



CORPORATE REPORT

To: Regional and Corporate Services Committee

Date: 2022-02-10

From: Melissa Geddert, Planner I

File No: 8830 - 02

Subject: Fraser Valley Regional District Transit Services Update – FVX Expansion, NextRide and Electronic Fare Collection

INTENT

This report is intended to advise the Fraser Valley Regional District Board of information pertaining to Fraser Valley Transit Services, which include expansion of Route 66 Fraser Valley Express to Lougheed **Town Centre in March 2022, launch of BC Transit's NextRide** initiative and the newly announced BC Transit electronic fare collection program. Staff is not looking for a recommendation and has forwarded this information should members want more clarification or to discuss the item further.

BACKGROUND

With support of the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD) Board and approval in the 2021-2022 provincial budget, work to implement the Fraser Valley Express (FVX) service extension to Lougheed Town Centre is ongoing. BC Transit has confirmed that service will begin on March 27, 2022.

On January 13, 2022, BC Transit announced implementation plans for the next phase of the NextRide program. NextRide falls under BC Transit's **Smart Bus** initiative, which will see the installation of new technologies on buses to improve the customer experience, while also helping grow ridership by making transit more efficient, accessible, safer, and enjoyable. NextRide is being implemented across the province over the next year. The Fraser Valley services (FVRD, Chilliwack and Central Fraser Valley) will be early in the roll-out, with the program being implemented shortly after the FVX expansion taking place in late March.

Additionally, on January 26, 2022, BC Transit announced a move forward in introducing an electronic fare collection system (EFCS). The timeline for the rollout of this program is it relates to the Fraser Valley has not been announced.

DISCUSSION

Fraser Valley Express Expansion

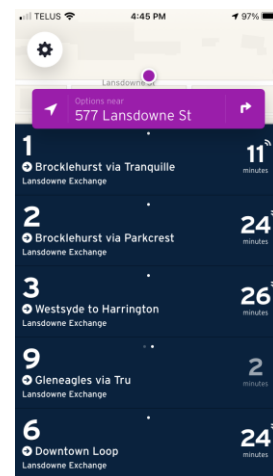
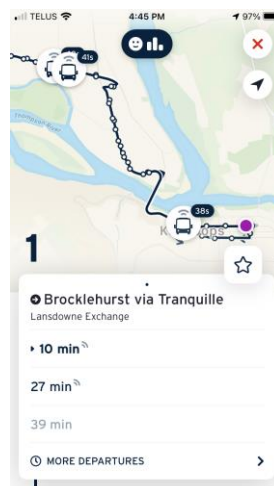
The FVX service expansion is set to launch on March 27, 2022. BC Transit is preparing a full marketing and communications strategy for the launch and is working directly with TransLink on a coordinated strategy to implement the new service. The aim is to make the customer experience as seamless as possible between the two transit systems by collaborating in providing information to all transit users and stakeholders.

As plans for the service launch advance, additional information on an event to celebrate the service expansion will be provided to our municipal partners and the Board. It is anticipated that with the pandemic still being a factor, any events associated with the launch of the extended service will be in an online format. Provincial health orders and FVRD policy will be a determining factor in the type of event held.

NextRide

BC Transit is launching NextRide in transit systems across the province, including all of the Fraser Valley transit systems. NextRide **falls under BC Transit's Smart Bus program, which** introduces new technologies on buses that will improve the customer experience, while also helping grow ridership by making transit more efficient, accessible, safer, and enjoyable. NextRide uses the Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) technology to allow transit customers to see real-time bus locations along routes and the predicted arrival times at identified stops. On board, bus stops will be automatically announced visually and audibly, improving overall accessibility for many transit customers.

Among other things, the technology provides bus location data to mobility providers such as the *Transit App* and *Google Maps*, which will greatly increase the level of information available to customers in real time and improve the customer experience. AVL is a powerful tool for improving performance, communication, safety, and customer service. Route and trip planning will be available throughout the entire Fraser Valley so a customer in Hope can plan their entire trip into Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Mission and Metro Vancouver through these digital platforms.



Work has already commenced to prepare for the implementation of this technology in transit systems in the FVRD. This includes the Central Fraser Valley, Chilliwack, FVX, Agassiz/Harrison and Hope services. NextRide is set to go live in the regional services shortly after the launch of the FVX expansion.

In order to implement NextRide in the Fraser Valley Region BC Transit needs to adjust and group together scheduling data from the various Fraser Valley systems and has identified duplicate route numbers in the Abbotsford, Chilliwack and FVRD systems. As part of this technology roll out, it will require some routes in the City of Chilliwack and FVRD systems to be renumbered, as the combined scheduling data will not allow two different routes to have the same number. Having the same number for two different routes would also be confusing for customers. As a result, BC Transit has proposed the following route number changes.

NEW PREFIXES		BEFORE March 27, 2022	AFTER March 27, 2022
Chilliwack Prefix	AGH/Hope Prefix		
5	7	1 Vedder =	51 Vedder
		2 Evans =	52 Evans
		3 Chilliwack =	53 Chilliwack
		4 Promontory =	54 Promontory
		11 Agassiz/HHS =	71 Agassiz/HHS
		22 Hope =	72 Hope

A few reasons this change is recommended:

- First, this allows our customers that are planning and viewing their transit journey through NextRide, the *Transit App* and *Google Maps* to not be confused by same numbered routes in a single region
- For operating companies that oversee multiple transit systems, it allows them to view their buses, drivers and connections as one region
- This allows operators a safety oversight over their region that is imperative for daily operations
- This also allows convenience for the operating company to have one system login to manage operations
- As a result, route renumbering is required but also helps future-proof expansion and growth in the system by planning out the route renumbering in a logical way
- It is important to future proof the transit system and ensure that our route number selections do not conflict with Translink route numbers as we move towards increased integration and coordinated trip planning in the future

BC Transit will be launching a robust communications and marketing plan to ensure our customers are alerted to these important upcoming changes. FVRD staff is working closely with BC Transit and our municipal partners to ensure bus stop signage is properly updated. Local government partners are responsible for communicating to BC Transit any changes to the transit system, to ensure that physical changes are reflected in the data systems.

NextRide is a customer focused solution aimed to increase ridership and improve customer service, but also adds value for transit operators and local governments. The data intelligence of the system will offer valuable information on performance and provide real-time ridership data by route, stop and time of day. As an example, the system will provide a heat map of what stops are used most, which will assist in future planning for bus shelters and new stops. Operators will see their routing and performance, whether or not they are running according to schedule.



Operator Dashboard for monitoring route and performance

Electronic Fare Collection System

On January 26, 2022, BC Transit announced progress in its project to implement an electronic fare collection system (EFCS) in BC Transit systems across the Province. BC Transit has entered into an agreement with **Cubic Transportation Systems, Inc. (Cubic) for their Umo ("you-mo") platform**. Cubic is the long-time vendor for TransLink's Compass Card network, used in Metro Vancouver. The new EFCS will replace aging technology and equipment and will introduce contactless tap payment methods that will improve the transit experience and provide more reliable data. New payment methods will include a mobile app, debit card, credit card, mobile wallet, and reloadable smart card, providing riders with the ability to pick the best payment method for their lifestyle and travel habits. **Cash will continue to be accepted for those riders who prefer to use it.**

The EFCS will be implemented in transit systems and interregional routes in two phases, initially enabling mobile app and reloadable smart card payment methods, and the next phase payment by credit card, debit card, and mobile wallets will be supported. The Victoria Regional Transit System has been selected for the EFCS pilot project with implementation expected by fall 2022. Following a successful launch in Victoria, more than 30 other BC Transit systems, including FVRD systems, are scheduled for system implementation. More information regarding implementation dates and details on when it will be introduced to services in the Fraser Valley will be forthcoming.

COST

The costs associated with the FVX expansion have been incorporated into the FVRD's 5 year financial plan. Both the NextRide project and electronic fare collection system initiatives are funded through the *Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program*. These projects are being cost shared with the Government of Canada contributing 50 per cent, the Province of British Columbia contributing 40 percent and local government partners contributing the remaining 10 per cent through respective Annual Operating Agreements.

CONCLUSION

The FVX expansion, implementation of NextRide and the future introduction of electronic fare collection are exciting transit initiatives which will enhance the customer's experience and provide improved information for transit users. The new technologies are also expected to increase on time performance and operational effectiveness and improve transit data that is necessary to support transit planning decisions in the future.

COMMENTS BY:

Alison Stewart, Manager of Strategic Planning and Initiatives: Reviewed and supported.

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

Kelly Lownsbrough, Chief Financial Officer/ Director of Corporate Services: Reviewed and supported.

Jennifer Kinneman, Chief Administrative Officer: Reviewed and supported.