

SGI Community Bus Assessment

2021 REVISED Addendum




Capital Regional District | June 2020

Introduction

In 2017, the CRD issued an assessment of the various community bus services in the Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area. This addendum provides an update on those services for 2017-2019, as well as recent changes to legislation that impact them.

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Southern Gulf Islands Community Buses Update, 2017-2019

Mayne Island

Since 2011, the population has decreased from 1,070 to 949. Mayne Island continues to age, with the median age increasing from 61.5 in 2011 to 64.9 in 2016. The percentage of the population that is 65 years or older has increased from 37% in 2011 to 49.5% in 2016 (all 2016 numbers from the 2016 Census).

Service - Mayne Island Bus Society

The service model is unchanged—service operates Thursdays, Fridays and Saturday mornings year-round, and also operates on Wednesdays that precede long weekends. Trips to the ferry are also accommodated on Sundays and on holiday Mondays. The primary target market for the community bus service continues to be visitors arriving on Mayne Island by ferry. Service provision for 2020 has been confirmed.

Vehicles

The CRD funded the purchase of a new bus in January, 2019, a **2009 Ford e450**.

Fuel Type: Gas

Seating Capacity: 24

Accessibility Features: None

2006 Dodge minivan was recently sold to reduce overhead.

Back-up plan: None

Repairs Needed: No major repairs have been needed. Minor repairs underway.

Ridership

2016: 1,466 passengers, 3,906 kms

2017: 2,179 passengers, 5,223 kms

2018: 2,728 passengers, 6,198 kms

2019: 3,347 passengers, 8,936 kms

Ridership breaks down into approximately 60% visitors and 40% residents.

Financials

Mayne 2019 Expenses (Yr. Round)	
Drivers' wages/ stipend	
Coordination	
Fuel	\$4,650
Vehicle insurance.	\$6,250
Maintenance and inspections	\$900
Other (Accounting, phone, tech...)	\$750
Office space and bus parking	
Fleet upgrading and contingencies	
Transportation – ferry fares	\$400
total	12,950
Mayne 2019 Income	
Fares (or onboard donations)	\$12,000
Charters	
Advertisers	
Donations and grants	
Other	
total	12,000

Primary source of revenue is, by far, the by-donation fare system, with occasional contributions from the Green Angels Firewood Service. The Society has solicited donations in the past for charter services, but now charges according to a sliding scale.

Primary concerns

Over the years, numbers have been very close to break-even, which is not sustainable. There isn't any funding being set aside for future vehicle purchases. Insurance, fuel and maintenance are the main costs. Switching to an electric vehicle would reduce fuel costs. Moving away from heavy reliance on volunteer staff to paid positions would also make things more sustainable.

2020 Update:

The bus ran on a reduced schedule for the summer season of 2020 - about one trip a week by pre-arrangement to reduce the workload for volunteers having to sanitize for Covid. They have had to put the bus into insured storage since then. They have just completed their 6 month inspection minor mechanical maintenance and renewed their Passenger Transportation License, and will operate as long as the bank account allows.

Saturna Island

Since 2011, the population has increased from 335 to 354. Saturna Island continues to age, with the median age increasing from 60.6 in 2011 to 65.6 in 2016. The percentage of the population that is 65 years or older has increased from 31% in 2011 to 52.9% in 2016 (all 2016 numbers from the 2016 Census).

Service - Saturna Lions Club

Saturna's shuttle is a passenger-directed service run by the Saturna Lions Club, and there is no regular scheduled route. As demand is lower in the winter, only 1 vehicle is insured to save money, while in the summer a second vehicle is added to the fleet in order to meet the higher demand. Service provision for 2020 did take place, albeit without the use of the 21 passenger bus that began active service in 2014. Demand in 2020 diminished substantially due to Covid-driven health orders discouraging non-essential travel, so only one vehicle was insured and for only five months. Revenues covered fuel costs, but insurance and maintenance costs were not covered.

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Vehicles

2001 Pontiac Montana

Seating Capacity: 6

Accessibility Features: none

Fuel Type: gas

Mileage when Purchased: 160,000km+

This vehicle will be sold and replaced soon.

2011 Toyota Sienna

Seating Capacity: 7

Accessibility features: none

Fuel Type: gas

Mileage when Purchased: 160,000km+

Lions Club sold the 21-capacity bus as it was underutilized and had increasing maintenance needs due to age.

Back-up plan: In the event that they require more vehicles/drivers, a number of Lions Club members are willing and able to drive their personal vans. This is already done during the Lamb BBQ and Tour des Iles events. Unlike the 21-passenger bus, which requires a Class 4 Unrestricted License, regular vans don't require special licensing and so increase the pool of potential drivers.

Repairs Needed: No major repairs have been needed on their vehicles but they are older, so upkeep is estimated at about \$2000 plus the mandatory commercial vehicle inspections.

Ridership

Ridership has steadily increased since the first year of service from about 500 passenger trips/year (2015) to 1000 passenger trips/year (2019). Summer is a busy time of year and sometimes 200+ passengers are carried in a day for events. In the summer, the bus averages about 3 trips per week. Increasingly, the bus is doing more tours and dropping people off around the island as they come to the island car free. Many bikers use the service to be transported over the steep and hilly areas of the island to the flatter riding areas. As previously noted, 2020 was an anomaly, with very little ridership, due to Covid restrictions.

Financials

Saturna 2019 Expenses (Yr. Round)	
Drivers' wages/ stipend	
Coordination	
Fuel	\$1,200
Vehicle insurance.	\$2,000
Maintenance and inspections	\$800
Other (Accounting, phone, tech...)	
Office space and bus parking	
Fleet upgrading and contingencies	

Total	\$4,000
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Saturna 2019 Income	
Fares (or onboard donations)	
Charters	
Advertisers	
Donations and grants	\$4,000
Other	
Total	\$4,000

The main supporters of the bus financially are the donors to the Lions Club. Rider donations also contribute to the bus funding. The fare system is unique in that there is no charge to passengers, but if they like what the Lions Club does for the community it is asked that they contribute to the Lions donation boxes located on Saturna.

Primary concerns

Grant funding to pay for a part-time administrator who could respond to calls/emails from visitors looking to arrange transport, coordinate with the drivers, and schedule maintenance for the vehicles.

North Pender Island

Since 2011, the population has increased from 2,035 to 2,067. North Pender Island continues to age, with the median age increasing from 58.6 in 2011 to 61.5 in 2016. The percentage of the population that is 65 years or older has increased from 32% in 2011 to 40% in 2016 (all 2016 numbers from the 2016 Census).

Service - Moving Around Pender (MAP)

In 2016, MAP received a grant to purchase used vehicles. The bus service was launched in August 2016 and began a 2.5-year pilot project in December 2018 to demonstrate feasibility. Since then, service has varied depending on the time of year (seasonal population), and availability of the volunteer drivers. In 2019, service was offered for Fridays and Saturdays over the summer (10 weeks), when it was very popular with tourists and locals.

The routes serve approximately 70% of the population on North Pender Island; South Pender Island is not presently served. Busses run 2-4 days per week for 10-12 hours each day. The schedule is principally set around the arrival and departure times of ferries at Otter Bay. When not required for scheduled service, the community bus is rented for community events, summer camps, school trips and miscellaneous community activities.

Drivers are predominantly volunteer, with occasional honoraria when the number of shifts exceed 3 per month. During the summer of 2019, the group received funding from Canada Summer Works which went towards an operations manager/primary driver.

Regularly scheduled service provision for 2020 is not guaranteed, and is subject to funding, volunteer capacity; Canada Summer Jobs grant funds, and new driver recruitment. If operational, service will be 2 or more days weekly.

Vehicles

As of 2020 all vehicles have been sold. MAP had a vehicle-sharing relationship with the Pender Island Cab Company. However, the cab company has now closed.

Ridership

2017: 2,083 passengers, 1,500 kms

2018: 3,260 passengers, 2,000 kms

2019: 1,079 passengers, 1,200 kms

The bus is busiest in the summer months and ridership has increased since service started.

While service for seniors was a major consideration in the development of the project, uptake by this demographic was slow. However, many seniors have bemoaned the loss of winter service in 2019.

Financials

Funding to purchase the bus came from grants from the CRD. Funding for fuel, insurance, maintenance, and other operational costs were funded by grants, fundraising and donations from individuals and businesses. Income from charters was limited by the constraints of the agreement with the local cab company. There is \$2 suggested fare rate; this contributes a small amount towards the bus costs.

Pender 2020 Est. Expenses (Summer)	
Drivers' honouraria	\$2,000
Coordination	\$7,000
Fuel	\$2,300
Vehicle insurance and PTB licensing	\$1,600
Maintenance and inspections	\$2,100
Other (Accounting, phone, tech...)	\$500
Office space	\$500
Fleet upgrading and contingencies	\$500
total	16,500
Pender 2020 Estimated Income	

Fares (or onboard donations)	\$1000
Charters	\$2400
Reserves	\$1000
Donations and grants	
Other (Summer Jobs grant, pending approval)	\$4800
total	9,200

Primary concerns

The working arrangement of a volunteer-run bus supported predominantly by grants and donations is not sustainable given the costs of vehicles, the reliance on volunteers, and the ridership due to the small population.

Service did not operate in 2020 due to Covid and driver fatigue.

Galiano Island

Since 2011, the population has decreased from 1,140 to 1,044 in 2016. Galiano Island continues to age, with the median age increasing from 59 in 2011 to 61 in 2016. The percentage of the population that is 65 years or older has increased from 32% in 2011 to 40.2% in 2016 (all numbers from 2016 Census).

Service - Galiano Island Community Transportation Society (GICTS)

In 2016, GICTS applied for a CRD grant to purchase used vehicles and the community van and bus started operating in 2017.

For the first two seasons, regular scheduled service was offered Friday evenings and Saturday mornings and afternoons, April through September, with the schedule anchored to ferry arrival times at Sturdies Bay. Runs were also scheduled at other times, based on passenger demand. The vehicles made driver-directed pickup and drop off stops along the route. During the insured season the bus was used for charters, and both vehicles are used for community special events. Fares for the first year (2017) were by donation. Fixed fares were charged starting in 2018. In 2019 the fares were increased, and tied to trip length. Drivers were paid when the bus is chartered, however when the van or bus was being used for regular service, drivers were usually volunteers.

The primary route is a loop between Sturdies Bay ferry terminal and Montague Harbour. The secondary route to the north end of the island operates if there is sufficient passenger demand.

Service did not operate in 2020, in part due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Resuming service provision in 2021 is unlikely, due to lack of operational and maintenance funding, and the pandemic situation.

To resume service during the spring-summer-fall seasons of 2021, the Society would have to renew its annual Passenger Transportation Branch (PTB) general authorization license in spring, 2021. In order to renew the PTB license the vehicles must pass a regular six-month commercial vehicle inspection, and be insured. If the PTB license is not renewed and lapses, the Society or some other entity would have to begin again with applying to the PTB for a general authorization license, which is a time-consuming process with an uncertain outcome.

Vehicles

Model: 1999 Ford Shuttle Bus

Capacity: 18

Fuel Type: Gas

Mileage when Purchased: 363,429 km

Accessibility features: none

2004 Toyota Sienna

Capacity: 7

Fuel Type: Gas

Mileage when Purchased: 166,344 km

Accessibility features: none

Back-up plan: If one vehicle is out of service the other can be used.

Repairs: As both vehicles are older, they have required costly major repairs despite being driven relatively little. The Society is not aware of any major repairs that would have to be done to either vehicle, but that depends upon what is found during the commercial vehicle inspection.

Ridership

2017 222 passengers, 2,496 kms.

2018 538 regular passengers, plus approximately 400 community event riders. 6,486 kms.

2019 382 passengers, plus approximately 400 community event riders. 2,841kms.

Visitors represent more than 90% of the ridership. Between April and September, the vehicles provide scheduled runs on approximately 90 days. (Note that the ridership is for the scheduled runs, and that the number of passengers transported when the bus was operated for approximately a dozen charters is not included.)

Financials

Galiano 2020 Est. Expenses (Summer)	
Drivers' wages/ stipend	\$9,000
Coordination	\$1,500
Fuel	\$1,500
Vehicle insurance	\$2,500

Maintenance and inspections	\$800
Other (Accounting, phone, tech...)	\$0
Office space and bus parking	\$0
Fleet upgrading and contingencies	\$0
total	15,300
Galiano 2020 Estimated Income	
Fares (or onboard donations)	\$3,700
Charters	\$4,700
Advertisers	\$0
Donations and grants	\$0
Other (Summer Jobs grant) (<i>unconfirmed</i>)	\$5,900
total	14,300

The service would have broken even for the 2019 season, based on using a very limited group of volunteer drivers. However, there was approximately \$10,000 in unforeseen repair bills.

Depending on the route, fares range from \$3-\$15 per trip. A significant portion of the annual revenue comes from charter fees for private events.

The Society has a bank balance of \$3000 and outstanding debt of \$10,000.

Primary concerns

There is no contingency to cover breakdown repairs or other unforeseen expenses, and there is no reserve fund for upgrading the vehicles. Reliance on volunteer drivers is not sustainable. Additional funding is needed to pay drivers, however recruiting qualified drivers is also challenging.

Additional services

Salt Spring Island bus

Unlike the Southern Gulf Islands, the population on Salt Spring has increased from 10,322 in 2011 to 10,640 in 2016. Salt Spring Island's population is younger, with a median age of 55.4 in 2016. The percentage of the population that is 65 years or older is also lower, 30.6% in 2016 (all numbers from the 2011 and 2016 Censuses).

BC Transit and the Capital Regional District operate a transit service on Salt Spring Island which was established in 2008. The Salt Spring Island Transportation Commission (SSITC) serves in an advisory role to the CRD and to BC Transit, and employs two operation managers. In 2009, the Salt Spring Island Transit System was awarded the "Exceptional Service with Outstanding Performance" award from the Canadian Urban Transit Association.

Service

Salt Spring Island Transit has 6 routes running daily 5:40am-10:00pm, with extended service during the summer months. Three routes connect the island's three ferry terminals at Fulford, Long Harbour and Vesuvius with downtown Ganges. The fourth route is within Ganges, the fifth route runs between the Fernwood neighbourhood and Ganges and the sixth route is the Salt Spring Connector.

Vehicles

The service utilizes five 24-passenger lift-equipped minibuses that can accommodate passengers using mobility aids such as wheelchairs and scooters.

Ridership

In the first year of service ridership was more than double what was expected with a maximum of 1,508 rides a week. Ridership in 2019 was 116,978.

Cash Fare

Adult/Student/Senior \$2.25, discounts available via bulk tickets and day and month passes. Fare is free for those under 4 and reduced for students and those over 65.

The Gulf Islands School District

School District #64 is based on Salt Spring Island and operates several elementary schools; Salt Spring Middle School and Gulf Islands Secondary on Salt Spring Island, as well as one community school on each of Galiano, Mayne, Pender and Saturna. While this is not a public transportation service, it may be helpful to consider the potential opportunities presented by partnering with the district, which has both unused capacity and unmet need for transportation. This year, SD64 has embarked on a full review of its program offerings and facilities, including transportation services. Over summer 2020, District staff have been directed to “undertake a financial and operational feasibility study of the Scope of Opportunity”, which included a recommendation to “assess bus and water taxi routes for optimal finance and climate action efficiency”.

Galiano

There are 51 students attending the Galiano Community School. One vehicle (46-passenger capacity) provides twice-daily runs serving the Galiano Community School, driving a total of 141km daily. Approximately 20 students ride the bus in the mornings and 40 in the afternoons. The bus is empty heading north each morning and heading south each afternoon. No transportation service is provided to the 32 secondary students travelling to and from the water taxi at Sturdies Bay each day.

Mayne

Mayne Island is the only island without a school bus. No bus service is provided for the 20 students attending school on Mayne nor the 16 students travelling to SSI via water taxi. A bus is chartered from another district for off-island field trips, and from the Mayne Island Bus Society for on-island trips.

Pender

There are 112 students attending the Pender Island School. One vehicle (72-passenger capacity) covers 3 routes with twice daily runs serving the Pender Islands School, driving a total 106km daily. Regular ridership for the elementary school is about 100 students. Bus service is provided to most of the 59 students traveling to and from the water taxi at Port Washington each day. The bus is empty heading out each morning and returning each afternoon.

Saturna

No scheduled bus service is provided for 21 students attending school on Saturna nor the 5 students travelling to SSI via water taxi. A mini bus transports SEEC students to and from the ferry once a week and between their two campuses as needed, and is also used for on- and off-island field trips for all Saturna students.

Transit On-Demand Pilot Program – Bowen Island

TransLink piloted Transit On-Demand services on Bowen Island from July 15 to September 15, 2019. The pilot project aimed to explore the technical feasibility and customer experience of implementing Transit On-Demand services.

Service

The on-demand services supplemented existing bus routes which continued to provide regular transit service during the trial. Two additional shuttles offered Transit On-Demand services:

- Weekday Evenings: Fixed pick-up from Snug Cove from 4:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.
- Weekends: Flexible pick-up and drop-off anytime between 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

Transit On-Demand customers could book trips up to two weeks in advance using the TapRide app on a smartphone or web browser, or by calling a dispatcher. The smartphone app was the most popular booking option and accounting for over 76% of total bookings.

Ridership

Over the course of the pilot, the Transit On-Demand service was used by 554 unique users, with a total of 1,200 trips and approximately 2,000 boardings.

Key Findings

The service was well-received and confirmed through the results of a post-pilot survey. Approximately 80% of users gave their on-demand experience top scores, with an average score of 8.6 out of 10. 47% opted to use the on-demand services over their own private cars and over 23% replaced the use of fixed-route transit with on-demand services.

For the complete report, see https://www.translink.ca/-/media/Documents/plans_and_projects/translink_tomorrow/Transit_On_Demand_Pilot-Bowen_Island_Summary_Report.pdf?la=en&hash=D230601A86B554F128229942F24670056BA4E872

Summary of Findings from Southern Gulf Islands Service Discussion Document CRD and BC Transit, April 2014 (Updated costings Oct 2018)

(Complete report available at <https://www.bctransit.com/documents/1507213421952>)

Pender's year-round population and make up is most supportive of a traditional transit model, especially in partnership with School District #64 and Poet's Cove Resort.

Galiano's and Mayne's summer populations just bump over the typical threshold for daily transit service. In winter, communities of this size are on the threshold for service 2-3 days per week. Galiano has the largest collection of privately run transportation alternatives. Key markets are predominantly at the south end: Montague Harbour corridor to amenities; and the school water taxi traffic. Mayne's distribution is more scattered, and would therefore require more resources to service, however it does have more groups and services catering to the needs of seniors.

Even in summer Saturna is well below the viable population threshold even for flexible paratransit. Creation of a transportation umbrella group would benefit transportation on the island, i.e. sharing network coordination or access to a grant to help offset vehicle operating costs. The island seems to have strong volunteer capacity.

Suggested overall network strategy for the area, as well as service options for each of the four islands, are presented in the complete report. Public transportation appears to become more feasible as the administrative and dispatch components become consolidated for the larger area, and would also complement the goal of the Experience the Gulf Islands project. It is doubtful that BC Transit would partner separately with multiple transit operating companies in such a small service area. At one end of the spectrum, consolidation would mean centralizing public information on available transportation options, at the other end it would mean coordinating public information and dispatch under a single umbrella organization. Some of the proposals look at providing service three days a week. Adding additional days of service to ramp up or ramp down shoulder period service levels should be included for consideration. The island services perform right on the cusp of viable transit, on the low side for traditional paratransit that isn't covering long distances and at the "break-even point" for Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

When comparing the proposed performance levels with other BC Transit systems serving communities of less than 5,000 people, the expected performance for transit on the Southern Gulf Islands compares

fairly well for its population, and ridership would likely grow. Ultimately, community appetite to fund the local portion of costs for service—as well as provincial funding and prioritization for expansion, would determine pursuit of more formal transit services. Detailed review of the maintenance facilities and capabilities are required to identify the feasibility of maintaining a transit fleet.

Recent changes to Transportation Regulations

Passenger Transportation Branch

The Passenger Transportation Act is designed for commercial shuttle buses and taxis. However, as there is presently no regulatory mechanism for Community Buses not funded by tax dollars, they fall by default under the regulatory framework of the Passenger Transportation Branch. Organizations who operate commercial passenger vehicles require a passenger transportation license issued under the Passenger Transportation Act.

Community Buses are typically licensed under the General Authorization license, which is required for vehicles that do not require a Special Authorization license. General Passenger Vehicles (GPVs) are all commercial passenger vehicles that are not passenger directed vehicles or inter-city buses. Examples of GPVs include:

Tour, charter or sightseeing buses that have a carrying capacity of a driver and 12 or more passengers. (These may be “carrier directed” or “passenger directed” services).

Sightseeing buses if all itineraries are set by the operator. (These are “carrier-directed” tours. Operators may use vehicles with a carrying capacity of a driver and 11 passengers or fewer).

Tour operations if all tours are set by the operator. (These are “carrier-directed” tours. Trips are not “customized” for passengers. Operators may use vehicles with a carrying capacity of a driver and 11 passengers or fewer.)

Services that a community bus operator might provide under a General Authorization license include:

Scheduled community bus service. Routes can include on-demand deviations, as the schedule, route and bus stop locations on a deviation are determined by the operator. Community bus service can be provided with any size of vehicle, and operator can charge fares and receive other forms of compensation. The operator can also change routes and schedules as desired, and there is no requirement to identify a terminus for the service.

Transportation for persons with disabilities and their companions.

Operate tours where all itineraries are determined by the operator.

Transport passengers to regularly scheduled events, such as weekly seniors’ events organized by a health care society. Requires a vehicle with seating for 12 or more passengers.

Provide charter services to events such as community events, weddings and parties, and tours and excursions on-island and off-island. Requires a vehicle with seating for 12 or more passengers.

For Regulations, see Passenger Transportation Board, www.ptboard.bc.ca

Transportation Network Services

Transportation Network Services (TNS), also known as rideshares, are a new transportation option, where passengers connect via apps with drivers to pre-arrange trips in their personal, privately-owned vehicles. Financial compensation is paid to the driver and to a Transportation Network Company (who own and operate the app used). Special Authorization is required by the Passenger Transportation Board to allow for this service. See https://www.leg.bc.ca/content/CommitteeDocuments/41st-parliament/4th-session/cc/SSC-CC_41-4_Report-2018-03-26_Web.pdf

New ICBC Regulations for Commercial Vehicles

New regulations were enacted in September 2019 which bring the following changes into effect:

Non-fleet commercial vehicles

- A Community Bus organization will need to list those who drive their vehicle(s)
- At-fault crashes may impact your drivers/employees (depending on the rate class involved in the crash.)

Fleetplan commercial vehicles

Fleet insurance for five or more vehicles is now available, which includes:

- Premium discounts of up to 63%.
- Discount for vehicles driven less than 5,000km a year
- Safety discount for vehicles equipped with factory-installed autonomous emergency breaking.

No need to list drivers or declare a principal driver.

For details see: <https://www.icbc.com/insurance/commercial/Pages/default.aspx>