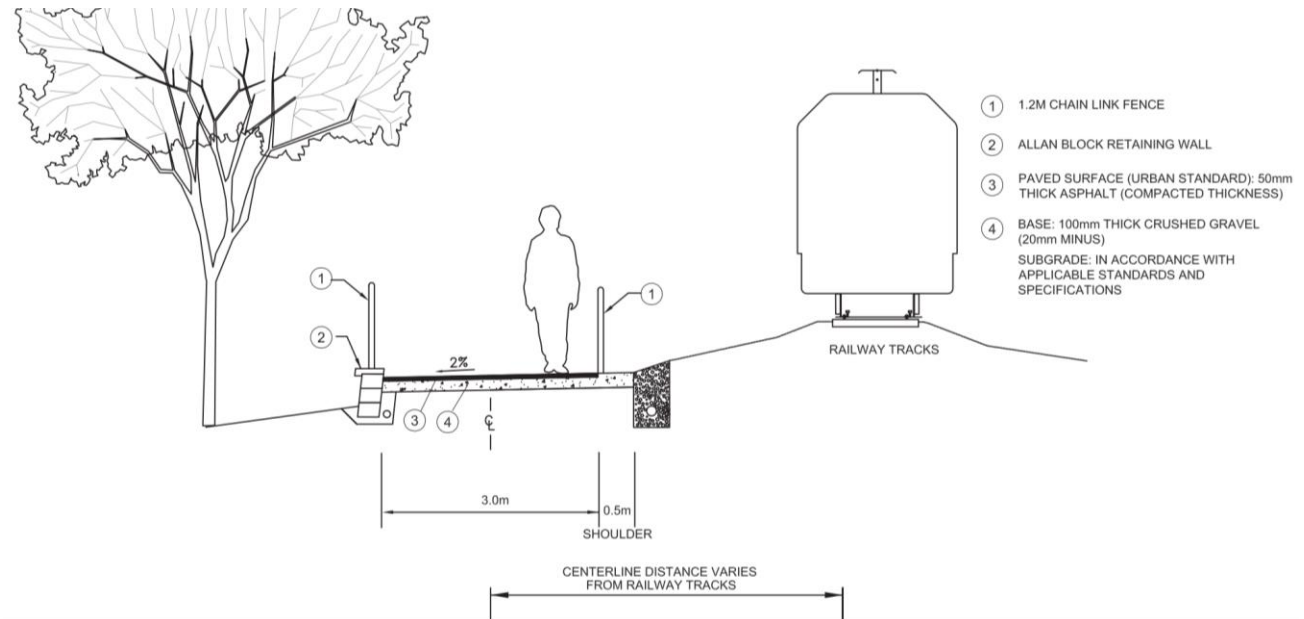
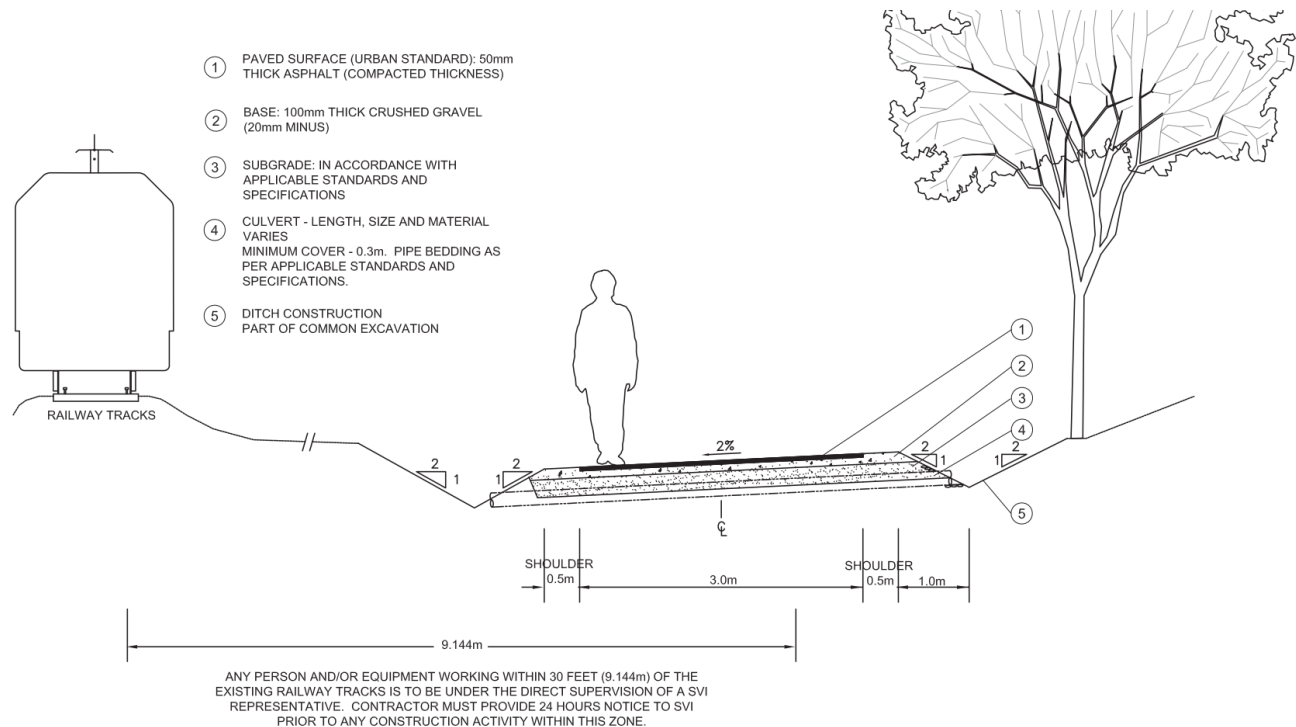


FIGURE 10. TYPICAL CROSS-SECTION IN AN UNCONSTRAINED CORRIDOR (15 METRE WIDTH)





6.0 PLANNING FRAMEWORK

This section identifies key unifying themes from regional and local government plans and policies related to the Island Rail Corridor. Foundational planning documents for the CVRD, member municipalities, and provincial government were reviewed to inform each of the themes.

Through review of the various documents, six focus or theme areas were identified that generally reflect key policy directions relating the Island Rail Corridor. The six focus areas are summarized below and have been used to organize the more detailed policy analysis contained later in this section.

Focus Area no.1

Reconciliation

Throughout the region the desire for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples generally and specifically K'ómoks First Nation is shared to address historic and ongoing injustices perpetuated through the colonial and settler colonial systems, including the establishment of the Island Rail Corridor. All levels of government emphasize a desire to rebuild and strengthen relationships with KFN, including involving KFN in decision-making.

Focus Area no.2

Growth + Land Use

The Regional Growth Strategy emphasizes the need to limit sprawl and focus growth and density in the Core Settlement Areas, including areas along the Island Rail Corridor in Courtenay West, Royston, and Union Bay, and potential development on KFN Treaty Settlement Lands.

Focus Area no.3

Transportation + Mobility

A desire to enhance mobility options and encourage sustainable modes is shared throughout the region. This includes the role that the Corridor could play in facilitating commuter and recreational trips via rail service and/or active transportation.

Focus Area no.4

Natural Environment + Climate Change

Protecting, enhancing, and restoring natural features, biodiversity, and sensitive ecosystems is a priority, while also seeking to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These shared goals align with provincial climate action initiatives and contribute to other themes, such as growth and land use, transportation and mobility, and economic development.

Focus Area no.5

Economic Development

Regional policy supports a strong, diverse, and sustainable local economy, developed in collaboration with K'ómoks First Nation and the member municipalities. The regional economic approach emphasizes public sector employment, natural resources, and agriculture, while seeking to foster a thriving and diverse business community. The Corridor offers potential for goods movement, tourism, and land development, that may align with K'ómoks First Nation economic priorities.

Focus Area no.6

Parks + Recreation

Greenways and trails are a key regional initiative to support mobility and recreation. The Island Rail Corridor is seen as providing potential to link communities and the broader trail and parks network.

Corridor References in Planning Documents

Specific references to the Island Rail Corridor are found in numerous documents, plans, and policies, that will be useful context when considering specific corridor uses in this and future phases of work. Specific references are identified below.

K'ómoks First Nation Comprehensive Community Plan (2019)

- ➔ Objectives for the Lands include consideration of the use of the existing rail line and potential expansion of new rail systems.

City of Courtenay Official Community Plan (2022)

- ➔ Desired amenities in the Terminal Addition Residential Neighbourhood
 - Development of Rail-trail park end;
 - Rotary Trail extension or upgrade

City of Courtenay McPhee Meadows Concept Plan (2022)

- ➔ The Island Rail Corridor passes adjacent to the McPhee Meadows parcel.
- ➔ A corridor has been proposed to connect both ICF lands and McPhee Meadows, pending the confirmation of lease agreements. The intent would be to extend the Rotary Trail.

Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan (2014)

Community Partnerships

- ➔ Recover lost beach accesses, railway grades and road rights of way and continue to work with provincial government agencies to re-secure forgone opportunities for public access and maintain improvements.

Kensington Island Properties DPA

- ➔ Pathway design and construction to meet the proposed criteria for a bicycle commuter trail on the shoulder of major transportation routes or the Island Rail Corridor include a minimum required width of 2.0 m and surface finishing of an impervious surface.

Rural Comox Valley Parks & Greenways Strategic Plan (2011)

- ➔ CVRD could seek statutory right-of-way to develop a trail, which may be routed along the Waterfront (where opportune).
- ➔ Opportunity for Island Rail Corridor to connect with other jointly acquired lands to link to municipal greenspaces.

Regional Growth Strategy (2010)

- ➔ Objective 4-C: Develop and maintain an inter-regional transportation system that efficiently and safely facilitates the movement of people and goods.

Promote and support the improvement of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway (E&N Railway) infrastructure, servicing and scheduling and continue to protect the Corridor and potential stations.

- Collaborate with BC Transit, BC Ferries, the Province and the federal government to improve inter-regional transportation, including improved rail service and expanded marine transportation opportunities.

Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy (2010)

- ➔ Goal 4.4 - Promote the development of rail infrastructure and use in the Comox Valley for commuter and freight connections to the rest of Vancouver Island.
 - Relevant actions for the CVRD and member municipalities include:
 - Support efforts to increase commuter rail service on Vancouver Island, including upgrades to the rail line to support freight travel. In addition, provide education to local government, businesses, and the public on the long-term economic and environmental benefits of passenger and freight service by train.
 - Work with the ICF to connect the E+N Rail Corridor to the Valley's greenway and bicycle network and continue to support the "Rails to Trails" initiative.
 - As developments grow in areas along the railway Corridor, ensure appropriate stations and rail-oriented infrastructure are established to support future passenger rail, while preserving the viability to function for other uses.
 - Relevant actions for the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure:
 - Explore a feasibility study on commuter travel by train in the Comox Valley, including intermodal connections to other transportation hubs and modes.
 - Promote the use of the rail Corridor as a freight corridor to reduce impacts of trucking on Comox Valley and other Vancouver Island communities.
- ➔ Objective 1.1.3: Neighbourhoods within Core Settlement Areas and Town Centres are structured and designed to support a high quality and convenient regional transit service, linking development approaches to the goal of reducing climate emissions.
 - Relevant actions for the CVRD and member municipalities include:
 - Continue to partner with the RDN, BC Transit, SRD, and other stakeholders to reinforce existing and establish new future development nodes along the Island Railway Corridor through the development and adoption of supportive policy.

Regional Active Transportation Network Plan (2021)

- ➔ Identified as a future opportunity with valuable long-term active transportation potential:
 - The E&N Rail Corridor is among the most significant active transportation opportunities in the Comox Valley. A potential trail along the Corridor would connect Courtenay to Royston, Union Bay, and on to the Regional District of Nanaimo.
 - It is acknowledged that further collaboration with K'ómoks First Nation and the ICF will be required if active transportation facilities are to be realized on the E&N Corridor.

Comox Valley Transit Future Plan (2014)

- ➔ Medium and Long-term Implementation Priorities (6–25+ years):
- ➔ Investigate the realignment and operation of the Comox Valley transit routes to connect with the proposed reinstatement of the E & N rail services at Courtenay train station.

6.1 Reconciliation

The Comox Valley is within the unceded, traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation. For thousands of years, K'ómoks First Nation's ancestors occupied the extent of their territories, and harvested and managed the rich natural resources therein. These lands and waters supported thousands of people who developed a rich and sophisticated culture. Today, the K'ómoks people continue to assert their rights and title to the whole of their territory. The history of the establishment of the Island Rail Corridor continues to be a powerful reminder of the loss suffered by Indigenous peoples during past and ongoing colonial processes.

Today, the CVRD, member municipalities, and the Province of B.C. recognize the need for reconciliation to address the issue of the Island Rail Corridor and other injustices. All levels of government are emphasizing the need to rebuild and strengthen relationships with K'ómoks First Nation, include KFN in decision-making, and maintain consistent dialogue on important issues and projects. Respectful government-to-government relations are essential to building trust and seeking out opportunities to collaborate with KFN. Reconciliation will be central to the ongoing visioning for the Island Rail Corridor, like it is across Vancouver Island. K'ómoks First Nation's interests will be central to planning efforts and decision-making for future corridor use.

There is also a collective desire to educate the local community and visitors of K'ómoks First Nation's ongoing presence and leadership in the region. This is expressed through a desire to share information on traditional land uses practices and create opportunities for Indigenous artwork in public spaces. Careful consideration is also given to the need to protect important sites to K'ómoks First Nation, including areas of archaeological significance as the region continues to grow and develop.

Regional Themes

- ➔ Strengthening relationships with K'ómoks First Nation, including regularly engaging and maintaining consistent dialogue and collaborating with KFN on regional planning, infrastructure, and other projects.
- ➔ Creating spaces that celebrate Indigenous culture and heritage through design and placemaking while ensuring all visitors know they are on K'ómoks territory and protecting culturally important sites as new development

Guiding Documents & Policies

Comox Valley Regional District

- ➔ Indigenous Relations Framework
- ➔ Regional Growth Strategy
- ➔ Official Community Plan

City of Courtenay

- ➔ Official Community Plan

Town of Comox

- ➔ Official Community Plan

Village of Cumberland

- ➔ Official Community Plan

Province of British Columbia

- ➔ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act
- ➔ Declaration Act Action Plan

Government of Canada

- ➔ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act
- ➔ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

6.2 Growth + Land Use

The CVRD has grown steadily in recent years, as evidenced by a nearly 9% population growth between 2016 and 2021. As the region grows, the land use context to accommodate current and future growth is also changing. Traditionally, land use patterns in the region have been low-density residential, particularly in rural areas.

To accomplish the various goals set out in the RGS and other local government planning documents, intensification of development in growth areas, including the member municipalities and some rural areas. By 2030, the RGS targets 90% of all new housing in the Core Settlement Areas. This will mean higher-density residential and mixed-use development, and a focus on creating complete communities that meet residents' housing, employment, commercial, and recreational needs. The RGS also envisions that employment in the municipal centres will grow from 85% in 2008 to 93% in 2030.

Several areas within 1 km of the Island Rail Corridor are identified in the Courtenay OCP for future development. These include mixed-use centres in Downtown Courtenay and three neighbourhood centres, along with some intensification envisioned for other residential neighbourhoods clustered around the Puntledge River. Future development is also anticipated in Union Bay, which includes multiple phases of the Union Bay Estates development, of which the first is underway.

The Island Rail Corridor crosses through growth areas in Courtenay, Royston and Union Bay, along with future K'ómoks Treaty Settlement Lands in the southern Comox Valley. As such, the Corridor could play an important role in supporting the varying needs of these lands through mobility options, economic opportunities, and/or utility corridors. Higher density development will require upgrades and/or expansions to municipal and regional infrastructure, including road, sewer, water, stormwater, electrical, and internet services that may be impacted or be accommodated in the Island Rail Corridor.

Growth near the Island Rail Corridor, particularly in Courtenay, may be influenced by recent changes to provincial legislation allowing for greater variety and density of housing forms in communities across B.C.

Regional Themes

- ➔ Regional growth will be focused in the Core Settlement Areas (municipalities, settlement nodes) to promote efficient land use while limiting sprawl and protecting the environment.
- ➔ To facilitate ongoing and projected growth, communities across the CVRD must expand and improve housing options, employment opportunities, community amenities, transportation systems, and other infrastructure.

Guiding Documents & Policies

Comox Valley Regional District

- ➔ Regional Growth Strategy
- ➔ Official Community Plan

City of Courtenay

- ➔ Official Community Plan

Town of Comox

- ➔ Official Community Plan

Village of Cumberland

- ➔ Official Community Plan

6.3 Transportation + Mobility

Transportation and mobility are key considerations for the present and future of the Island Rail Corridor. Across the region, the CVRD and member municipalities are prioritizing sustainable mode shift towards a higher share of walking, cycling, and transit use to support reduced greenhouse gas emissions, healthy lifestyles, accessibility, and improved urban design. This represents a fundamental shift for transportation in the Comox Valley which is traditionally auto-oriented, as evidenced by commuting mode share data from the most recent Census and the GHG inventory which shows that 46% of GHG emissions in the region comes from on-road transpiration. To this end, the Regional Growth Strategy targets a 50% reduction in transportation-related GHG emissions and a combined 22.5% mode share for walking, cycling, and transit use by 2030.

To support this transition, the CVRD and local governments are investing in active transportation and regional investments in public transit are forthcoming. Coordination across jurisdictions, both within the CVRD and outside, is recognized as an essential component to successful change, due to the highly interconnected nature of the Comox Valley and the focus on the urban centres. Therefore, the Island Rail Corridor could play an important role in facilitating both short- and long-distance trips within the CVRD and to destinations in neighbouring regions, through rail service and/or active transportation uses. Support is provided for the continued protection of the Corridor for transportation purposes, with the “rails with trails” supported in multiple guiding documents and policies.

These broad transportation and mobility objectives align with the Province’s overarching goals to promote sustainable transportation, reduce transportation related greenhouse gas emissions, and improve accessibility.

Regional Themes

- ➔ Desire to increase sustainable mode share, reduce transportation related GHG emissions, and invest in sustainable transportation infrastructure.
- ➔ Support for coordinated, inter-community and inter-regional transportation infrastructure, including protecting and improving the Island Rail Corridor for future use.

Guiding Documents & Policies

Comox Valley Regional District

- ➔ Regional Growth Strategy
- ➔ Transportation and Road Network Plan
- ➔ Regional Active Transportation Network Plan
- ➔ Sustainability Strategy

City of Courtenay

- ➔ Transportation Master Plan
- ➔ Cycling Network Plan

Town of Comox

- ➔ Transportation Master Plan

Village of Cumberland

- ➔ Active Transportation Background Report
- ➔ Official Community Plan

Province of British Columbia

- ➔ CleanBC
- ➔ Move, Commute, Connect
- ➔ Active Transportation Design Guide

6.4 Natural Environment + Climate Change

Protecting the natural environment and addressing the causes and impacts of climate change are key goals of CVRD communities.

As mentioned in previous sections, the Regional Growth Strategy provides clear targets for regional greenhouse gas emissions reductions, in three areas, including the building, on-road transportation, and solid waste sectors. In 2021, on-road transportation emissions accounted for 46% of total emissions in the CVRD. Emissions reductions in these and other sectors, will support the overall targeted reduction of 50% emissions reductions by 2030, and an 80% reduction by 2050.

For communities in the Comox Valley, care for the natural environment is critical. This includes protecting natural spaces throughout the region, restoring ecosystems or habitats that have been previously disturbed, and ensuring that they can act as responsible stewards of the air, waters, and land. From this perspective, ensuring that future development does not harm sensitive ecosystems is an essential component of good stewardship and responsible development. This also includes collaborating with K'ómoks First Nation to understand how traditional ecological knowledge and uses can be applied.

Visioning for the Island Rail Corridor provides an opportunity to understand how the Corridor can support environmental and climate change goals. This includes how the Corridor affects the natural environment, such as the watercourses it crosses, and how future use could contribute to greenhouse gas emissions reductions.

The region's focus on sustainable development and climate change aligns with the Province's guiding document, CleanBC. The pathways set out in CleanBC focus on delivering low-carbon energy, transportation, buildings, communities, industry, and agriculture among others, to reduce GHG emissions by 40% by 2030.

Regional Themes

- Ensuring that natural features, biodiversity, and sensitive ecosystems are protected, enhanced, and restored as new development occurs.
- Significantly reducing overall GHG emissions by 2050, including substantial reductions in emissions from buildings and on-road transportation.

Guiding Documents & Policies

Comox Valley Regional District

- Regional Growth Strategy
- Official Community Plan
- Sustainability Strategy

City of Courtenay

- Official Community Plan

Town of Comox

- Official Community Plan

Village of Cumberland

- Official Community Plan

Province of British Columbia

- CleanBC
- CleanBC - Roadmap to 2030

6.5 Economic Development

The Comox Valley's economy is traditionally based in the natural resources, agricultural, and public services sectors, with several large employers, like CFB Comox. As the economy has changed, regional directions point to developing a strong, diverse, and sustainable economy. Coordinating economic development across the region remains critical to ensuring that a resilient economy is developed with K'ómoks First Nation and the member municipalities.

Specific opportunities for continued regional economic growth include maintaining a strong public sector employment base, growing tourism opportunities, and supporting sustainable and competitive natural resources and agricultural uses. The Regional Growth Strategy sets out a target job-to-population ratio of 0.55, including 2,200 jobs in the agriculture and resource-based economy by 2030.

Guiding policies emphasize the linkages between a strong economy and vibrant and sustainable communities, that can attract diverse businesses and workers. This means that ongoing economic success in the Comox Valley is closely connected to opportunities for quality, affordable housing, transportation and recreation options, and social interactions.

The Island Rail Corridor was originally constructed as an economic connection between settlements on eastern Vancouver Island. Today, the economic opportunities associated with the Corridor are different and more diverse, whether through direct use of the Corridor or indirect economic impacts on people and businesses, such as tourism. The proximity of many small communities creates possible local economic growth and employment outside of the regional centre. K'ómoks First Nation's economic priorities within their territory, which may align with those outlined above, will be central to this shared vision and collaborative approach.

Regional Themes

- ➔ Prioritizing a sustainable local economy and creating economic opportunities across the region, including on KFN lands.
- ➔ Growing and maintaining regional employment in the public sector, natural resource/agriculture, and tourism.

Guiding Documents & Policies

Comox Valley Regional District

- ➔ Regional Growth Strategy
- ➔ Official Community Plan

City of Courtenay

- ➔ Official Community Plan

Town of Comox

- ➔ Official Community Plan

Village of Cumberland

- ➔ Official Community Plan

Province of British Columbia

- ➔ Stronger BC Economic Plan
- ➔ Strategic Framework for Tourism

6.6 Parks + Recreation

The Comox Valley is defined by numerous accessible recreational opportunities. Opportunities to access the local mountains, waterbodies, and various parks are an important lifestyle consideration for many people throughout the region.

Policies in most communities in the Comox Valley emphasize the importance of greenways to increase local green space and connect to community destinations. While recreational opportunities in the region are clear, guiding documents such as the upcoming CVRD Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan recognize that connections between them are lacking or require improvement and that greater coordination is needed between jurisdictions. The planning process towards a Regional Parks and Trails Service in the CVRD will help fill the gaps identified in the Strategy. The need for an equitable distribution of community recreational amenities is also prioritized, and providing spaces, programs, and services that meet the Comox Valley's diverse needs.

Development of the Island Rail Corridor for recreational use, like the Rotary Trail and other multi-use paths in other regions, demonstrates the Corridor's recreational potential. The Courtenay OCP identifies an extension of the Rotary Trail or a park at the end of the existing trail as a key opportunity. This is being actioned through improvements to McPhee Meadows along the Puntledge River, which would see the Rotary Trail extended north of 5th Street, revegetation of the Corridor lands, and other uses of the lands including parking and pedestrian access.

As such, the Island Rail Corridor could serve the region's larger parks and recreation network as a standalone recreational opportunity or by providing connections to other destinations. The Corridor Communities would be most directly served by recreational opportunities along the Corridor but could also benefit from connections to other trails or recreational amenities.

Regional Themes

- Common desire to connect communities throughout the region with greenways and multi-use paths.
- The Island Rail Corridor has regional recreation potential with direct impacts on corridor communities and potential benefits for other member municipalities and areas should suitable connections be created.

Guiding Documents & Policies

Comox Valley Regional District

- Official Community Plan
- Regional Parks and Trails Strategy (in draft)

City of Courtenay

- Official Community Plan
- Parks & Recreation Master Plan
- McPhee Meadows Concept Plan

Town of Comox

- Official Community Plan
- Parks & Greenways Assessment

Village of Cumberland

- Official Community Plan
- Parks & Greenways Master Plan



7.0 CORRIDOR OPPORTUNITIES

This background study considers the many opportunities that have been identified in local government planning documents and past studies. The opportunities identified below will help to inform a shared vision for the Corridor in the near term and work to guide the use of the Corridor in the future. Consideration and prioritization of these opportunities has not been undertaken during this project phase, which will be an essential component of future work on the Island Rail Corridor in the CVRD. Other opportunities may also become evident in subsequent project phases that can be added to the list below.

Passenger Rail

Re-establishing a passenger rail service to connect the Corridor Communities and neighbouring regions. This opportunity could serve either or both a commuter or tourism function, creating opportunities for efficient, low-emissions transportation without the need to travel by car.

Depending on the directions of neighbouring regions and First Nations communities this service could become part of a larger passenger rail network across Vancouver Island. Like with other rail uses, substantial investment will be required to ensure that existing infrastructure is adequately upgraded for the ongoing safe use of the Corridor.

Freight Rail

Creating opportunities to move goods along the Island Rail Corridor could provide access to new markets and reduce the environmental impact of freight movement in the region. Integrating freight could also increase the economic viability of the broader corridor by collecting fees for track usage.

Integrating freight rail would likely require substantial upgrades to existing infrastructure to support larger cars and loads. Similarly, securing consistent business will be essential to financing operations over the long term.

Active Transportation, Commute + Recreational

The opportunities for direct inter-community connections from Courtenay to Mud Bay, along with the gentle grade of the Corridor, provide an opportunity to encourage active transportation for commuting and recreational use. Such a trail facility could be implemented either in replacement of, or along with, rail.

Other communities along the Corridor have implemented a rails-with-trails model to support active transportation alongside the rail infrastructure. The Rotary Trail in Courtenay already performs this function through a shared-use agreement with the Island Corridor Foundation.

The length of the Corridor, along with the complexity of implementing an active transportation facility through constrained locations such as bridges, could create significant cost implications for a potential trail.

Active Transportation, Inter-Regional

Beyond the commuting and recreational potential of active transportation uses within the Island Rail Corridor, there is also an opportunity to connect a potential trail to the Regional District of Nanaimo and beyond. If this opportunity is pursued it would primarily fulfill a tourism and recreation function, as commuting distances would be significant.

Implementation of this opportunity also relies on coordinated efforts with neighbouring regions and First Nations communities to build active transportation connectivity across the Corridor.

Land Development

The total area and location of the Island Rail Corridor could lend itself to supporting future land development as part of independent or surrounding development that is compatible with the directions established by municipal and regional governments. This could include development for housing, parks, or other community uses that address key areas of local and regional need.

Utilities

Securing land for utility uses, such as water, sewer, and electrical conveyance, can be challenging to help support future growth and development. Due to the location of the Island Rail Corridor near many future growth areas in Courtenay and Union Bay, including Union Bay Estates and the K'ómoks First Nation Treaty Settlement Lands, the Corridor could be used to connect utilities to existing or future local or regional systems. These uses can be compatible with other opportunities as utilities can be located below, above, or alongside many of the other opportunities described in this table.

Community Access

The Island Rail Corridor presents an opportunity for many of the uses listed above, however, the Corridor can also be a barrier for various uses on adjacent lands. One area where this barrier is evident is in the ability of communities to create perpendicular connections across the Corridor to access lands on either side of the Corridor.

Due to the nature of the transportation network in the Corridor Communities being concentrated to the east of the Island Rail Corridor, often the most direct and efficient route to the west would cross the Corridor. Current requirements limit the number of accesses that can cross the Corridor, and those that do must adhere to strict, and expensive, standards for railway crossings, despite the lack of current rail activity.

As such, it is critical to identify and address the barriers associated with the Island Rail Corridor and how they relate to the region's goals for growth, housing, and transportation, among other areas.

Rotary Trail nearby Dogwood Park, south Courtenay





URBAN SYSTEMS