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REGIONAL DISTRICT OF BULKLEY-NECHAKO
REGIONAL TRANSIT COMMITTEE
AGENDA

Thursday, May 9, 2024
1:00 p.m.

<u>PAGE NO.</u>		<u>ACTION</u>
	<u>AGENDA, May 9, 2024</u>	Approve
	<u>Supplementary Agenda</u>	Receive
	<u>MINUTES</u>	
2-5	Regional Transit Committee Meeting Minutes - June 8, 2023	Receive
	<u>DELEGATION</u>	
	<u>BC Transit</u> Lindsay Taylor, Manager, Government Relations - Northern BC Re: NextRide and Customer Alert System	
	<u>REPORT</u>	
6-16	Jason Llewellyn, Director of Planning -Update on BC Transit Bus Service Funding and Bylaw	Receive
	<u>SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA</u>	
	<u>NEW BUSINESS</u>	
	<u>ADJOURNMENT</u>	

REGIONAL DISTRICT OF BULKLEY-NECHAKO**REGIONAL TRANSIT COMMITTEE MEETING****(Committee of the Whole)****Thursday, June 8, 2023**

PRESENT:	Chair	Mark Parker
	Directors	Shane Brien Leroy Dekens Judy Greenaway Clint Lambert Linda McGuire Shirley Moon Kevin Moutray Chris Newell Michael Riis-Christianson Stoney Stoltenberg Sarrah Storey Henry Wiebe
	Directors Absent	Gladys Atrill, Town of Smithers Martin Elphee, District of Fort St. James
	Alternate Directors	Judith Friesen, District of Fort St. James Frank Wray, Town of Smithers
	Staff	Curtis Helgesen, Chief Administrative Officer Cheryl Anderson, Director of Corporate Services Jason Llewellyn, Director of Planning Deneve Vanderwolf, Planning Technician/Regional Transit Coordinator Wendy Wainwright, Deputy Director of Corporate Services
	Others	Michael Coulson, Transit Planner, City of Prince George- via Zoom Elijah Newell, Electoral Area G (Houston/Granisle Rural) Lindsay Taylor, Government Relations Manager, BC Transit Aaron Thompson, Planner, Service Review Lead, BC Transit - via Zoom

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Parker called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

AGENDA

Moved by Director Stoltenberg
 Seconded by Director Brienen

RTC.2023-1-1

"That the Regional Transit Agenda of June 8, 2023 be approved."

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

MINUTES

Regional Transit Committee
 Minutes – March 17, 2022

Moved by Director Riis-Christianson
 Seconded by Director McGuire

RTC.2023-1-2

"That the Regional Transit Committee meeting minutes of March 17, 2022 be approved."

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

DELEGATION

BC TRANSIT – Lindsay Taylor, Manager, Government Relations and Aaron Thompson, Planner, Service Review Lead RE: Transit Future Service Plan Highway 16

Chair Parker welcomed Lindsay Taylor, Manager, Government Relations and Aaron Thompson, Planner, Service Review Lead, BC Transit.

Ms. Taylor and Mr. Thompson provided a PowerPoint Presentation.

Transit Future Service Plan Highway 16

- Territorial Announcement
- Background
- Introduction
- Transit Today
- Engagement
- Transit Need
- Impacts and Response to COVID-19
- Strategies, Service Improvements, and Infrastructure
- Affordability
- Safety
- Promotion and Communication
- Fleet
- Service Improvements: Ease of Implementation
- Infrastructure Priorities
- BC Transit Future Initiatives
- Acknowledgments.

DELEGATION (CONT'D)

BC TRANSIT – Lindsay Taylor, Manager, Government Relations and Aaron Thompson, Planner, Service Review Lead RE: Transit Future Service Plan Highway 16

The following was discussed:

- Safety issue
 - o Variety of issues
 - Most common – safety at stops – drug use/aggressive behaviour
 - Where on-board issues are reported BC Transit reviewing and looking at how to address
 - o Reports of discomfort by some riders due to excessive intoxication of people
 - BC Transit does not put drivers in the position of enforcement – no enforcement
 - When addressing intoxicated individuals drivers can contact their operations department to have RCMP meet them at the next stop to address the individual
 - Working with local governments/municipalities for them to make the call
 - Working with RCMP and have them regularly check when possible
 - o Fares
 - Potentially increase the fee for service
 - As part of the agreement with the province fares will be maintained until March 2025F
 - Will review and take into consideration the potential of creating fees per zone
 - o Using the exterior of the bus for advertising opportunities
 - Revenue would go to the local government for the local costing of the service
 - BC Transit will explore possible opportunities
 - o Potential sponsorship of the service
 - o Collaboration with existing groups and transportation service providers
 - o BC Transit meets with Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT) regularly
 - Will be working with them to determine gaps
 - Support connectivity of already existing services
 - o Fort St. James
 - Seniors bus that transports seniors to appointments in Prince George
 - Binche Whut'en has a bus that goes to Prince George twice a week
 - Currently there is no general public bus service
 - o Adding routes and the need to add additional buses
 - o Next Steps
 1. BC Transit will provide report to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
 2. BC Transit develops an MOU outlining commitment
 3. BC Transit develops a Service Plan that will include areas where local government wants to explore expansion opportunities.

Chair Parker thanked Ms. Taylor and Mr. Thompson for attending the meeting.

REPORT

Draft Transit Future Service Plan – Highway 16

Moved by Director Brienen
 Seconded by Director Dekents

RTC.2023-1-3

“That the Committee receive the Draft Transit Future Service Plan – Highway 16 report.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

The following was discussed:

- NDIT Northern Community Shuttle Program
 - Nee Tahi Buhn Band Community Bus
 - A community bus for Fort St. James
 - Chair Parker will follow-up with Directors Lambert and Friesen
- Direction for the Committee moving forward
 - Service is not sustainable without an Increased level of funding and cost certainty
 - Rural/Agriculture Committee discussion regarding Electoral Area participation in the transit service
 - Bring forward for Board consideration to increase the requisition limit and determine direction regarding new service or increased service.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Director Dekens
 Seconded by Director Greenaway

RTC.2023-1-4

“That the meeting be adjourned at 1:37 p.m.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Mark Parker, Chair

Wendy Wainwright, Deputy Director of
 Corporate Services



Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Regional Transit Committee

To: Chair and Committee
From: Jason Llewellyn, Director of Planning
Date: May 9, 2024
Subject: Update on BC Transit Bus Service Funding

Receipt

This report provides an update on the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako's efforts to secure long term funding for the BC Transit Bus Service through the region.

At the March 21 and April 11, 2024 Board meetings the Board considered the attached staff reports which discuss the inability to move forward with amendments to "Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Regional Public Transit and Para-Transit (Highway 16) Service Establishment Bylaw No. 1790, 2016." These amendment bylaws proposed to increase the maximum taxation requisition amount from \$90,000 to \$135,000; include a number of Electoral Areas within the service area; and amend the cost apportionment formulas to account for electoral area participation.

At the April 11, 2024 Board meeting staff were directed to send the attached letter to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure discussing the ongoing funding challenges and requesting that the Province work with local governments, First Nations, and stakeholders to develop a regional transportation service model that better meets the needs of people in Northern BC.

The funding shortfalls identified in the attached letter and staff report are compounded by the recent request from the Village of Telkwa that they be removed from participation in the service.

ATTACHMENTS

- March 21, 2024 Board Report
- April 11, 2024 Board Report
- Letter sent to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.



Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Board of Directors

To: Chair and Board
From: Jason Llewellyn, Director of Planning
Date: March 21, 2024
Subject: **BC Transit Bus Service Funding**

RECOMMENDATION: (all/directors/majority)

Receipt

BACKGROUND

The Board has been discussing for a number of years the need to increase the maximum requisition amount allowed pursuant to "Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Regional Public Transit and Para-Transit (Highway 16) Service Establishment Bylaw No. 1790, 2016." This taxation increase is necessary to ensure adequate long-term funding for the BC Transit Bus Service in the RDBN.

This discussion resulted in the Board giving first and second readings to "Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Regional Public Transit and Para-Transit (Highway 16) Service Establishment Amendment Bylaws No. 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, and 2016, 2023" to include Electoral Areas B, C, D, F, and G in the transit service area. Electoral Areas A and E were not interested in participating in the service.

First and second readings were also provided to "Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Regional Public Transit and Para-Transit (Highway 16) Service Establishment Amendment Bylaw No. 2017, 2023" to increase the maximum requisition amount from \$90,000 to \$200,000; and amend the cost apportionment formulas to account for electoral area participation.

The Board deferred consideration of third reading of the above bylaws to allow for further discussions with the Ministry of Transportation regarding the Province's lack of commitment to long-term funding of the BC Transit Bus service in the RDBN. Specifically, the RDBN requested that the Province consider the following requests, which would

provide the RDBN with some financial security regarding the long term operation of the service:

- Provincial commitment to maintain Provincial funding of 66.7% of operational costs for the service for the life of the service;
- Provincial commitment to fund future capital costs for buses, bus stops, and bus shelters for the life of the service; and
- Provincial commitment to work with the RDBN to secure adequate long-term funding to cover the cost of providing transit service for on-reserve populations and provide certainty regarding responsibility for the cost of building and maintaining infrastructure on-reserve.

A letter (attached) was received from the Minister on October 13, 2023 which confirmed in writing that the Federal and Provincial contribution towards new bus purchases in 2024. However, none of the requested Provincial Government commitments were provided.

At the October 26, 2023 Board Meeting the Board amended Bylaw No. 2017, 2023 to decrease the maximum requisition amount from \$200,000 to \$115,000 and subsequently gave third reading to Bylaws No. 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, and 2017 (as amended).

Bylaws No. 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, and 2016, and 2017, 2023 were subsequently sent to the municipalities participating in the service for authorization. The Council's for the Town of Smithers, the Village of Burns Lake, the Village of Fraser Lake, and the District of Vanderhoof authorized the bylaw; however, the Councils for the Village of Telkwa and the District of Fort St. James declined to give approval. Given the refusal of Fort St. James and Telkwa Councils to authorize the bylaws the bylaws cannot proceed; therefore, the District of Houston Council did not take a final position on authorization.

CURRENT SITUATION

As noted, the taxation limit under the existing bylaw is \$90,000. Based on this taxation limit moving forward the service can continue to operate for approximately 4 years using reserve funds (intended for bus and other capital purchases). In 2028 reserve funds will be depleted and the service will not be funded.

It is noted that the below table assumes that the Province will maintain their funding of 66.7% of operational costs for the service. The Province's funding commitment expires in March 2025. Typical transit systems funding from the Province is 46.7%.

It is also noted that the above table assumes that the City of Prince George will maintain their funding of \$50,000 annually towards the operational costs for the service. The partnership agreement between the City of Prince George and the RDBN, and the commitment from the City to pay \$50,000 annually towards the service expires in December 2026.

There is no certainty that the Province and the City of Prince George will continue to contribute as they have long term,

REVENUE	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
taxation	\$87,045	\$89,856	\$89,738	\$89,045	\$90,000
reserves	\$5,000	\$63,000	\$71,000	\$80,000	0
grants	\$36,500	\$7,000	\$7,000	\$7,000	\$7,000
user fees	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000
Service agreements	\$52,500	\$52,500	\$52,500	\$52,500	\$52,500
other	\$25,232	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000
TOTAL	\$231,277	\$238,356	\$246,239	\$254,545	\$175,500
EXPENDITURE	\$231,277	\$238,356	\$246,239	\$254,545	\$263,039
DEFICIT					-\$87,539

VILLAGE OF TELKWA

The Village of Telkwa has requested that the RDBN Board amend “Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Regional Public Transit and Para Transit (Highway 16) Service Establishing Bylaw No. 1790, 2016” by removing Telkwa from the list of participating areas and boundaries of the service area. It is up to the Board to direct staff how to proceed with the requested bylaw amendment.

NDIT NORTHERN BC INTER-COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION STUDY

The Province of BC provided funding for Northern Development (NDIT) to conduct the “Northern BC Inter-Community Transportation Study” within the NDIT’s region. The stated purpose of the study was to do the following:

- Increase use of existing bus and other inter-community transportation services in Northern B.C.
- Identify challenges and opportunities with existing rural, regional and inter-community passenger transportation.

- Identify possible roles that local, regional and Indigenous governments could play in supporting inter-urban passenger transportation options.
- Fill in transportation gaps.

The document titled “Northern BC Inter-Community Transportation Study” dated August, 2023 is attached.

The challenges identified in the study (in regard to public ground transportation) are summarized below:

- Geographic gaps: There is an uncoordinated mosaic of transit services throughout the region with geographic gaps and areas of overlapping services.
- Level of service: There are multiple single-purpose operators with less flexibility to serve users outside of their target group and service frequency is limited due to cost.
- Access to Medical Services: There is inadequate service and the service available is disjointed.
- Tourism: There is a lack of service connecting smaller communities to airports, ferries and activity centres.
- Economic Development: Services are infrequent and operate on schedules that are not appropriate for commuting to employment.
- Governance and Communication: There are many service providers operating similar but different services in the region (BC Transit, BC Bus North and Northern Health Connections), and it is logistically challenging to transition from one service to another when travelling longer distances across the region.

The recommendations proposed in the study are summarized below:

Communication and Coordination:

- Sponsor an overarching technology at the provincial level to better enable citizens to view and book trips with the many transportation options that already exist.
- Seek an opportunity for critical partners to collaborate and determine the inter-regional and regional priority corridors.
- Consider further tangible and grassroots opportunities to communicate about and promote the services.

Funding

- Confirm, continue and further improve the Northern Passenger Transportation Services Fund for community shuttle programs.

- Confirm and continue BC Bus North, including leveraging long-distance operators and other services where possible to provide more trips and better coordinate services.
- Continue to expand funding for BC Transit-led regional and inter-regional services.
- Consider opportunities for shared procurement across transportation providers.

Regulatory

- Consider amendments to Passenger Transportation Board regulatory requirements to improve flexibility for intercity services.
- Amend the *BC Transit Act* to enable Indigenous communities to be sponsoring partners, modernize the suite of transportation options it delivers.
- Review the existing BC Rail agreement with CN to determine if there is any opportunity to prioritize passenger rail without materially impacting the movement of freight and goods.

Technical

- Undertake a comparative study of Northern Health Connections' and Interior Health Connections' passenger eligibility policies and outcomes.
- Undertake a study to determine options for how to make airport taxi service viable to support residents and visitors.

Moving Forward

- The study includes the following comment with regard to moving forward to address the challenges identified in the study.

“The logical next step resulting from this work would be the dissemination of this report to various levels of government, funding partners and other possible partners to seek alignment on how to continue improving mobility and connection in Northern B.C. This study has identified opportunities to increase the coordination, availability and integration of inter-community transportation services in the north. However, it also highlights Northern B.C. as an existing inter-community transportation success story and one that can serve as a model for other areas of the province. When thinking of next steps, the priority should be on increasing awareness of and access to the many existing transportation options.

Following this, other priorities involve considering processes that can improve how transportation services are coordinated and planned. Concurrent to this would be identifying funding and partnership opportunities to improve and strengthen existing connections. Lastly, it is critical to create new connections where none currently exist.”

RDBN SERVICE MOVING FORWARD

The NDIT study clearly identifies that the key challenges in providing public transit service to the north are associated with the number of different organizations providing transportation services to different use groups. This is certainly the case in the RDBN

where there are several independent community-based shuttle services, BC Bus North, the Northern Health Connections Bus, and 2 separate BC Transit services. In staff's opinion the recommendations in the "Northern BC Inter-Community Transportation Study" are unlikely to result in any notable improvement to the efficiency and effectiveness of public transit in the RDBN without the Province playing the lead role in designing and operating a regional transportation service to replace the multitude of uncoordinated existing services provided by multiple service providers.

In staff's opinion the RDBN Board's challenges funding the BC Transit Bus Service in the RDBN relate to the fact that the BC Transit service delivery, partnership, and funding model is not designed to work in the context of intra-community travel in northern BC and the RDBN. Given the limited efficiency and effectiveness of the existing public transportation services in the RDBN there is a reluctance to amend "Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Regional Public Transit and Para-Transit (Highway 16) Service Establishment Bylaw No. 1790, 2016" to increase taxation in support of the existing service model.

Ideally the Province needs to consider the need for a regional transportation service model which better meets the needs of RDBN residents. Alternatively, staff can continue to work with the Board to identify a bylaw amendment which includes Electoral Area participation and an increased taxation requisition as necessary to pay for the service in the long term. Or, staff can also work with the Ministry of Transportation and BC Transit to identify the level of service that may be supported by available RDBN taxation and amend the Annual Operating Agreement accordingly.

Following the Board's receipt of this report, and subsequent Board discussion, staff will further evaluate the situation and report back to the Board with recommendations for moving forward.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Letter from the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure dated October 13, 2023
- [Staff Report dated October, 26, 2023 \(link\)](#)
- [Northern BC Inter-Community Transportation Study \(link\)](#)



October 13, 2023

Curtis Helgesen, Chief Administrative Officer
Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako
PO Box 820
37 3rd Avenue
Burns Lake BC V0J 1E0

Reference: 321211

Dear Curtis Helgesen:

Re: Regional Transit Service Funding

I am pleased to follow up on our meeting of October 5, 2023, regarding regional transit service funding. I am glad you also had the opportunity to discuss this matter with ministry staff at the recent Union of British Columbia Municipalities Convention in Vancouver.

Support for better access to affordable and reliable transit, including in rural areas of B.C., is a high priority for our government, and the ministry remains committed to working with the Regional District to meet the transportation needs of people living in the North. As indicated during our recent meeting, the Province and Government of Canada is funding the six light-duty replacement buses for service along Highway 16. These buses are expected to be ready for delivery in 2025/26.

The Province has also previously committed to funding transit services along Highway 16, with current funding identified until March 31, 2025. This funding model is unique to BC Transit services, with the provincial government paying 66.67 per cent of operating costs, or up to \$520,000 annually. We recognize the importance of these services in ensuring safety for travellers along the Highway 16 corridor, and we are continuing to work closely with BC Transit and local partners like the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako towards developing the long-term policy and funding strategy prior to March 31, 2025, to support the ongoing delivery of these services within the transportation ecosystem in Northern B.C.

.../2

An important input to this work is the regional engagement recently conducted by Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT) on rural, regional, and intercity passenger transportation in the North. [NDIT published the results of their engagement in August](#), and the ministry is reviewing this report along with others conducted by two additional regional trusts. NDIT continues to administer the Northern Community Shuttle Program, which provides connections to the Highway 16 transit service. NDIT will also be launching a short-term funding program this fall, which will include capacity funding for transportation planning.

I hope that this letter provides the certainty that you are looking for in the short term. Thank you for bringing this important topic to my attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Fleming". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rob" being more prominent than the last name "Fleming".

Rob Fleming
Minister



Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Board of Directors

To: Chair and Board
From: Jason Llewellyn, Director of Planning
Date: April 11, 2024
Subject: BC Transit Bus Service Funding

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board send the attached letter to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.

At the March 21, 2024 Board meeting the Board considered the attached staff report regarding funding of the BC Transit Bus service in the RDBN. The Board discussed the report and the need for a regional transportation service model which better meets the needs of the residents of northern BC.

This report proposes that the RDBN send the attached letter to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure confirming the RDBN's current challenges funding the BC Transit System beyond 2027, and asking the Province to work with local governments, First Nations, and stakeholders (including the Northern Development Initiative Trust) to rationalize the way the multitude of public transportation services are provided and funded in the north.

ATTACHMENTS

- Draft letter to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.
- [March 21, 2024 Board Report \(Link\)](#)



April 15 , 2024

Honourable Rob Fleming
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure

Via email: Minister.MOTI@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Fleming:

Public Transportation in the RDBN

As you are aware the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN) has been challenged to secure adequate long-term funding for the BC Transit Bus Service along Highway 16. Part of this challenge is the limited certainty regarding the Province's long-term commitment to the current funding formula and future capital costs. The RDBN also has concerns regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing public transportation services in the RDBN.

Please be advised that the RDBN is currently taxing at the maximum amount authorized under "Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Regional Public Transit and Para-Transit (Highway 16) Service Establishment Bylaw No. 1790, 2016." The RDBN projects that it has adequate reserve funds to continue funding the service as it currently exists until 2027; although, the use of these funds will also impact the financial viability of the service into the future. At this time, the RDBN does not anticipate being able to enter into an Annual Operating Agreement with BC Transit for the service in 2028.

The RDBN Board asks that the Province work with local governments, First Nations, and stakeholders (including the Northern Development Initiative Trust) to rationalize public transportation services in the north and develop a regional transportation service model which better meets the needs of northern BC. This request is made in the hope of avoiding unnecessary disruptions to services provided in the region.

Sincerely,

Mark Parker
Chair

cc: NDIT