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Agenda Item # 6

**REPORT TO PLANNING AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE  
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY JUNE 25, 2008**

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**SUBJECT**

**Options for Addressing Rapid Transit in the Capital Region**

**PURPOSES**

1. To respond to requests from the local MLAs, the District of Saanich, the City of Victoria, and the TravelChoices Select Committee requests to initiate a comprehensive evaluation rapid transit options and technologies for the region, including an update of the 1996 LRT Feasibility Study prepared for BC Transit.
2. To outline the potential tasks and scope of work required to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of rapid transit options in this region.
3. To identify a range of roles the CRD could assume in undertaking rapid transit evaluation project.

**BACKGROUND**

The CRD has received several pieces of correspondence regarding the need to update the update the 1996 LRT study and undertake a comprehensive evaluation of rapid transit options in the region.

Correspondence was received by the CRD in early March 2008 from MLA's David Cubberley and Rob Fleming, recommending that the Board initiate a business case analysis for Light Rail Transit (LRT) in the Capital Region (Attachment #1). Their request was made in light of a number of emerging issues, including the need for the region to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet new provincial targets, and the need to evaluate the appropriate technology for rapid transit along Douglas Street. The letter noted that when asked why LRT wasn't being considered for Victoria, the B.C. Minister of Transportation responded that no business case has been developed by the region to support the technology. The Federal MP also noted the absence of a regional plan for LRT.

Correspondence for the District of Saanich was also received at that time regarding a resolution passed by Saanich Council at its meeting of February 25, 2008, (Attachment #2) which stated:

*That the Capital Regional District be requested to initiate an update to the LRT Alignment Study that will capture opportunities with the E&N project and other*

*development opportunities in the region as part of the Transportation Management review process.”*

At its meeting of May 7, 2008, members of the CRD TravelChoices Select Committee made the following recommendation to the Board:

*That staff be directed to prepare a report regarding the update of the 1996 LRT Feasibility Study that would include the assumptions and conclusions of earlier reports, what the scope of a comprehensive assessment might include, and the order of magnitude of costs for such a study.*

Correspondence received from the City of Victoria on May 14, 2008 (Attachment #3) included the following:

*It was moved by Councilor Young, seconded by Councilor Holland, that Council request the Capital Regional District to initiate an update to the LRT Alignment Study that will capture opportunities with the E&N project and other development opportunities in the region, as part of the Transportation management review process.*

### **1996 LRT Feasibility Study:**

The 1996 LRT feasibility study was prepared by the consultant firm ND Lea under the direction of BC Transit. The purpose of the study was to confirm optimal routing and station locations for a Light Rail Transit system from Downtown Victoria to the West Shore by 2011. The scope of the work consisted of identification of alignment options with station locations, projected ridership and cost estimates for the preferred alignment. The overall study goal was defined:

*To identify the preferred alignment and station locations for a Light Rail Transit system between the Western Communities and the City of Victoria that encourages the use of public transit by linking employment and activity centres (existing and future) and growing residential areas, in a cost-effective manner while minimizing social and environmental impacts.*

The preferred alignment based on these criteria was Douglas Street to Town and Country, then the Galloping Goose Trail to Colwood Interchange (Trans Canada Highway and Island Highway). Between Colwood Interchange and Goldstream Avenue there were two options:

1. The Galloping Goose Trail to CanWest Mall (now West Shore Town Centre)
2. Galloping Goose to Island Highway, Island Highway back onto Galloping Goose to CanWest Mall.

ND Lea also did a follow-up report on the feasibility of the E&N right-of-way as rapid transit alignment for service between Downtown and Langford via Esquimalt. The proposed technology examined for this alignment was self propelled Diesel Multiple Units (DMUs) as opposed to Light Rail Transit considered for the Douglas Street/Galloping Goose option. The consultants did not consider this route feasible for rapid transit at that time for the following reasons:

- Ridership potential would be significantly lower than the Douglas Street LRT option;
- The alignment did not serve the downtown employment areas;
- The land use benefits identified at the time were limited.

## **TRANSPORTATION PLANNING & GROWTH MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

Since the early 1990's, regional and transportation plans, including the Regional Growth Strategy and the TravelChoices Strategy, have identified the need for a high-capacity transit route connecting the downtown Core with the West Shore communities. The challenge identified in many of the plans is the dispersed growth pattern and relatively low population levels make it challenging to justify fixed rail technologies and their associated costs. Making rapid transit work will require the integration of land use and transportation planning, particularly along the corridors and stations.

Several changes have occurred since 1996 which warrant a reconsideration of the planning assumptions used in the earlier LRT /rail feasibility studies:

- The nature and extent of residential development and employment outside of the Core and in the western communities has exceeded the earlier estimates.
- The 1996 LRT study assumed the use of the Galloping Goose trail for LRT. However, the success of the trail in accommodating non-vehicular modes would make it difficult from a technical and community feasibility perspective to utilize for transit.
- The interest level in the E&N corridor is considerable compared to conditions in 1996. The CRD secured funding to develop a cycling and walking trail along the E&N from Langford to Victoria. In January 2008, the group Communities for Commuter Rail (C4CR) released the report, the *West Shore Tram Line Assessment*; a high-level examination of the feasibility of commuter rail on the E&N alignment. The Island Corridor Foundation (ICF) is proposing a *Proposal for a Comprehensive Corridor Plan* for the entire length of the E&N right-of-way. Part of this work will examine passenger rail options especially the section between Langford and Victoria.
- Climate change concerns and efforts to approach or exceed carbon neutrality are changing how governments do business and evaluate projects. On November 20, 2007 the BC Government passed the *Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Act* which sets ambitious targets for GHG reduction to at least 33 percent of 2007 levels by 2020. Since the transportation sector is a very large contributor to greenhouse gases, efforts to meet this target will require new responses and initiatives.
- BC Transit worked with the City of Victoria, District of Saanich and the Ministry of Transportation to develop the first stage of a Bus Rapid Transit alignment between Downtown Victoria and Town and Country Mall. As a result of input received through the course of the project, the Victoria Regional Transit Commission, at its meeting of May 6, 2008, requested that BC Transit pause the busway project and develop a business plan for the entire alignment.

BC Transit will be submitting a business plan this month to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission which may include recommendations on the suggested roles and responsibilities for undertaking a comprehensive rapid transit evaluation. The multi-jurisdictional nature of transportation planning and implementation in this region will necessitate discussions among all the affected levels of government and stakeholders to determine the optimal project management approach to undertake such a study.

A comprehensive assessment of LRT/fixed rail feasibility for the region would involve significant resources and partnerships, given the multiple jurisdictions, authorities, and

levels of government affected. Attachment (1) of this report contains an overview of the possible scope of work for a comprehensive study.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Receive this report as information
2. Direct this report to the Victoria Transit Commission for their consideration.
3. Direct staff to initiate an update and revision of the 1996 Victoria Light Rail Transit Implementation Study in partnership with BC Transit, Ministry of Transportation and member municipalities.
4. Direct staff to assist the BC Transit with their comprehensive feasibility assessment of LRT/rail on the Douglas Street/TransCanada and E&N Corridors through the work of the Corridor Management Study and the transportation model.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The development of a comprehensive feasibility study is a significant undertaking in terms of cost and staff resources. Based on previous estimates done by BC Transit and comparable projects in other jurisdictions, the cost for such a study could range from \$250,000 to \$450,000 depending on scope, nature and extent of consultation, and anticipated deliverables. Funding availability and cost sharing options will depend on how the project is structured and who is chosen to lead the project.

Under the current staffing and resource allocation, the CRD could contribute transportation modeling data and technical assistance through the course of the study with minimal financial implications. If a more involved role is anticipated, additional senior staff resources would be required to manage the project, undertake the more detailed analysis, and manage the public consultation process. Efforts would be made to develop synergies with the RGS review process where appropriate.

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The evaluation of rapid transit options for the CRD is an important part of planning for a sustainable Region and follows from the goals and objectives of the *Regional Growth Strategy* and *TravelChoices*. Results of a rapid transit evaluation will have significant implications for the RGS review and the affected municipal plans, particularly as it affects the designation and development of the regional centres.

The work steps proposed for the CRD's Corridor management Plan could provide an important contribution to any subsequent assessment of rapid transit. The Corridor management Plan and the RGS urban model – will examine a number of different scenarios anticipated to include, a centres-based scenario (variation of the existing RGS), a carbon-sensitive scenario (assumes high transit ridership and non-vehicular modes), and a trend scenario.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That Planning and Protective Services Committee staff recommend to the Board that staff work with BC Transit in their rapid transit study through the provision of technical and modeling support.

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Concurrence

**COMMENTS**