

To: Regional and Corporate Services Committee  
From: Alison Stewart, Manager of Strategic Planning

Date: 2021-11-12  
File No: 8330-02-19744

**Subject: FVRD Transit Future Action Plan – Chapter 6: Fraser Valley Express**

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### RECOMMENDATION

**THAT** the Fraser Valley Regional District Board give Approval in Principle to the Draft FVRD Transit Future Action Plan - Chapter 6, relating to the Fraser Valley Express service to facilitate the ongoing Highway One Expansion planning and design process;

**AND THAT** the Final Transit Future Action Plan covering the Fraser Valley Regional District services be brought forward to the Board for endorsement at a future date.

### BACKGROUND

BC Transit has been undertaking a Transit Future Action Plan for the Chilliwack and FVRD service area for several years. As with many other things, the process has been interrupted by COVID-19 and as a result, the FVRD portions of the Plan are close to completion but are not yet finalized. In the meantime, the provincial government announced earlier in 2021 that the long-awaited Highway 1 Expansion will go ahead, with an aggressive construction start date in 2022. As such, planning and design work has been accelerated and information relating to long-term future growth of the Fraser Valley Express (FVX) service is needed to finalize its planning and design work around the provision of transit infrastructure on Highway 1.

### DISCUSSION

BC Transit has been undertaking a Transit Future Action Plan (TFAP) for the Chilliwack and FVRD service area for several years. The draft plan as it relates to the FVRD services is nearing completion but not all sections are ready for final approval. The final TFAP will be brought forward for approval early next year. Chapter 6 of the draft plan specifically addresses the FVX and presents a long-term view of potential growth out to 2040 in terms of long-term ridership and service potential. The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) is asking for this information now to help finalize the Highway 1 expansion planning and design work currently underway.

The Highway 1 expansion project is the first major expansion in the FVRD since the freeway was built in the 1960's. Climbing lanes and several interchanges/bridges have been built or replaced over the years, but nothing as comprehensive as the improvements being proposed today. Given the time it

has taken for this expansion to be realized, it is easy to speculate that this will be the last for some time. With that in mind, it is important that long-term transit requirements be incorporated into the planning and design today. **The TFAP itself is not a commitment to these timelines or levels of service.**

Chapter 6 of the draft TFAP is specifically dedicated to the Fraser Valley Express and provides an overview of the existing service and sets out three growth scenarios:

#### **“Scenario 1- Low Growth or Slow COVID-19 Recovery**

In this scenario, growth in ridership demand is slower than it has been in the last five years (<28,000 rides/year). This scenario may occur due to longer-term impacts to ridership caused by COVID-19. In the short-term the service on the 66 Fraser Valley Express will be extended to Lougheed Station (approved in 2020) and this scenario assumes that investment will be required to maintain service reliability, but other expansions will be delayed to the long-term. To accommodate the low growth and maintain capacity, the fleet dedicated to the 66 Fraser Valley Express could be up-sized from heavy duty buses to high capacity buses (subject to the garage facility).

#### **Scenario 2 – Historic Growth**

In this scenario, demand grows at a similar pace to what has happened since the service was introduced (approximately 28,000 rides/year). In the short-term the service on the 66 Fraser Valley Express will be extended to Lougheed Station and there will need to be investment to improve service reliability across the network. In the medium-term investments will focus on improvements to Saturday service. Long-term investments will seek to improve Sunday service, and improve the weekday service span and frequency.

#### **Scenario 3 – High Growth (TFAP Investment trajectory)**

In the high growth scenario, demand grows faster than it has in the past (>28,000 rides/year). In this scenario, investment in the service over the next few years will be rapid to accommodate a significant increase in demand. In the short-term the service on the 66 Fraser Valley Express will be extended to Lougheed Station (approved in 2020), and there will be an associated lift in demand that will need to be addressed through modest expansion.

Improving service reliability and improving Saturday service will need to be accomplished within the next 1 to 2 years. Improving Sunday service, improving the weekday service frequency to 15 minutes in the peaks and 30 minutes in the off-peaks, and extending the weekday service span will need to be accomplished within 3-5 years. To ensure that capacity meets demand, the fleet dedicated to the 66 Fraser Valley Express should be up-sized from heavy duty buses to high capacity buses (subject to the garage facility).”

For planning purposes, BC Transit is using the High Growth scenario to establish long term service requirements to accommodate potential demand over time. The High Growth Scenario envisions a

service level that would need investment of an additional 65,700 hours and investment in high capacity buses by 2040 to lift ridership from about 253,000 annual rides in 2019 to 2.6 million annual rides in 2040. This is very aggressive and while the TFAP uses a twenty-year time horizon, it is possible that such levels of demand will not be achieved until 2050 or later, resulting in a less aggressive investment trajectory.

Actual growth of the FVX service will be realized through the regular three-year Transit Improvement Program (TIP) expansion agreements signed annually between BC Transit and the Fraser Valley Regional District and subject to consultation with contributing partners. Considerations shaping implementation timelines include population and employment growth, passenger demand, revenue growth, availability of funding, transit infrastructure needs and other considerations for local transit implementations.

The High Growth scenario will be driven by a number of factors, including:

- Completing the Lougheed Extension to reduce transfers, reduce costs and improve ease-of use for FVX passengers destined to/originating from Metro Vancouver destinations west of Langley.
- Completing Highway 1 widening to the Whatcom interchange and beyond, to accommodate increased transit service and related infrastructure.
- Central Fraser Valley transit system connecting Abbotsford Airport to the FVX at Highstreet Mall, enabling airport access on transit for residents of both the FVRD and Metro Vancouver.
- Growing UFV interest in BC Transit services for students travelling to and from the Abbotsford campus from locations to the east and west. Accommodating 2019 level of UFV shuttle riders could lift ridership by 250,000 to 400,000 rides per year.
- Strong demand for transit access to Gloucester (for commuters originating in the east and west) and demand for improved transit access to Trinity Western University via Highway 1.

Servicing areas within Metro Vancouver opens an opportunity for collaboration with TransLink or others on funding the service, the local share of which is funded by City of Abbotsford and City of Chilliwack residents/businesses. In addition, as the Langley SkyTrain extension moves forward, a regional connection between Abbotsford and City of Langley along the Fraser Highway needs to be considered. The Langley SkyTrain expansion has a 2028 completion date. It is possible that some of the hours allocated to the FVX in the draft TFAP may be applied to this extension as demand warrants. Both the Highway 1 and Fraser Highway express service alignments are identified by TransLink in its draft Transport 2050 Plan.

The High Growth scenario provides clear direction as to the type of capacity that an upgraded Highway 1 should accommodate. Whether the level of service reaches this level in 2040 or 2050, the infrastructure must be built today to accommodate long-term growth. This scenario will help MoTI finalize its planning and design work around the provision of transit infrastructure on Highway 1.

## **COST**

The Transit Future Action Plan itself is not a commitment to the timelines or levels of service identified in the Plan.

Expansions will be realized through the regular three-year Transit Improvement Program (TIP) expansion agreements signed annually between BC Transit and the Fraser Valley Regional District and subject to consultation with contributing partners. The TIP seeks to align municipal and regional budget processes to ensure funding availability is aligned with local needs and provincial funding.

Where a proposed expansion requires a tax requisition above the cap allowed in the FVX Service Area Bylaw (Fraser Valley Regional District Fraser Valley Express Sub-Regional Transit System Service Area Establishment Bylaw No. 1236, 2013 as amended) must be amended, with statutory consent of the funding partners. As an example, the upcoming 6,000 hour expansion in 2022 required an amendment to the FVX Service Area Bylaw, which increased the requisition cap from \$992,000 to \$1,250,000 to accommodate the expansion.

## **CONCLUSION**

With a 2022 construction start-date, planning and design work for the Highway 1 expansion from 264<sup>th</sup> Street to Whatcom Road has been accelerated and information relating to long-term future growth of the Fraser Valley Express (FVX) service is needed to finalize this work. Supporting the Draft FVRD Transit Future Action Plan - Chapter 6 in principle will allow MoTI to finalize its planning and design work around the provision of transit infrastructure on Highway 1.

BC Transit will provide a presentation of the material when this report comes before the Board.

## **COMMENTS BY:**

**Stacey Barker, Director of Regional Services:** Reviewed and supported.

**Kelly Lownsborough, Director of Corporate Services/CFO:** Reviewed and supported.

**Jennifer Kinneman, Chief Administrative Officer:** Reviewed and supported.