



Making a difference...together

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April 1, 2020

File: 0400-20

The Honourable Claire Trevena  
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure  
Room 306 Parliament Buildings  
Victoria BC V8V 1X4  
Via email: [Minister.Transportation@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Minister.Transportation@gov.bc.ca)

Dear Minister Trevena:

**RE: INTEGRATED TRANSPORTATION PLAN FOR THE SOUTHERN GULF ISLANDS**

On behalf of the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board I am writing to request that the Province develop a strategy and plan for ongoing coordination between BC Ferries, BC Transit, and Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure road infrastructure planning to achieve integrated, low carbon and active transportation orientated solutions for the Southern Gulf Islands and Salt Spring Island.

We are looking for a provincial plan of action that will advance ongoing cooperation and coordination and will:

- *support public transit on the Southern Gulf Islands to parallel the very successful BC Transit service that operates on Salt Spring Island;*
- *provide seamless integration of water and land transit systems with public transit in neighbouring metropolitan centres at the Tsawwassen, Swartz Bay, and Crofton ferry terminals;*
- *promote and support active and public BC Ferry transportation alternatives for visitors to the islands; and*
- *investment in active transportation road improvements and cycling infrastructure on the islands.*

The Electoral Area Director for the Southern Gulf Islands, Dave Howe, the Electoral Area Director for Salt Spring Island, Gary Holman, and the Corporate Officer - General Manager, Corporate Services, Kristen Morley would like to meet with you to discuss these issues at your earliest convenience. Please contact Carolyn Jenkinson at [cjenkinson@crd.bc.ca](mailto:cjenkinson@crd.bc.ca) or 250-360-3125 to coordinate this meeting.

Please see the attached background to offer additional context for this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Colin Plant', with a stylized, cursive style.

Colin Plant  
Chair, Capital Regional District Board

Attachment: Background

cc: CRD Board  
Director Howe, CRD Board  
Director Holman, CRD Board  
Robert Lapham, Chief Administrative Officer, CRD  
Kristen Morley, Corporate Officer, General Manager, Corporate Services, CRD  
Justine Starke, Manager, SGI Administration, CRD



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## Attachment - Background

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### BACKGROUND

#### Context

- The Salt Spring Island (SSI) and the Southern Gulf Islands (SGI) is comprised of rural, ferry dependent communities with a combined resident population of approximately 15,000 people.
- The Salt Spring Island Electoral Area has a population of approximately 10,000 people.
- The Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area has a total population that is less than 5,000 people: Galiano has a population 1,040 people; Mayne Island has a population of 955 people; Pender (North and South) has a combined population of 2,310 people, and Saturna has a population of 345 people (2016 Census).
- The SGIs and SSI are served by BC Ferries, using large car ferries.

#### Alignment with CRD Strategic Priorities:

- The Capital Regional District (CRD) has adopted a Corporate Plan with the strategic priority to “ensure residents have access to convenient, green and affordable multi-modal transportation systems that enhance community well-being.”
- The CRD has declared a climate emergency and has prioritized climate action and adaptation in its Corporate Plan.
- The CRD Southern Gulf Islands Economic Sustainability Commission has a goal of advancing a fossil free future for the region. Transportation is widely understood to be a key factor influencing a region’s ability to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

#### Supports the Preserve and Protect Mandate:

- The *Islands Trust Act* includes a legislated mandate to, “to preserve and protect the trust area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of residents of the trust area and of the province generally, in cooperation with municipalities, regional districts, improvement districts, other persons and organizations and the Government of British Columbia.”
- Protection of the unique and ecologically important environment of the islands is an asset to British Columbia and a strong cultural marker of the island communities.
- The *Islands Trust Act* functions to limit to growth on the islands.
- The responsibility to protect this special place brings particular economic and servicing challenges associated with a limited local tax base. The economy of scale needed to support transportation services is challenging to achieve.
- The island geography currently contributes to communities that are overly-reliant on high-carbon infrastructure. There is a role for the provincial government to take greater action and fund solutions that will uphold the spirit of the *Islands Trust Act*.

#### Recognition of the Rural Character of the Islands:

- The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) is undertaking a South Island Transportation Plan that has excluded the Southern Gulf Islands from consideration of integration into the larger regional systems.

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- The Infrastructure that exists on the Southern Gulf Islands is inadequate and is stressed by the extreme increases in population that occur when “all British Columbians” come to benefit from the “unique amenities and environment” of the Area. The population of the islands can triple in the summer season.
  - Most visitors bring their vehicles to the islands which causes the ferries to be overloaded, restricting residents from their daily life needs of travel for medical appointments etc.
  - The roads are the responsibility of the MOTI, but they are not built to a standard to accommodate bicycles or to handle the volumes that use the roads in the summer.
  - On most islands, there are not adequate parking facilities to accommodate people who would otherwise opt to travel as foot passengers.
  - Although the islands are popular cycling destinations the roads are narrow and unsafe for bicycles.
  - The ferry service between the Southern Gulf Islands is infrequent and inefficient and this impacts economic integration in the region;
  - BC Ferries is designed primarily to provide links from the islands to the Lower Mainland and the Saanich Peninsula and Victoria.
  - Some Southern Gulf Island and Salt Spring Island residents commute daily to work in Vancouver, on Vancouver Island (Cowichan Valley and Nanaimo area), the Saanich Peninsula or in Victoria, and others travel to work on adjacent SGIs or SSI, sometimes having to travel via Swartz Bay.
  - Although it is possible to travel among the Southern Gulf Islands by ferry, either as a foot passenger or with a vehicle, the scheduled sailing times are infrequent, often inconvenient, and some connections are impossible on some days. Round trips within a single day aren’t possible on all routes. During periods of high volume, the schedules are unpredictable due to ferry overloads that lead to delays.
  - BC Ferries reports significant financial losses from providing their current schedule of service to the islands and is exploring new routes, vessels, and schedule options to address this.
  - The CRD has done some preliminary work to explore options for a viable service model to provide passenger only inter-island travel options. This work is still in the project scoping phase.
  - BC Transit and the Capital Regional District operate a transit service on Salt Spring Island
  - Bus service was established on Salt Spring Island in January 2008. In the first year of service ridership was more than double what was expected with a maximum of 1,508 rides a week. In 2009, the Salt Spring Island Transit System was awarded the “Exceptional Service with Outstanding Performance” award from the Canadian Urban Transit Association.
  - Ridership in 2019 was 116, 978 passengers.
  - Salt Spring Island Transit has 5 buses and runs 6 routes daily with extended hours during the summer months. The service utilizes lift-equipped minibuses that can accommodate passengers using mobility aids such as wheelchairs and scooters.
  - The Salt Spring Island Transportation Commission (SSITC) serves in an advisory role to the CRD and to BC Transit.
    - Neither BC Transit nor the Capital Regional District operates a transit service in the Southern Gulf Islands;
    - BC Transit has decided that a transit service is not feasible on the Southern Gulf Islands and is not receptive to providing service to this area;

- There are struggling community bus systems operated by non-profit societies on some of the islands.
- The CRD is currently undertaking an updated community bus assessment to understand the costs for these community bus societies to operate a basic level of service on the islands.
- The majority of community bus trips are used by visitors. More frequent and reliable scheduling would likely see an increase in the use of the buses by island residents.
- BC Transit has given some analysis to operating a service on the Southern Gulf Islands (Southern Gulf Islands Service Discussion Document April 2014 (Updated costings Oct 2018) and has found that the existing community buses perform on the cusp of viability for transit.
- Inevitably, any sustainable system will require public investment from a broader tax base than the island residents themselves.