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Briefs

Connecting BC: A Ten-Year Vision and Investment Plan for Public Transit throughout BC

Imagine: Public transit that gets you where you need to go — quickly, easily, reliably... and affordably. No matter where in BC you live.

This plan can make that vision a reality — within the next decade.

We can fill the gaps left by years of neglect and privatization under past BC Liberal governments, and build on the important transit investments our current provincial government has made. And we can unite local and regional transit into an integrated, sustainable, zero-carbon whole.

This report, written by Marc Lee — a senior economist with the BC Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives — sets out a 10-year plan for investing in public transit throughout BC, with a call for immediate action on three key priorities:

- an inter-community express bus service connecting BC communities that were left stranded by the end of BC Rail passenger service and the departure of Greyhound.
- eliminating privatization throughout BC's public transit systems to ensure better, more reliable services for riders, and fairer benefits and wages for transit workers.

- extending the provincial government's free transit program to cover all British Columbians 18 and younger.

In the longer term, the plan includes a dramatic expansion and electrification of BC Transit's bus and HandyDART fleet, new regional rail and passenger ferry connections, accelerating Metro Vancouver's transit plans and integrating transit systems to allow seamless travel throughout BC.

Connecting BC is the first part of the BCFED Climate Justice and Jobs Plan, currently being created through consultations and conversations with union members throughout BC.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Vancity in creating this report.

Learn more:

- Full report (PDF, 5 MB)
- Executive summary(582 KB) (PDF, 390 KB)
- News release

What the community is saying

Labour

MoveUP is proud to endorse the *Connecting BC* plan. This is exactly the roadmap we need to address the gaps that presently exist and allows us to build a world-class system that is equitable, affordable, and reliable for people who rely on public transit every day while bringing communities closer together. This inspirational vision also ensures that our robust transit system will be delivered by unionized workers in good-paying jobs in communities across BC.

- Graeme Hutchison, President, MoveUP

We're proud to have played a key role in developing this report, by bringing the voices of our members and other working people to the table — along with voices from grassroots groups like the Okanagan Transit Alliance and the Okanagan Climate Hub. This plan reflects the needs of riders, workers and the community here in the Okanagan and in regions throughout BC.

- Al Peressini, President, ATU Local 1722

The BC Building Trades represents over 40,000 unionized construction workers. The projects outlined in the BCFED's Connecting BC Public Transit report will provide good, family-supporting jobs to thousands of British Columbians and offer hundreds of training opportunities for the next generation of unionized skilled workers. We are proud to support investments into public transit infrastructure.

- Brynn Bourke, Executive Director, BC Building Trades

Public transportation connects people with employment, education, services, healthcare and other community amenities, and is a key piece of our response to the climate emergency. For too many British Columbians, especially those in suburban and rural areas, transit services remain out of reach, and operated by private, for-profit corporations. This plan for a major investment in publicly-delivered public transportation will expand and improve services for thousands of British Columbians and support local and regional economies. It's a priority for BC's future prosperity and sustainability.

- Karen Ranalletta, President, CUPE BC

The BCFED's report is an excellent plan to create a HandyDART service across BC that would truly serve the needs of our aging population. For decades, workers and riders alike have advocated for insourcing and expanding HandyDART, to address the severe safety issues and service shortfalls that increasing plague the current system. Decision-makers have a choice: either continue allowing HandyDART service to deteriorate and be hollowed out by private contractors, or get behind the BCFED's solid plan to improve the lives of thousands of riders and workers.

- Mark Beeching, President, ATU 1724 (Save Our HandyDART campaign)

Public transit benefits individuals, families, communities and our environment. A robust public transit network means lower emissions and faster commutes as well as improving accessibility and affordability for everyone. It is time for game-changing, visionary investments in public transit that will move British Columbians, create jobs and build the green economy of the future.

- Stephanie Smith, President, BCGEU

The BC Ferry & Marine Workers' Union supports provincially funded, thoughtful, interconnected, intermodal transportation along our marine highways. Government leadership with provincially funded and directed transportation will have a positive impact on taxpayers. The outcome of a poorly defined, connected or forward-looking transport system has been observed along our coast in the past. Premier W.A.C Bennet sought to stabilize transportation through the purchase of Black Ball and then Canadian Pacific ferries. It is time to connect all of BC.

- Eric McNeely, President, BCFMWU

The Vancouver and New Westminster & District Labour Councils are pleased to see calls for major investments from senior levels of government, especially the frontloading of funds for Metro Vancouver transit in the *Connecting BC* report. The ability of workers to travel efficiently and rapidly around the region is of critical importance to the local economy and also addresses affordability and equitable access. Another priority highlighted is addressing the failed privatization model for HandyDART services, which the Save Our HandyDART campaign has been drawing attention to over the past year.

- Janet Andrews, New Westminster & District Labour Council and Stephen Sychowski, Vancouver District Labour Council

Connecting BC is a much-needed eagle-eye view of the path ahead for communities and working residents on the Sunshine Coast. With better connections between and within our communities, as well as to the Lower Mainland, it will be a big help to commuters and young people. And by making transit much more accessible and affordable, it will help make our province more inclusive, equitable and connected!

- Miyuki Shinkai, President, Sunshine Coast Labour Council

As our planet's population growth surges, our transportation solutions will have to consider and support that exponential growth, by moving people and the goods to support them in new and

innovative ways. As an Islander, I believe an expanded ferry system and a functioning Railway Corridor are paramount to that population and economic growth.

- Phil Venoit, Business Manager/Financial Secretary, IBEW Local 230 Vancouver Island

British Columbia has many remote communities and treacherous terrain, but the mobility of workers is vital to the healthy economic growth of this province. This plan ensures we can build upon our existing infrastructure and provide future generations with safe, equitable access to clean transportation."

- Brandon Dyck, IBEW Canada

HSA is strongly supportive of the proposals in this report. The expansion of HandyDART services and improvements to public transportation in rural areas are particularly important to specialized health and social service professionals, and essential to the people we care for. Everyone in BC deserves full access to the care they need, whether they live in a big city or a small community.

- Kane Tse, President, Health Sciences Association of BC

Community and business

In many parts of the province, getting around without a vehicle can be challenging, unsafe, or impossible for people without a car. An expanded and improved transit system could have a significant impact on BC's Indigenous people, especially in small, rural and remote communities. Providing more ways to travel that are safe, affordable, and inclusive would remove barriers to accessing employment, community connection, healthcare, education and culture.

- Leslie Varley, Executive Director, BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres

Accessible transit is more than transportation; it's the backbone of a thriving green economy. By providing mobility for all, we encourage sustainable progress, linking people to opportunities while minimizing our carbon footprint.

- Andrea Harris, VP of Impact Strategy, Vancity

This is a bold, visionary plan proposing the transit future we need for this province. *Connecting BC* lays out an important pathway and vision for the shift to a robust, accessible and people-focused public transit system that connects all communities in BC despite our complex geography. This is the transformative vision we need to agree on to tackle climate change, affordability, and access for all as we create the safe and accessible transit future our growing province must achieve.

- Viveca Ellis, Centre for Family Equity

Transit is a right, one that many living in smaller BC centres and rural and remote communities can't access. Instead, they face a mostly private patchwork of minimal, poor or no public transit at all. This *Connecting BC* report recognizes the inequity of the present transit "system" and echoes our calls for the province to build a reliable, safe, sustainable rural and inter-community transit network that is publicly-owned and operated by BC Transit — responsible to those it serves."

- Sharon Kravitz, Let's Ride! Make Public Transit BC Wide

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition is a coalition of over 80 organizations advocating for poverty eradication in BC. We fully support the BC Federation of Labour's *Connecting BC* 10-year vision for public transit throughout BC. This plan provides a zero-carbon solution, connecting services across the province and creating jobs while providing an accessible, inclusive system for everyone. Transit should be affordable, accessible, and reliable to all who call BC home.

- Rowan Burdge, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

It is great to see the release of the BCFED/CCPA Public Transit Report. An interconnected society very much needs an interconnected, affordable transportation network and this is what the Report is calling for. Indeed, such a network is part of province-building and constitutes important social and economic sinews that connect people and communities.

- Peter Ewart, Stand Up for the North Committee, Prince George, BC

The reality is that right now, many communities in BC do not have access to a good quality, reliable transit network. In these communities, people must take on the additional cost of owning a car to be

able to get to work, go to the shops and be with their friends and family. Investing in a better transportation network across BC will benefit everyone and could lower the living wage in rural communities.

- Anastasia French, Living Wage for Families Campaign

In Metro Vancouver, we have a million people trying to ride transit. Too often, they're turned away because the bus is full, late, and slow. We need more buses and bus lanes immediately. Increasing capacity will increase ridership, and the new riders will grow the support base for the world-class rapid transit and intercity rail investments proposed in this document. It's time to start the chain reaction!

- Denis Agar, Movement: Metro Vancouver Transit Riders

Municipal government

My mom didn't drive a car, so I took public transit in my hometown of Vernon. I also took Greyhound to Vancouver and up to Prince George. In Langley City, public transit is the only way to give people an affordable way out of congestion. In more rural areas, transit is a matter of equity. You shouldn't need a car to safely get to a job, the doctor, or visit with friends. It's time to invest in BC's public transit network.

- Nathan Pachal, Mayor of Langley City

I want to thank the BC Federation of Labour for this important report. We must rapidly expand transit to meet the needs our province's record-setting population growth to support people who live here today and will move here tomorrow and in the future. But the kind of transit expansion we need is too big just for TransLink to fund on its own – we need the province as a full partner, and now is the time, both before next week's budget and this year's election for them to hear from BC Fed members that this must be BC's priority.

- Port Coquitlam Mayor Brad West, Chair, TransLink Mayors' Council

People across the region deserve fast, accessible and efficient transit services. Now more than ever before we rely on transit to connect us with school and work, to ease congestion, to support economic productivity, and to reduce GHG emissions. An investment in transit is an investment in our economy and the people who call this region home. Transit is the thread that weaves communities together and either makes them work, or stall out. I applaud the BC Federation of Labour for calling on the Province to enhance existing services and make long overdue new capital investments that will connect working people with homes, jobs, recreation, retail, and more.

- City of North Vancouver Mayor Linda Buchanan

Transit is being asked to do more than it ever has before, to meet Clean BC targets, support affordable housing development and social equity, and respond to record-setting population growth. These big challenges need massive expansion in transit if we are to succeed as a province. But without a new approach to how we fund transit, we will fall short. We need the province at the table ready to make big moves on transit, starting next week in the budget.

- Burnaby Mayor Mike Hurley, Vice-Chair, TransLink Mayors' Council