

# TRANSIT *future*

## Service Plan

### PORT ALBERNI

---

2025



# Transit Vision

The Port Alberni Transit System connects people and communities through cost-effective, convenient, safe and accessible transit services

The Transit Future Service Plan builds upon the Port Alberni/Clayoquot Transit System Service Review (April 2012) and the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Electoral Area Feasibility Study (April 2020).

This purpose of this plan is to develop a cohesive regional transit plan to incorporate the Transit Vision and Goals for the City of Port Alberni, in consultation with the Tseshaht and Hupacasath First Nations.



Identify improvement opportunities for service and infrastructure.



Ensure alignment with local area plans and development strategies



Make the transit system more efficient and receptive to community need.

Figure 1: Transit Future Service Plan objectives

# Transit Today

## Port Alberni Transit Network

- **Route 1 (Southside)** provides service from the Redford Exchange, going west to West Coast General Hospital, and south as far as Cameron and Ship Creek. It also services the Alberni Harbour Quay.
- **Route 2 (Pacific Rim)** provides service from the Redford Exchange to Pacific Rim Centre (including Wal Mart) in the north.
- **Route 3 (River Road)** operates from the Redford Exchange, going northeast as far as Falls and Georgia.
- **Route 4 (Crosstown)** provides service on evenings and Sundays, servicing a portion of all 3 weekday routes. Service is provided to places such as North Island College, West Coast General Hospital, and Pacific Rim Centre.

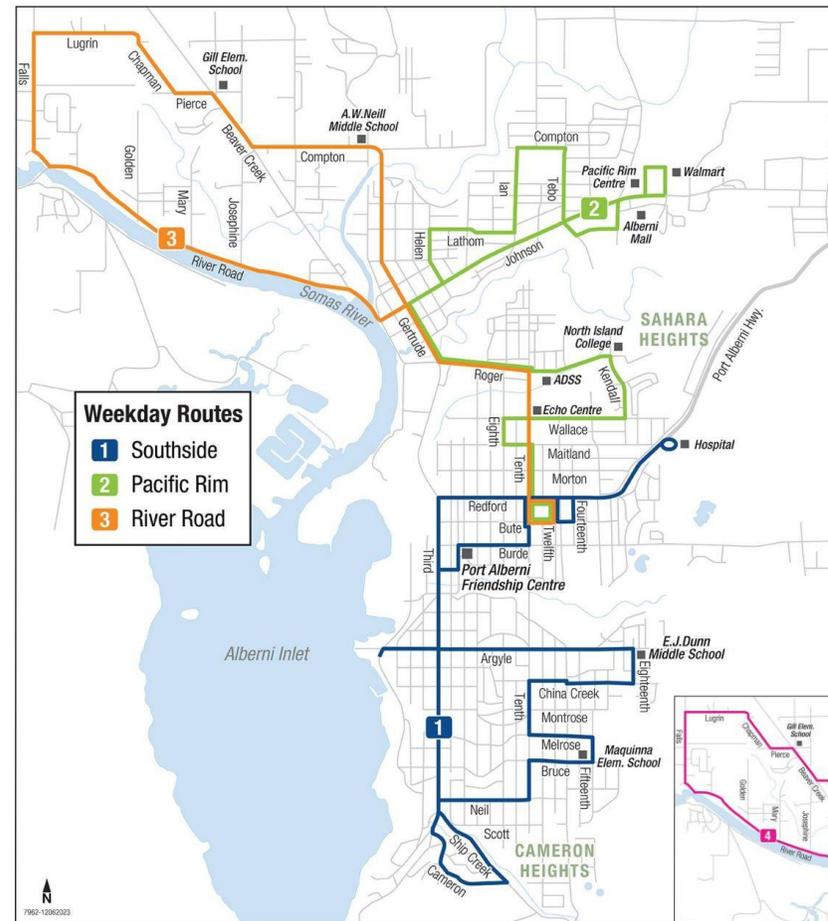


Figure 4: Port Alberni Transit System map

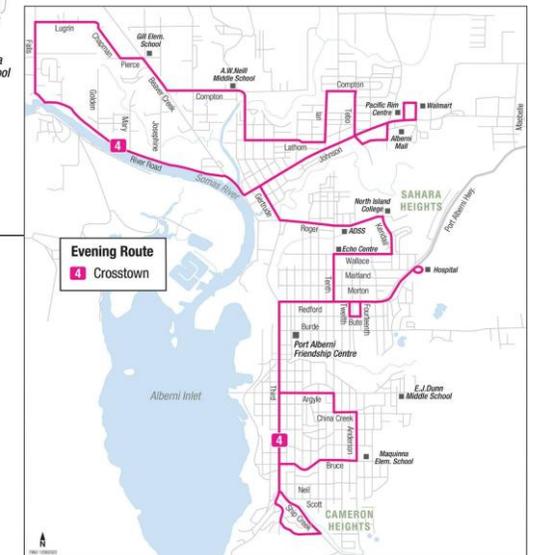


Figure 5: Route 4- Crosstown (Evening-Only/Sunday Service)

# Transit Need

## Demographics in the Alberni Valley

- The population in the Port Alberni grew by 4.5% per cent between 2016 and 2021 (Census 2021).
- Key corridors of residential density include Argyle St. Redford St., 10<sup>th</sup> Ave. and the Uptown core (Johnson Rd.).
- A low density and dispersed population in outlying communities and electoral areas outside of the City of Port Alberni makes providing efficient transit service a challenge.

## Alignment with Population Density, Community Growth, and Local Planning Priorities

- In consultation with the City of Port Alberni, this plan and subsequent transit priorities aim to offer alignment with the City's ongoing Transportation Master Plan development process.
- At a high-level, and in review of census data, the existing routes in Port Alberni provide good coverage in relation to areas of higher population density, and with consideration areas with higher concentrations of seniors and low-income residents.

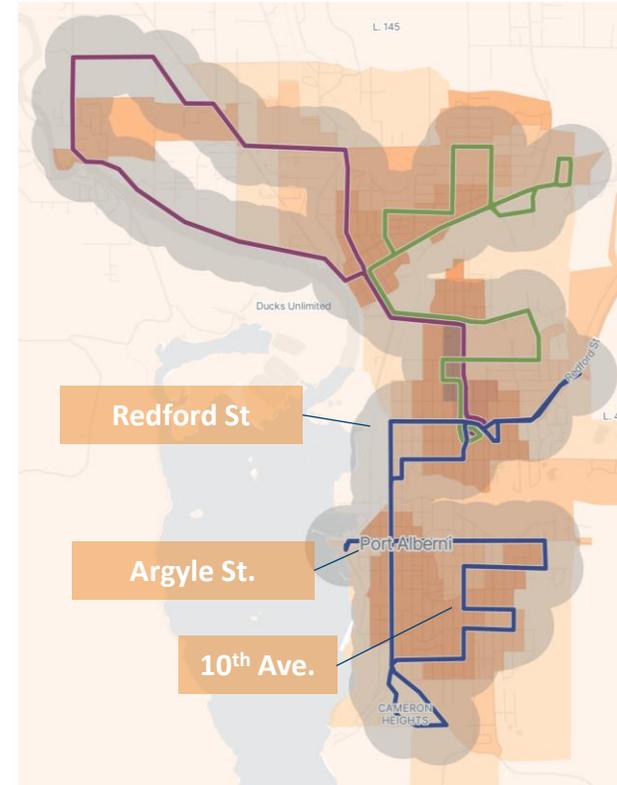


Figure 7: Senior residential concentrations in the Alberni Valley

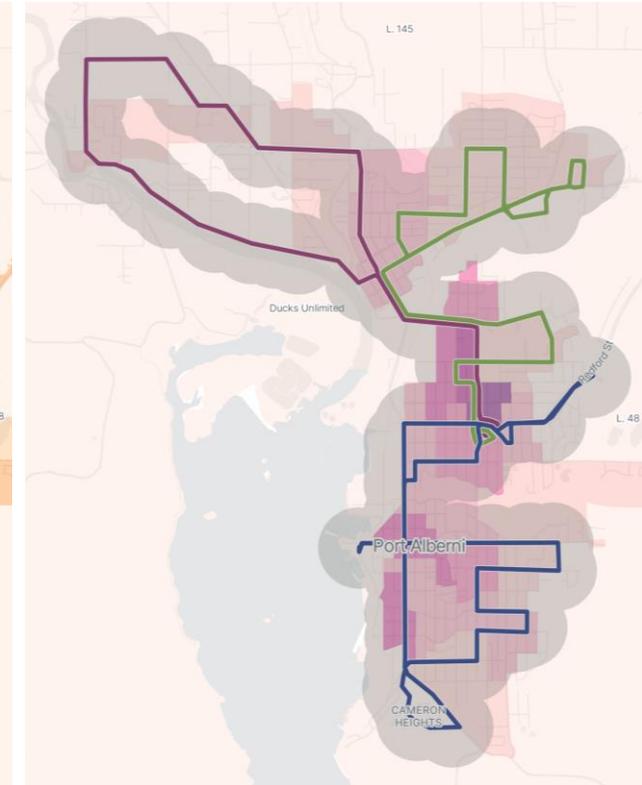


Figure 8: Low-Income residential concentrations in the Alberni Valley

# System Performance

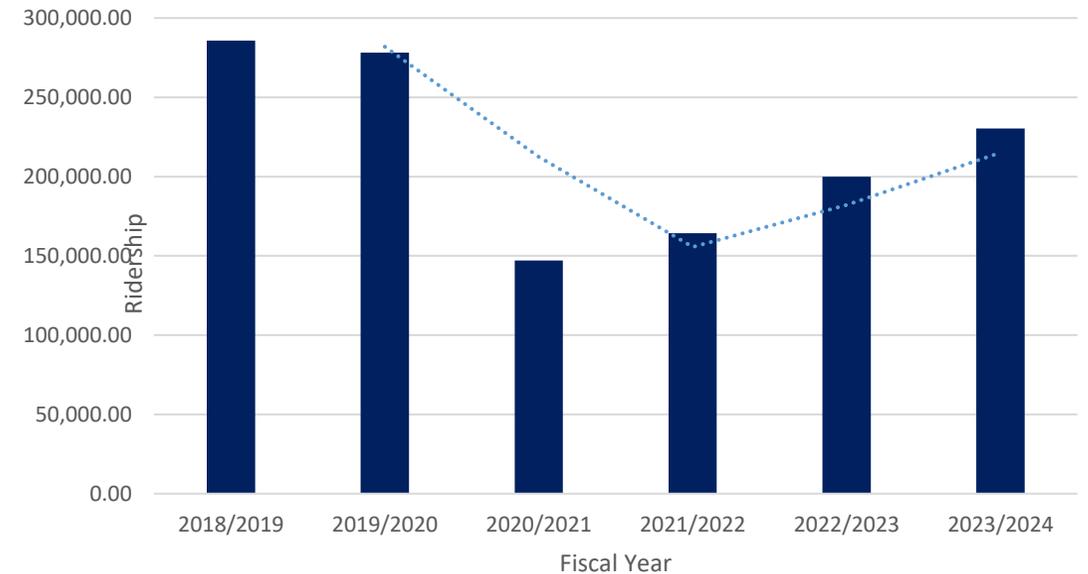
Post-pandemic, and in line with other small/mid-sized systems across the province, Port Alberni Transit has seen a gradual year-over-year ridership return since 2021 but has not yet seen 100% ridership recovery as compared to pre-pandemic levels.

- The 2023-2024 fiscal year saw approx. 230k rides, as compared to 146k rides during the 2020-2021 year (Pandemic low-point). This is below the 275-280k rides observed annually pre-pandemic.

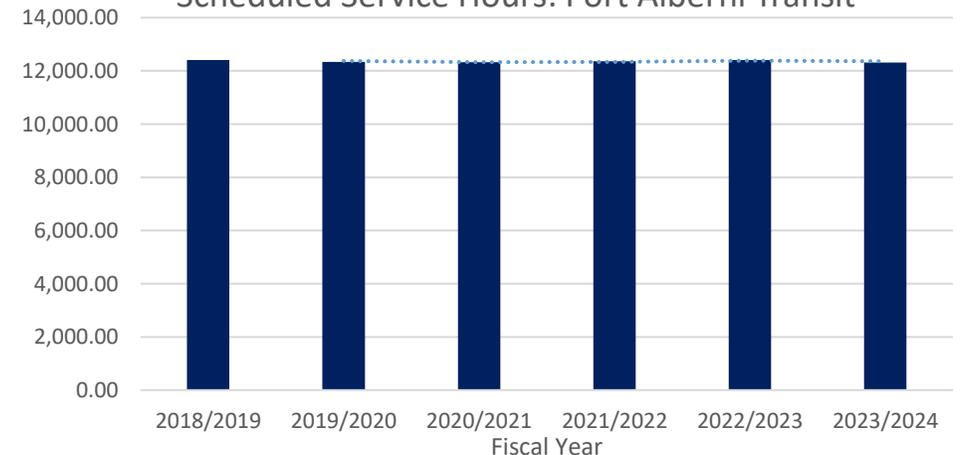
Port Alberni is experiencing ridership at 5-10% below the provincial average, however, the local transit system is 25% smaller than the average Tier 3 system, so in short, factoring in system size, ridership proportionally is strong compared to other peer transit systems in BC.

Similar to peer systems, Port Alberni's dedicated transit service hours have remained stable year-over-year, with approx. 12.3k/hours dedicated to the system annually since 2021.

System-Level Ridership: Port Alberni Transit



Scheduled Service Hours: Port Alberni Transit



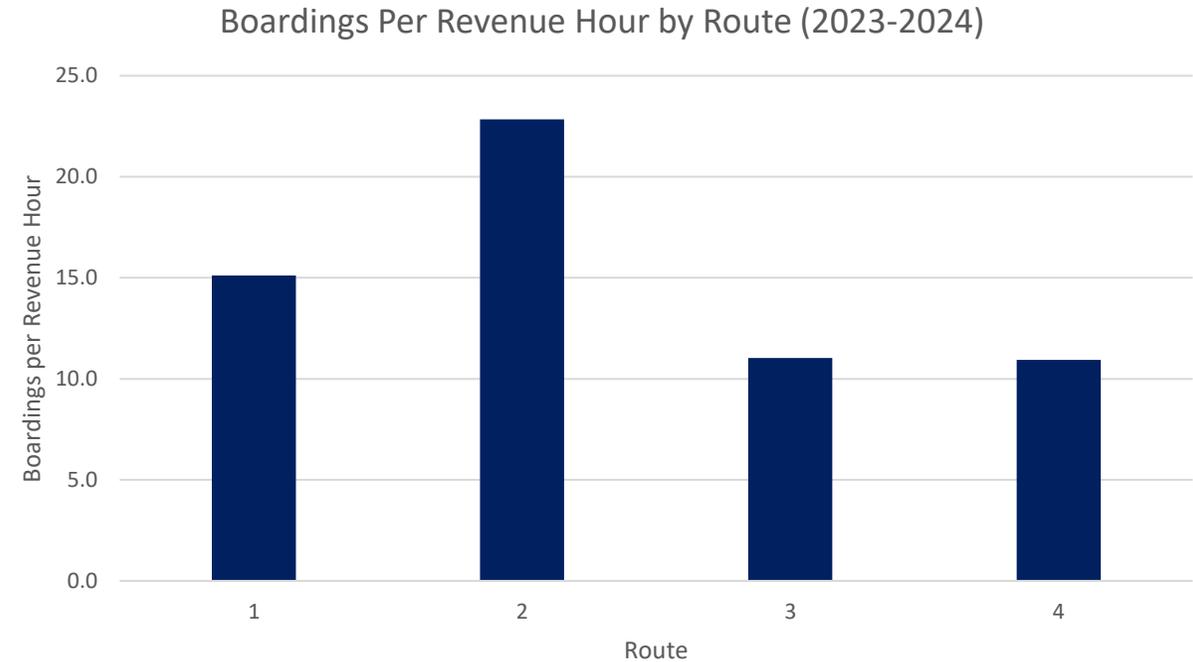
# System & Route Performance

## Key Takeaways

- The Route 2- Pacific Rim is the highest ridership route in the Port Alberni Transit System, with approx. 22 boardings/per in-service hour (2023-2024 Fiscal Year Data).

Within the Port Alberni Transit System, the noted lower-performing transit routes provide boarder service coverage and important connections to commercial, recreational, and health services. Route 4- Crosstown in specific, offers essential evening and Sunday service for Port Alberni. Major alterations to these services could have an impact on dedicated existing ridership.

Any prospective routing changes implemented through this plan shall be monitored from a customer service and operational perspective, in addition to service performance data (as collected by BC Transit).



# Engagement

As part of BC Transit's commitment to public engagement, outreach was carried out to identify draft service and infrastructure priorities based on community feedback, and to hear both from transit users on their experiences navigating the local transit system, and from non-users around increasing access to transit services.

Public engagement was launched online in April 2024, with community marketing facilitated via BC Transit through a variety of tools including in-person engagement, a project website, local media ads, internal bus ads, and social media promotion.

Engagement for the Port Alberni Transit Future Service Plan was facilitated through a variety of different methods/settings, to ensure a variety of voices and experiences were represented in the planning process.



- **240 Public Survey Responses**

- **200+ Unique Comments (via Public Survey)**

- **Transit Open House**

- **4 Key Stakeholder Workshop Sessions**

- **Engagement with local First Nations (Tseshaht First Nation, Hupacasath First Nation- via ACRD staff)**

- **Transit Operator-specific Survey**

# What we heard

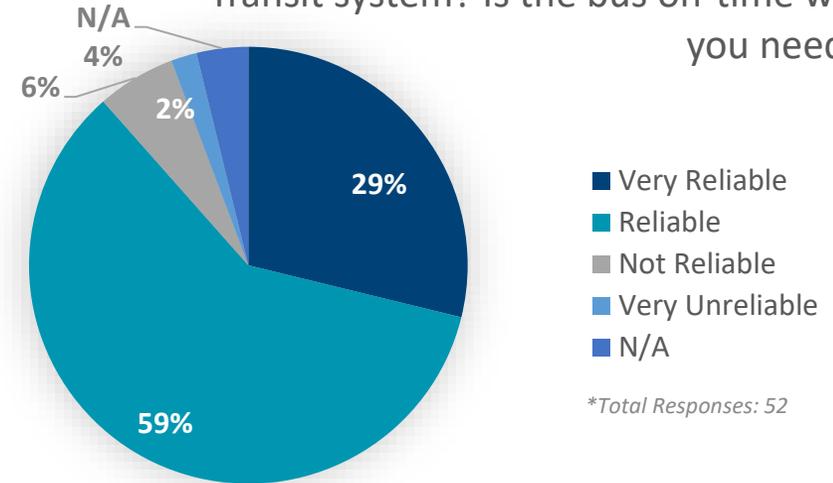
## Current Service:

- Current service is quite reliable. Transfers between routes are largely seamless based on pulse service scheduling. Strong satisfaction with existing service amongst regular users (approx. 71%). Service reliability also noted as positive (approx. 87%).
- Most transit riders feel safe when using transit, but non-riders and parents of youth expressed safety concerns.

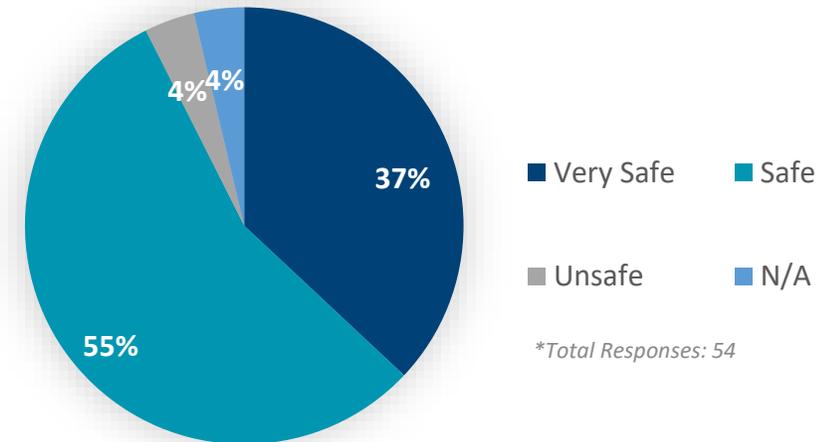
## Future Service:

- Frequency and span improvements to weekday and weekend evening service was the most desired amongst engagement participants and survey respondents.
- Strong support for the study and future implementation of interregional service between Port Alberni and the Regional District of Nanaimo (Qualicum Beach).

How reliable do you find the Port Alberni Transit system? Is the bus on-time when you need it?



How safe do you feel using the Port Alberni Transit system?



# Conventional Service Priorities 2025-2029

Priority	Description	Expansion Resources (Subject to change)
Improve Evening Service	Improving weekday and weekend evening service.	1,300 annual service hours.
Increase frequency on Route 2- Pacific Rim	Monitor ridership and increase frequency of service on Route 2 as needed during AM and PM peak periods (Connecting Pacific Rim Centre, Wal-Mart, Uptown core, NIC/ADSS/Echo Centre, and the Redford Exchange).	1,000 annual service hours, 1 vehicle
Investigate transit service to Tseshaht First Nation	Explore introducing an extension of Route 3 or dedicated service to the Tseshaht First Nation. Introducing service would be dependent on Tseshaht First Nation becoming a partner in the Port Alberni Transit- Local Government cost-share function.	900 annual service hours (Routing via Tseshaht Market) 350 annual service hours (Routing via Tsuma-as Dr.). 1 bus may be required via either service option.
Investigate interregional transit service between Port Alberni and the RDN	Conduct feasibility and service study for interregional service. Prospective introduction of limited weekday and weekend service between Port Alberni and Qualicum Beach (Regional District of Nanaimo).	2,400 annual service hours (Estimated Introductory Hours), 2 vehicles.

# Conventional Service Priorities 2025-2029

Priority	Description	Expansion Resources (Subject to change)
Improve On-Time Performance of Existing Services	On-Time Performance adjustments as needed based on analysis of operational data.	Resources to be determined. BC Transit recommends assigning 0.5-1.0% of total annual service hours to on-time performance. Approx. 150 annual service hours.
Investigate direct north/south route(s) between major locations of ridership	A redesign of core service providing more efficient and competitive travel between key ridership locations (i.e. Uptown, Downtown, Redford Exchange, Pacific Rim Centre, Wal-Mart).	Service hrs. Reallocation & additional resources to be determined upon service study.

Note: Due to the pulse-scheduling set-up of the Port Alberni Transit System. Additional review from BC Transit Scheduling Dept. is needed to ensure proposed improvements can be facilitated from an operator-shift and fleet assignment perspective. Estimated service hours for expansion items in this document are subject to change.

# Improve Evening Service

Strong support for improving evening service on weekdays and weekends. Current span of transit service noted via public engagement feedback as being insufficient.

- Additional service on Route 4- Crosstown to approx. 11:00pm.

1,300

Estimated annual service hours

Note: Estimated service hours subject to changes based on calculations from BC Transit's Scheduling Dept.

1\*

Additional Vehicle (Subject to further operational analysis)

Note: Not including required spare/contingency vehicles.

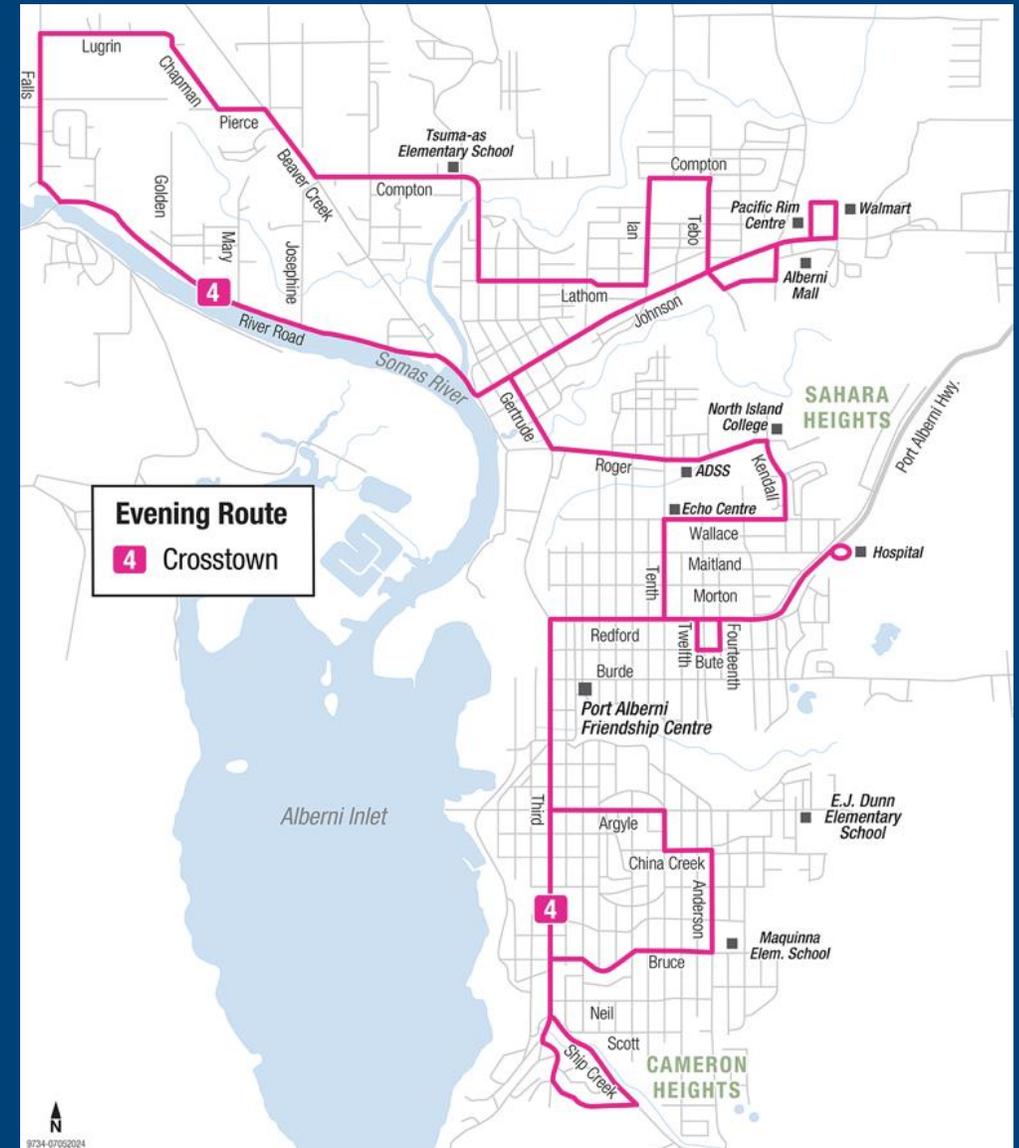


Figure 9: Route 4- Crosstown (Evening-Only/Sunday Service)

# Transit Service on Route 2: Pacific Rim

Increase frequency along Route 2 (Pacific Rim Centre/Wal-Mart) during peak AM and PM times.

Route 2 is the highest ridership route in the system, with notable ridership particular around school bell times. Current service appears sufficient, but as Port Alberni grows over the next few years, given the nature of this route, we are likely to see higher ridership and demand for more frequent and efficient service.

Note: Due to current pulse scheduling and interlining of routes, scheduling changes to the Route 2 would require the re-organization of operator shifts and timetables.

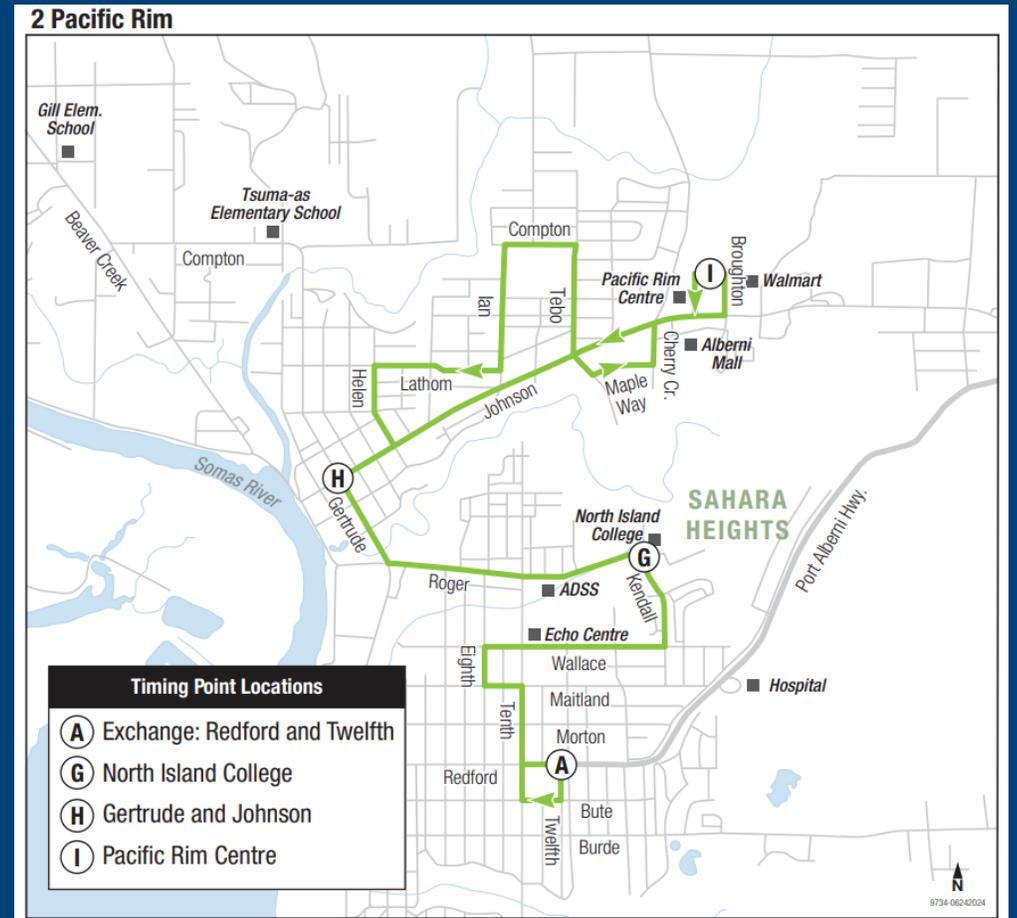


Figure 10: Route 2- Pacific Rim

1,000

Estimated annual service hours

Note: Estimated service hours subject to changes based on calculations from BC Transit's Scheduling Division.

1\*

Additional Vehicle (Subject to further operational analysis)

Note: Not including required spare/contingency vehicles.

# Interregional Transit Service: Port Alberni to RDN

- Produce feasibility study with intent to establish an interregional transit service between Port Alberni and the Regional District of Nanaimo (Qualicum Beach).
- Strong support from existing ridership and Port Alberni residents (93% support from transit users, 65% support amongst all respondents). Interest in year-round service to access to services and amenities not available in Port Alberni.
- Regional expansion would need to involve participation with the ACRD and would require additional discussion to modify the governance and funding structure of the transit system.

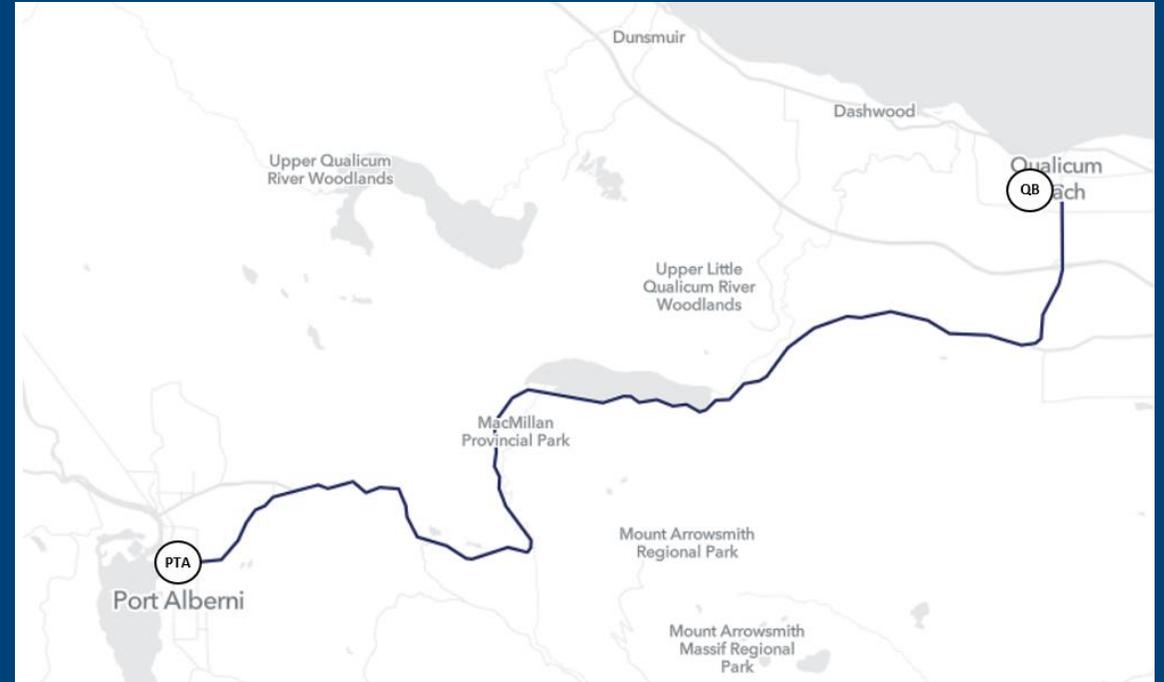


Figure 12: Concept Map: Interregional service to Regional District of Nanaimo

2,400

**Estimated annual service hours**  
Introductory-level service via Hwy 4.

Note: Estimated service hours subject to changes based on calculations from BC Transit's Scheduling Division.

2\*

**Additional Vehicle (Subject to further operational analysis)**

Note: Not including required spare/contingency vehicles.

# Transit Service to Tseshaht First Nation

Provide service to the Tseshaht First Nation via Route 3 (or dedicated service) to Tseshaht Market or Tsuma-as Dr.

Early engagement and previous feasibility studies outlined opportunity for service extension to Sproat Lake Provincial Park, however service proposal received mixed reception for existing ridership and Port Alberni residents, and strong opposition from Sproat Lake residents (36% support across all respondents, 85% support amongst riders).

Consultation in previous transit plan engagement noted early support for the establishment of such a service.

Further operational and feasibility assessments required prior to formalization within the Transit Improvement Program (and implementation of service). Options to consider implementation without an additional bus to be explored in greater detail.

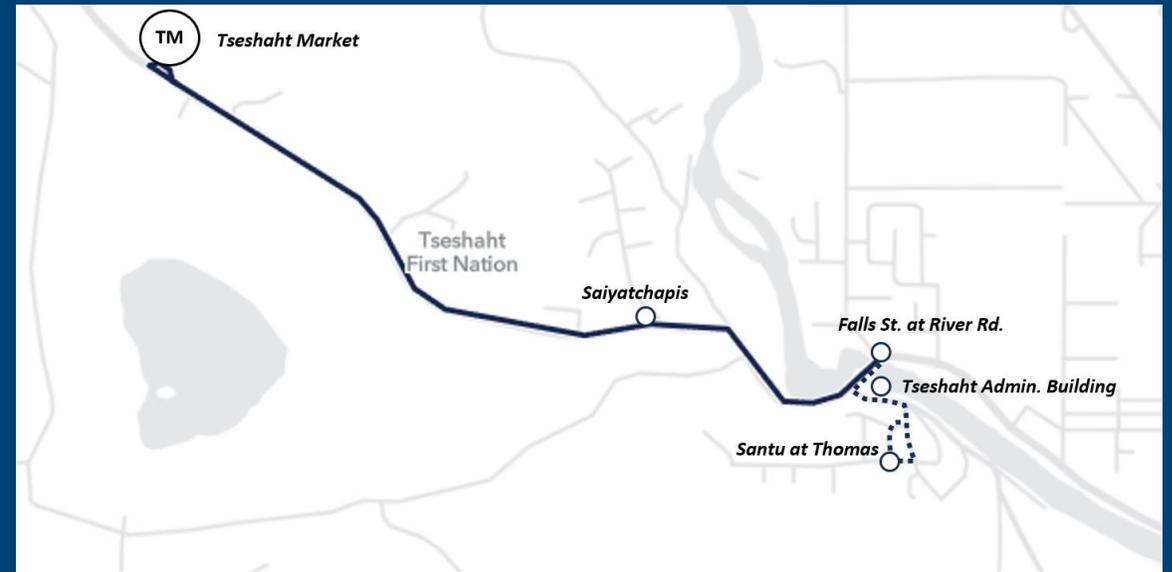


Figure 11: Concept Map: Transit Service to Tseshaht First Nation

**900**

**Estimated annual service hours**  
Introductory-level service extension to Tseshaht Market.

**1\***

**Additional Vehicle (Subject to further operational analysis)**

**350**

**Estimated annual service hours**  
Introductory-level service extension via Tsuma-as Dr.

**1\***

**Additional Vehicle (Subject to further operational analysis)**

Note: Estimated service hours subject to changes based on calculations from BC Transit's Scheduling Dept.

Note: Not including required spare/contingency vehicles.

# Considerations for Service to Tsawaayuus- Rainbow Gardens

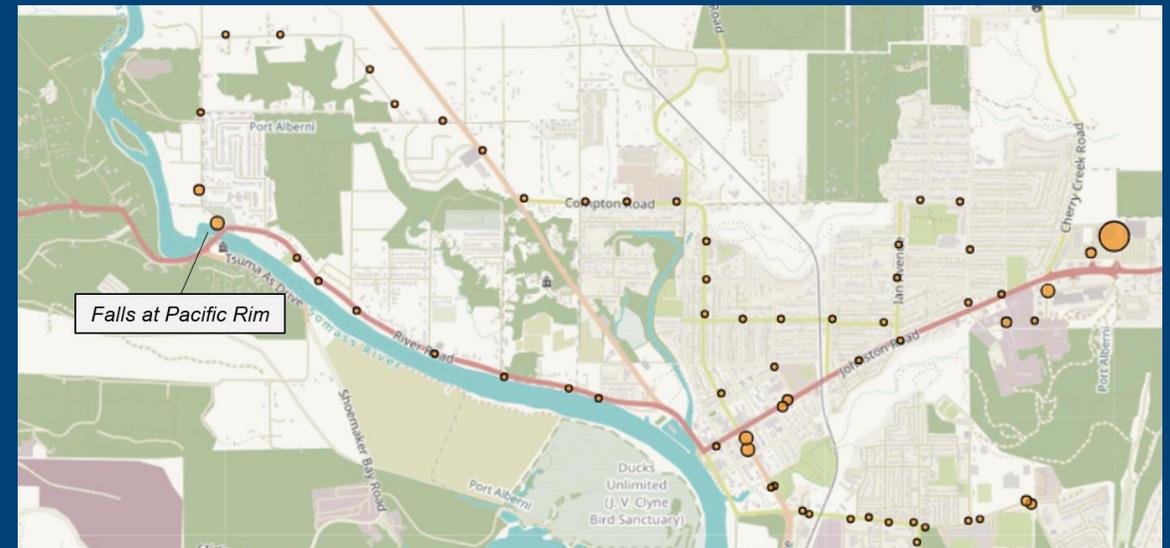
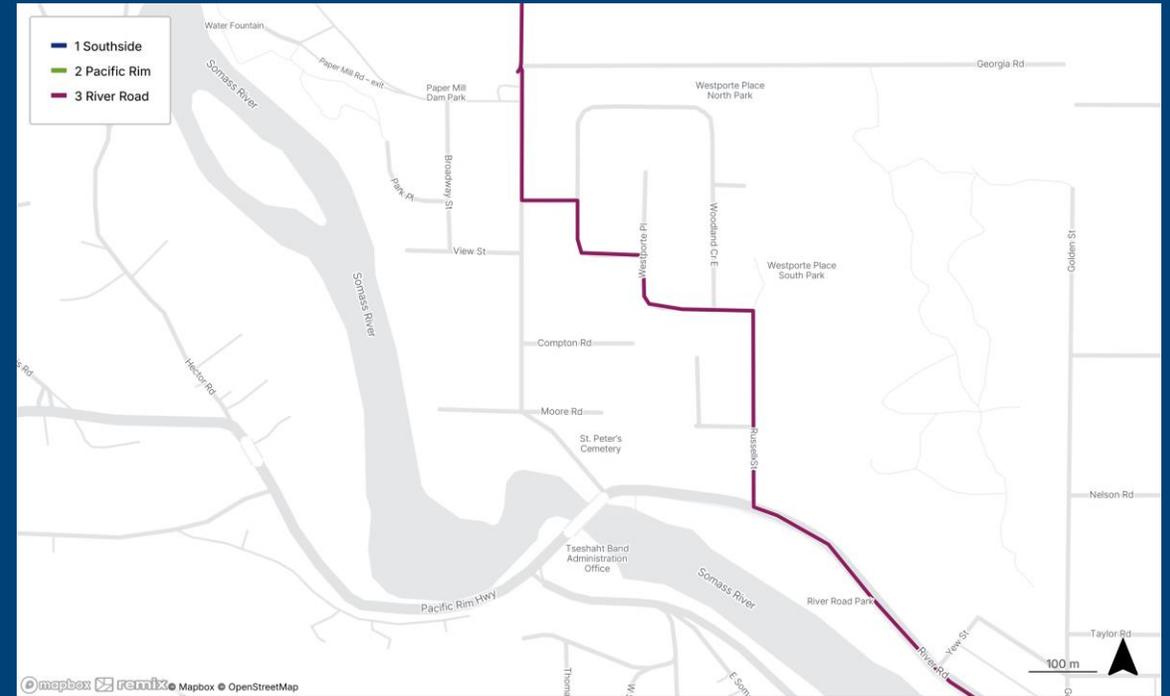
Based on recent feedback, it was recommended to assess options to provide closer access to the Tsawaayuus- Rainbow Gardens retirement community.

Options were reviewed by BCT Planning, however, service hrs. are limited to support changes, alternate routing is comparatively circuitous, and maintaining service on Falls St. is strongly recommended.

Falls at Pacific Rim is the most-used bus stop north of Johnston Rd./Alberni Hwy. Noted consistently as a key stop and connection for Tseshaht First Nation.

Currently and for the near-future, Custom Transit (handyDART) service is recommended as preferable due to its capabilities around door-to-door access.

Falls at Pacific Rim (SB)	Stop ID: 111858
Avg. Boardings per Day	11.6
Avg. Alightings per Day	8.2



# Custom Transit Overview

Custom Transit is defined through the BC Transit Act as a door to door; shared transit service, provided to people who have a permanent or temporary disability that prevents them from safely and independently navigating the conventional fixed route transit system without support.

The ultimate goal is for the fixed route conventional service to be as accessible as possible, but for those who need it, Custom Transit, known as “handyDART” in BC Transit Systems, is available as a door to door, demand responsive service. This means that custom transit riders receive assistance to and from the door, should they need it, and must pre-book their ride.

Pressure and demand for accessible transit both in the conventional and custom service continues to grow as the Provinces understanding of disability has increased. This is reflected in 1 in 4 people between the ages of 15 – 64 reporting to have a disability in British Columbia. That number increases to over 40% for those over the age of 65. The population is also aging, with 1 in 4 British Columbians set to be over the age 65 by 2031.

This makes the process for determining eligibility and increasing the efficiency of the Custom Transit service extremely important in order to accommodate increased demand, as well as the varying and unique needs of the users themselves.



# System Performance

Post-pandemic, Custom transit ridership has recently passed pre-pandemic levels despite labor action in 2023/2024. With a current fleet of 6, Custom Transit Service hours run:

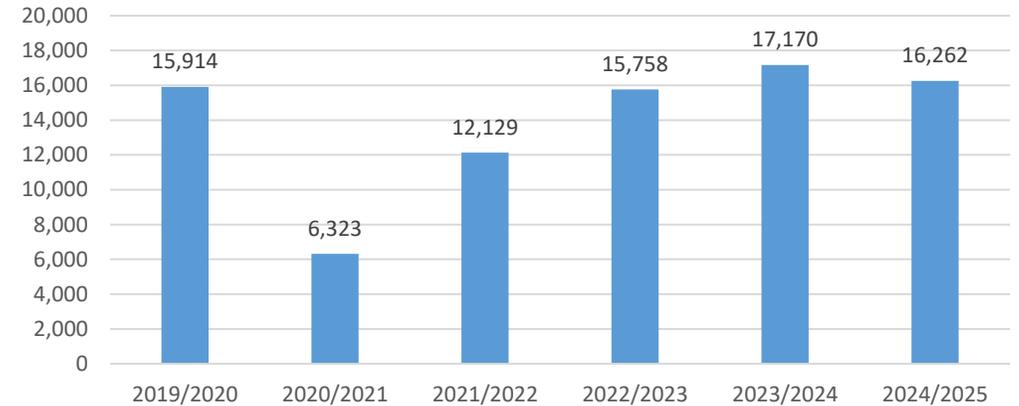
- Monday – Friday : 8:00am – 5:00pm
- Saturday : 9:00am – 1:00pm
- Sunday : 8:30am – 12:30pm

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started in early 2020, greatly impacted ridership in transit systems the world over and the Alberni-Clayoquot Custom Transit system was no exception, with ridership having dropped significantly (from approx. 16k/yr. in 2019/2020 to 6k rides/yr. in 2020/2021)

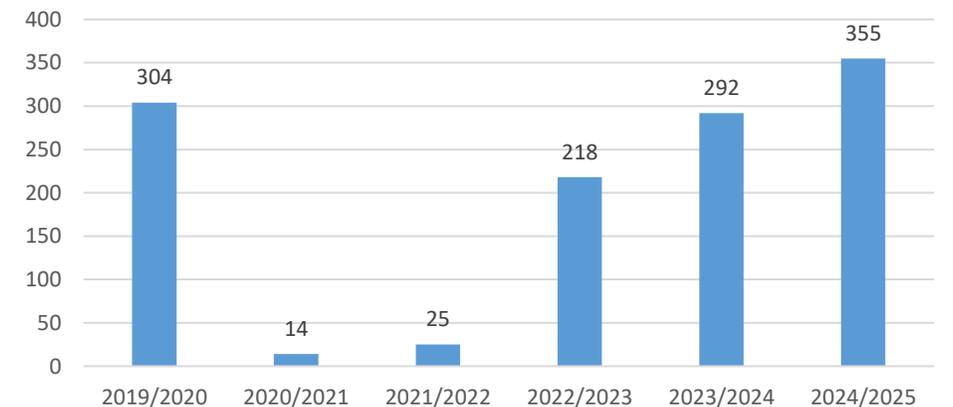
## Key Takeaways

- *Ridership has passed pre-pandemic levels*
- *Continued increase in demand with 168 new active users last year alone*
- *Gradual and sustained increase in Taxi usage as overflow to manage increase in demand*
- *Unmet trips remains low at 0.36% in the last year*
- *Cost per ride (\$41) is well below the current average of \$58.56.*
- *Trips per hour (2.46) are above the current average of 2.14*
- *Challenges remain with high subscription trip usage restricting the availability of the service*

Total Trips Delivered: Alberni-Clayoquot Custom Transit



Total Trips Delivered by Taxi: Alberni-Clayoquot Custom Transit



# Custom Transit: Looking Ahead

As part of the Custom Transit Strategy, the introduction of the “Custom Transit Solution”, a technology solution focused on modernizing Custom Transit Service Delivery by increasing the availability and efficiency of the service, is being planned by BC Transit.

The solution will include:

- A digital process for handyDART registration
- An online portal for customers to book trips, making it easier and faster to manage trips online
- A mobile app and web interface to provide push notifications and in-app messaging to inform customers about key service updates, including registration, trip booking, details and delays
- Tracking of key metrics to help guide vehicle and driver allocation for improved optimization of service
- New on-board display on handyDART vehicles to assist drivers with trip-mapping and route navigation, allowing real-time updates to drivers’ schedules to provide a more flexible service that meets customer needs
- Tracking of key metrics to help guide vehicle and driver allocation for improved optimization of service
- Access to new data that will help inform potential future service expansion and enhance service delivery
- The potential to introduce Electronic Fare Payment



# Custom Service Priorities 2025-2029

Priority	Description	Expansion Resources (Subject to change)
Peak Service Improvements	Improving service during peak travel times and addressing availability challenges brought on by high subscription rates and reducing reliance on Taxi Supplement. With expansion into Tseshaht First Nation, increased capacity is needed to maintain a consistent service level.	3000 annual service hours, 1 vehicle.
Expand Weekend Service Span	Expanding weekend afternoon/early-evening service span to match hours of operation of weekday custom transit (to 5:00pm).	850 annual service hours
Expansion of Custom Service on Statutory Holidays	Expanding custom transit to offer base-level service on statutory holidays throughout the year (In-line with current conventional service).	150 annual service hours

Current Total Custom Transit Hours (Alberni-Clayoquot): Approx. 7,976 Hrs.

# Infrastructure Priorities 2025-2029

Priority	Description
Supporting Transit-Friendly Community Development	Support transit-friendly and transit-accessible development in Port Alberni via BC Transit’s Development Referral Program. Ensure that development proposals and plans locally are supported with transit-focused, site-specific recommendations and information from BC Transit (relating to accessibility, first-last-mile access, transit amenities, and existing and future service context).
Improve Transit Amenity Coverage and Investment in Bus Stop Infrastructure	<p>Support Port Alberni Transit for improving coverage of bus shelters and benches for higher-ridership stops and key community locations. Seek investment through capital planning and funding opportunities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Transit Shelter Program</a></li><li>• Transit Minor Betterments Funding</li></ul> <p>Bus stop infrastructure falls under the responsibility of the local government partner/road authority. Opportunity for Accessibility Committee to work with local gov’t. to support identification of bus stop locations desired for amenity improvements.</p>
Operations & Maintenance	Explore options for a larger operations and maintenance facility to support transit system growth and accommodate additional fleet vehicles.

# Approaching Service Improvements

<b>1. Operational Needs/Critical Fixes</b>	Are the existing routes reliable and consistent? Any outstanding performance issues? *Note: The Province is prioritizing support for expansion funding in this area.
<b>2. Performance Data Response</b>	Are any routes reaching capacity thresholds? Any additional critical fixes needed?
<b>3. Outstanding Transit Future Planning Priorities</b>	What changes identified in the most recent TFSP (or past TIPS requests) have not yet been addressed.

Figure 12: Service Planning and Expansion/Improvement Prioritization Matrix

## Monitoring + Implementation

Performance of the transit system is monitored on an annual basis, which is typical for transit systems of this size. Performance may be monitored more closely after a significant service change to evaluate the change.

Service improvements will be integrated into the Three-Year Transit Improvement Process (TIPs), which is updated on an annual basis. Infrastructure improvements will be incorporated into BC Transit's Capital Plan.

Prior to implementation of service changes, BC Transit planning staff will work with local government staff and leadership to ensure service improvements appropriately reflect local needs. Additional targeted engagement may be conducted.