

Dear Minister Lekstrom:

I understand that the Province is looking at how to finance BC Transit's \$950 million LRT plan, which is one of the most expensive single public works projects that has ever been proposed for the Island. At the same time I am aware that the Province and the federal government are facing pressure by Island communities to pay to rebuild the E&N to get it back in service. This is on top of many other priorities, including keeping taxes down.

I would like to offer several solutions for your consideration. I am a longtime transportation advocate and have been active on the E&N and Victoria LRT briefs for nearly 30 years. This includes co-founding the Greater Victoria Electric Railway Society, now the Greater Victoria Light Rail Society in 1986 and the SaveRail Coalition in 2002 when the E&N was threatened with abandonment. Professionally I have covered provincial transit for *International Railway Journal*, *Mass Transit* and *Metro* magazines. In addition I sit on the City of White Rock's transportation committee and am and have been active on the Surrey rapid transit and cross-border rail issues.

1. **Consider putting the Victoria LRT out to bid to a public-private-partnership (PPP) and include in the following:**

(a) A DBOMD (design-build-operate-maintain-develop) PPP that could include development rights at stations and air rights on rights-of-way and over facilities, plus property tax relief to winner-owned properties in walking distance of stations.

**Potential benefits:** Attracting private investment and reduced capital and operating costs, Transportation has long been a catalyst to development; this means provides value-capture.

(b) Give bidders the option of the E&N right-of-way, and access to the Douglas Street corridor that would include a new Johnson Street rail bridge as well as the preferred Highway 1/Douglas corridor. Also give them the choice of extending LRT to the Legislative Precinct and Ogden Point. The Province jointly with BC Transit would then decide on which bid provides the best value for money.

**Potential benefits:** Lower capital and operating costs, higher revenues and greater return on investment.

The E&N RoW, it has been argued, is substantially less expensive than the Highway 1/Douglas route while generating similar ridership and revenues. That is because the core transit market is West Shore/downtown Victoria. Moreover the E&N would boost service to the under served Esquimalt/Dockyards employment area. The net result may be a *lower cost per new rider attracted*. Also, bringing LRT to the Legislative Precinct and Ogden Point would attract more customers and facilitate redevelopment while reducing the traffic--and resulting air and noise pollution--from serving the cruise ships, thereby outweighing the added costs. *This method fairly and effectively puts both propositions to the test.*

(c) Require all bidders regardless of route to include provision for E&N passenger access through designing the track envelopes and put in connections to permit modern articulated diesel/alternative-fueled "TramTrains". This would provide convenient one-seat commuter rail and intercity rail access into downtown Victoria.

TramTrains are railway-and-street rail-compatible railcars which enables high quality frequent service at lower capital costs by utilizing existing railway and street rail tracks, thereby avoiding inconvenient, ridership/revenue-detering transfers. They are becoming popular for that reason; both diesel and electric types are in service in Austin and Denton, Texas, Camden-Trenton, New Jersey and across Europe.



TramTrains have low labor costs—a train operator and a roving ticket collector/food cart attendant—would suffice.

Here is a link to an article on the advanced TramTrains that Denton, Texas will be introducing. While Denton has no plans to through-route them into Dallas over the DART LRT there is no regulatory or technology barrier preventing it from doing so. Interestingly Denton is using ex-VIA Budd cars—like those that had been operated on the E&N—until the TramTrains arrive.

<http://www.masstransitmag.com/article/10407291/stadler-showcases-gtw-dmu-2-6>.

**Potential benefits:** TramTrain compatibility would make E&N commuter and intercity passenger rail successful by bring customers to and picking them up from the downtown origins and destinations. They could also draw visitors who would be interested in traveling to West Shore attractions. TramsTrains eliminate an inconvenient, demand/revenue-hurting relocation to VicWest. E&N patronage suffered when the station was moved there in 1972 when Pandora Street was extended to the Johnson Street Bridge, so much so that service was moved back to downtown Victoria in 1985.

## 2. New through-routed E&N passenger service as follows, following up on the Provincial E&N studies

These trains could be operated by private firms under contract, with assistance from the Province and the federal government, the latter through directing the money it had been allocating for VIA service. A new station would be built at Wellington near the Departure Bay ferry terminal, linked by connecting shuttle vans.

- (a) Nanaimo-originated tourist-targeted trains to Port Alberni and to Duncan and Victoria, schedules to meet BC Ferries; they would connect with future cruise ships.
- (b) Limited Nanaimo-Duncan-Victoria commuter rail.
- (c) “Right-way” morning Courtenay/return Victoria evening trip supplemented by a Victoria-Courtenay Saturday morning, return Sunday/Holidays evening trip.

**Potential benefits:** This service pattern would boost the economy through encouraging and appealing to green tourism as well as to green personal travel that meshes with Island traffic patterns. This pattern would maximize E&N ridership and revenues and investment returns.

3. **Give large new freight traffic sources the choice of going rail or paying the Province surcharges to cover the greater wear-and-tear on highways**

U.S. studies indicate that trucks incur many times more wear than cars; they also inflict air pollution that translates into higher healthcare costs. *None of these costs should be borne by taxpayers.* The safety and environmental impacts of heavy truck traffic on steep, winding Island roads, shared with cyclists and other users is one of the worries from the proposed Raven Mine.

**Potential benefits:** more and sustaining income to the E&N, reduced costs to taxpayers and lowered negative impacts from industrial development, resulting in greater net returns to communities.

4. **Look at a new governance model for Vancouver Island transit.**

Here are two options:

(a) Single authority, learning from the TransLink experience. It would be responsible for the E&N, taking over from the Island Corridor Foundation but retaining the partnership with VIA and for contracted out freight rail, and include in it urban transit, LRT and greenways. The authority could include potentially Gulf Islands and Mill Bay ferries, and long-sought commuter ferries, plus intercommunity/intercity bus transit and major roads.

(b) Two authorities: southern island (Cowichan Valley, CRD) and north central island, each responsible for local transit, greenways and ferries with a joint body responsible for intercommunity transportation: the E&N, intercity buses, local ferries and major roads.

Consider creating a single governing body for both options, with the makeup split between local mayors and the Provincial representatives with one or two mutually agreed-on public appointees who have demonstrated knowledge of and commitment to Island transportation.

Examine fairer, more sustainable permanent funding options. One alternative: a blend of dedicated property and employment taxes with portions rebated to homeowners and employers based on their and their employees' transit, cycle/walk and telecommuting use. The net effects include driving up transit ridership and revenues, encourage individuals and businesses to locate on transit use and use other greener alternatives to driving.

**Potential benefits:** more effective, responsive governance. Fairer, more stable funding, higher ridership and revenues and less demand on the public purse. Greater environmental returns *including lowered healthcare costs* through providing more attractive options to driving, and less greenspace-consuming and expensive-to-service/support sprawl.

Thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact me if I could supply any further information.

Yours truly,

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