



The loss of the Vancouver Island Rail Corridor will cost Vancouver Island residents for decades.

No doubt by now you have heard the predictions that Vancouver Island will reach 1 million residents by 2030. That was spoken to in Rob Fleming, B.C. Minister of Transportation & Infrastructure and Omar Alghabra, Canadian Minister of Transport's joint statement. That is another 100,000 people on the island that will have to join the other 900,000 currently depending on ever widening roads and rising fuel and other related costs. Every trip, the whole trip, and nothing but the entire trip is made by road, unless you are lucky and live within a 15-minute walk of everything you need. Failing the Vancouver Island Rail Corridor will cost Vancouver Island residents for decades; that cost will come in many ways beyond just the dollars, because it makes sense!

Our roads today are already clogged, particularly in the morning and evening during work commutes. Many of those roads cannot be expanded. The Malahat through Goldstream comes to mind as one such road for ecological, park protection, and reconciliation reasons, but there is also Duncan, and Parksville

and so many others to consider. Even Saanich and Sooke are going to be hard pressed to expand the highways for much longer. If the trend of having 79% of Islanders travelling by car continues, we will have another 79,000 cars on the road in 2030, and that will increase your idling travel times exponentially. As more cars fill the highways and drivers that shouldn't need to be on the road are on the road, there will be more collisions, more road closures, and more casualties. Should they decide to widen the roads, you will need to be prepared to give up a lane through a construction zone for years while it is widened.

In 2011 Passenger Rail services were shut down. Built in 1953, the Dayliner was a 58-year-old Budd Rail Diesel car, today it would be 70! It was an uncomfortable train and smelt of diesel and oil, but the staff were friendly and made the experience fun. I have an early childhood memory of the trip, although I was more fascinated by the train than the views.

The schedule the Dayliner had ran backwards to commuting traffic, and the maintenance costs were getting upwards of \$1 million per year to keep it running, so when the track was deemed unsafe to use, there was no evidence to say it would be worth the investment to restore the track. At the time the Government was also looking at a 3-year declining rate of people moving here, a joke that was on all of us as it quickly spiked and rose by over 140,000 people since then. Many people that lived here while the train ran were frustrated that it didn't travel from Courtenay going South in the Morning and then from Victoria going North in the evening. I can't help but think change alone would have had that train full and likely running with additional cars as people from city-to-city load and unload to reach their destinations. But instead, it remained a tourist train, leaving at a tourist time, and providing the minimum level of service that a railway can.

Restoring a railway is a known cost, they have it down to a science and have engineered a vast array of incredible machines that can do the work in a jiffy. The cost estimate of \$431 Million is reasonable for the initial phase to have an operational railway, but private investment could amplify that \$431 Million into something truly useful. There is no disputing the Freight Assessment just conducted by the B.C. Government <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/reports-and-reference/reports-and-studies/vancouver-island-south-coast/island-rail-corridor/island-rail-corridor-freight-analysis-appendix-d-2022-12-05.pdf> that spells out that between 4,500 and 11,400 rail carloads could be achieved in the near to medium term and that 10,400 and 25,570 truckloads (2 to 4 million truck kilometers) would be taken off the roads. The study anticipates a savings of between 1,741 and 3,636 metric tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year. From a viability perspective \$3-9 Million per year in revenue is expected. It's good for the environment, good for freight, good for revenue, good for our rapidly growing economy, while truck driver shortages in B.C. are a serious concern.

The passenger services are a no-brainer in today's day and age. There is a big push for 15-minute walkable and cycle friendly cities, and what do you need between those cities to make it work? Transit, great transit that carries bikes, wheelchairs, and other methods to Walk and Roll. The Vancouver Island Corridor is a pre-existing dedicated Right-of-Way, in other words the traffic stops for the train, not the other way around. That minute while it passes will be a good time to relax for a second after dealing with that last driver. You know, the slow-going elder in a hat, the indie 500 driver that hasn't realized yet the error of their ways yet, or that rude emotionally broken driver. There simply is no transport project cheaper than restoring an existing railway.

There is a growing movement to open the door for proper transit solutions on Vancouver Island. People want walkable and safe cycling spaces so they don't have to drive or endure the expense of car ownership, especially while energy prices such as fuel are rising, and everything else with it. To connect those spaces on Vancouver Island, it makes perfect sense to leverage the dedicated Right-of-Way to create a reliable, comfortable, accessible modern passenger train synchronized with transit. From Wheelchairs to Bikes, scooters and baby carriages and small pets, Trains can carry it all. They are considerably longer than a bus, and they are wider and more spacious inside. They run smoother given they are on precision installed rails, and are more efficient, less polluting people and freight movers. They have onboard accessible bathrooms for those traveling the long hauls from Port Alberni and Courtenay down South for appointments, for work, or all the other reasons people have to travel. The buses used for traveling between cities now could be used elsewhere to augment or establish new routes in the areas where the railway doesn't have a terminal nearby.

Well over 140,000 people make minimum wage on Vancouver Island. With the cost-of-living spiking in high rental costs, high food costs, high fuel prices, and high everything costs due to inflation and carbon taxing, we need to build a lifeline of savings for those in poverty or those at risk of entering it. Consider the total cost of ownership of a car and what that could mean in savings to someone who is struggling to make ends meet. Having a well-run integrated transit system using the island railway as its backbone would be transformative for many people, and lifesaving for others. It would also be healthier for everyone that uses it as they would be away from the road exhaust fumes proven to be harmful to our brains in just 2 hours. <https://www.sciencealert.com/inhaling-car-fumes-can-change-a-brains-connectivity-in-just-2-hours-study-finds>

With many people moving here from places with active railway networks and great transit services, we can give them an alternative to owning a car, and for those that would already use it that live on the island, they can clear off the highways to make space for the die-hard drivers. Providing a reliable, accessible, no-transfer service from Courtenay to Victoria would help so many of our Elderly, sick and injured get to appointments without breaking the bank, or missing them due to road collisions. Reconnecting Port Alberni to Parksville to revitalize that hub would bring a storm of benefits to the island, including extending tourist reach from Victoria Harbour and Nanaimo Airport to Courtenay and Port Alberni.

I have learned a lot about the First Nations history on Vancouver Island in the last year and much of that history predates the railway by nearly 40 years. After the arrival of the boat people (British Colonists,) it gets dark, it is all horrible, and I thoroughly believe reconciliation with First Nations needs to be addressed. At the same time I also believe the need to save people from falling into poverty is important, that the needs of the 900,000 people living here is important, and saving the environmental impact from undue pressures to expand roads and their pollutants is important. I believe steering away from pure-road dependency is important, and that doing whatever we can on our not-so-little Island to combat Climate Change is important.

The moral compass of time is staring back at us from 2030, I hope that reconciliation can be achieved while restoring the corridor to provide the kind of transit and freight services Vancouver Island so desperately needs.

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