

Service 780 Transit Comox Valley

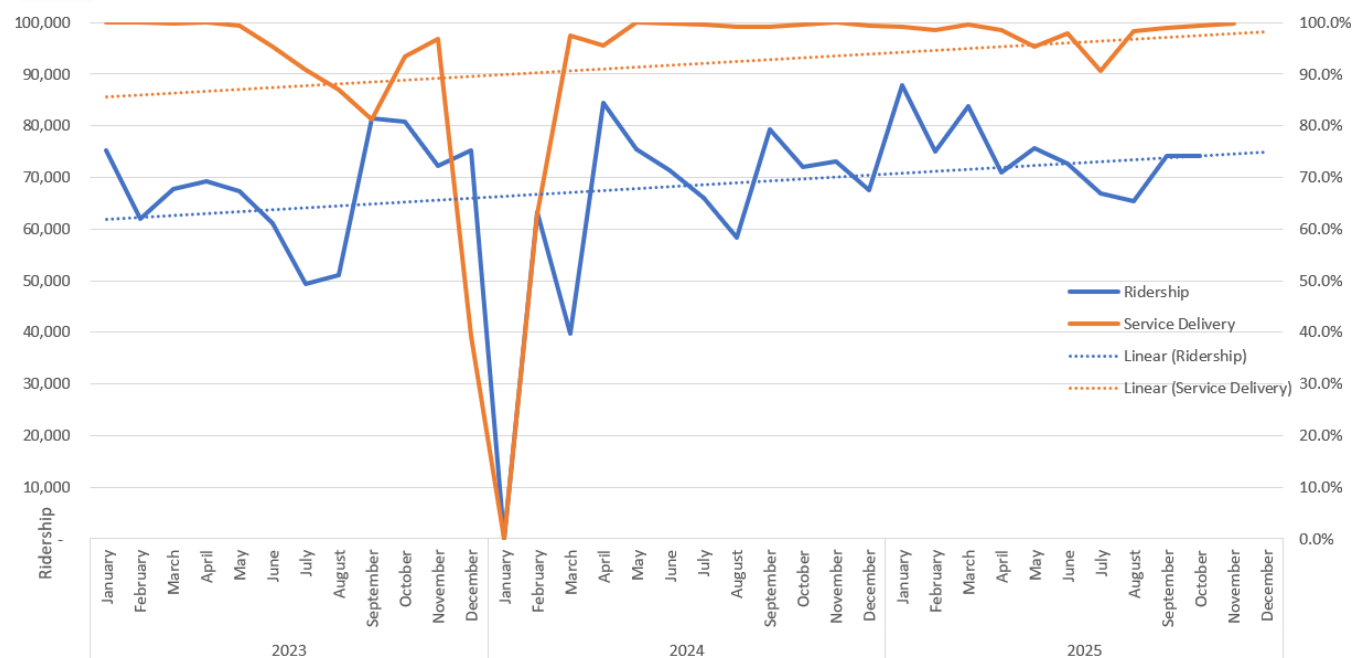
PURPOSE

To provide supplementary information related to transit service level increases including ridership increases, costs, and taxation.

OVERVIEW

The latest BC Transit statistics shows a post-pandemic trend of increasing ridership amidst various disruptions, including a labour dispute, the sewer conveyance project, and service delivery challenges. This steady upward trend can be attributed to past increases to transit service levels and a strong demand for public transit.

Figure 1. BC Transit Ridership and Service Delivery



During the pandemic, the Province was not able to support increased transit service levels and, since then, they have provided only limited support. For reference, transit costs are shared with the Province which covers approximately 47 percent of conventional transit costs and 67 percent of handyDART costs. Minor service level increases over the past couple years have resulted in extended evening and weekend handyDART routes, a new connection with Nanaimo Transit at Deep Bay, and the addition of 2,000 service hours to reduce impacts of the sewer conveyance project on transit service. The latter was extremely important to maintain transit service levels during construction and has resulted in transit ridership continuing to grow in 2025. With the

project coming to an end, these service hours will be removed from the schedule in mid-2026 and will result in a reduced number of trips on certain routes.

2026 Service Levels Increases

Ridership growth will continue to be supported by service level increases starting in January 2026. Increased levels include the expansion of route 5 Vanier/Anfield Centre to serve the Comox Valley Farmers Market and Food Bank, as well as additional trips on Sundays for routes #2 Cumberland, #6 Uplands and #8 Anfield. This expansion was **endorsed by the CVRD Board in 2024** as part of the annual Transit Improvement Program (TIP). The CVRD's budget also includes increased funding to support Hornby and Denman Island bus services (\$50,000) and to provide cost-free service on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (\$10,000) in 2026.

2027 Service Levels Increases

Further increases were **approved in the 2025** TIP for implementation in 2027 and are focused on route expansions that will yield increased ridership while also providing service on stat holidays and improving on-time performance. The latter is a direct impact of traffic congestion, primarily related to population growth. With the Comox Valley's population growing at around 1,200 residents per year and Canadian car ownership rates at approximately 0.7 vehicles per capita, approximately 840 additional vehicles are anticipated to occupy our road networks every year. This additional traffic volume will result in each transit trip taking longer. Efforts to reduce private automobile dependency remains critical to future transit plans.

Taxation

These increased service levels come with an increased need for more revenue, whether from increases to taxation, bus fares, or more contributions from reserves. A large increase in taxation is shown in 2026 because of service expansion commitments made in 2024, and the decision to hold the 2025 requisition at 2024 levels. Similarly, increased taxation in 2027 is a result of increased services approved in the 2025 TIP for implementation in 2027. Table 1 shows the service level increases and associated cost increases. It is recognized that a taxation and reserve strategy is needed for the Service and will be developed as part of the 2026 work plan to help smooth out taxation increases over future 5-year financial plans.

Table 1. Transit service increases and budget impacts

Service Level Increase	Description	Budget 2026	Budget 2027
Conventional Transit 3,000 hours 2 buses Approved 2024 Implementation January 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional frequency and route expansion on Route 5 • Additional Sunday service on routes 2, 6, 8. 	\$245,097	
handyDART 150 hours Approved 2024 Partial implementation September 2025, full implementation January 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of service on select stat holidays • Additional service during peak weekday periods 	6,165	
Conventional Transit 7,575 hours 5 buses Approved 2025 Implementation January 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional frequency on Route 1 (5,000 Hrs.) • Route 2/Route 20 (1,800 Hrs.). • Extended Transit on Statutory Holidays (600 Hrs.) • On-Time Performance Adjustments (175 Hrs.) 		\$714,370
handyDART 2,100 hours Approved 2025 Implementation January 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved peak weekday service • Additional stat holidays to align with conventional transit 		63,945
		\$251,262	\$778,315

These increased service levels follow an 18 plus month timeline, as shown below, that depend on bus procurement timelines and necessary infrastructure added to support transit. While ridership may respond quickly, other times it may lag as resident awareness of new service and behaviour changes takes time to establish, creating delays in ridership metrics



Ridership and other benefits of improved transit are felt regionally as people travel throughout the community from one jurisdiction to another. Societal benefits of transit, such as GHG reductions, accessibility and inclusion, as well as improved public health, air

quality, economic aspects and reductions in traffic congestion, and road safety are shared throughout the Comox Valley. The increased transit service levels which provide these benefits are what drives increases to the CVRD's transit budget, in addition to inflationary pressures coming from the increases in fuel, insurance, repairs and maintenance, and driver wages, to name a few examples.

Another important component of the 2026 workplan is the development of strategic communication resources that will help raise awareness of improved transit, its benefits to the community, and to provide education about how to use it. It is hoped that this, combined with improved transit service, will help residents find more ways of using transit to save money and travel time. Private automobile transportation represents one of the highest household costs annually and, combined with demographic trends in the Comox Valley that include population growth and increased numbers of seniors and youth, the need for high quality public transit remains high. The CVRD will continue to work closely with BC Transit and the operating company to improve service reliability in order to realize the full benefit of increased service levels.