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## **REPORT TO ELECTORAL AREAS COMMITTEE MEETING OF MAY 8, 2019**

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### **SUBJECT     TRANSPORTATION SERVICE FOR THE SOUTHERN GULF ISLANDS**

#### **ISSUE**

The Capital Regional District (CRD) has been requested to create a Transportation Commission for the Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area.

#### **BACKGROUND**

At its meeting on May 24, 2018, the Southern Gulf Islands Community Economic Sustainability Commission (CESC) requested that the CRD establish a new Transportation Commission for the SGI Electoral Area. The CESC motion specified the new CRD SGI Transportation Commission have representatives from Galiano Island, Mayne Island, Pender Islands, and Saturna Island with a mandate to oversee and coordinate the transportation initiatives relating to on-island and inter-island transportation, trails and bikeways and liaising with the SGI Harbours Commission, and with island-based Parks and Recreation Commissions regarding trails. The Commission would also be responsible for liaising with SGI-wide organizations such as the SGI Trails Society.

The Electoral Areas Committee considered this request on July 11, 2018. At that time, EAC was informed that the CRD was in discussion with BC Transit on the potential of establishing an SGI Transportation Service, similar to the service on Salt Spring Island. The EAC passed a resolution to defer consideration of a CRD Transportation Commission until discussions with BC Transit about alternative methods to provide transportation services on SGI were completed.

More recently, on May 17, 2019, the Southern Gulf Islands Economic Development Commission passed a resolution to request staff develop, "...a scope of work and proposed budget to define and consider feasibility of a Transportation Service and advance Connectivity Planning."

This initiative aligns with the Capital Regional District Board priorities for 2019-2022, specifically "Community Well Being - Transportation and Housing," and corresponds with the CRD Corporate Plan action 2(e)3: "Work with BC Transit to investigate opportunities for public transportation in the SGI."

#### **SGI Transportation Initiatives**

For several years, the CESC and local community groups have tried to advance community bus services on the SGI as a way to provide alternative transportation options on the islands. Groups have also advocated for pedestrian and cycling infrastructure to reduce vehicular traffic and emissions. In addition, the CESC and community groups of the Southern Gulf Islands have proposed an inter-island pedestrian ferry service to improve travel options between the Southern Gulf Islands, Salt Spring Island (SSI) and the Town of Sidney. These initiatives are supported by the Experience the Gulf Islands Concept Plan.

Separate not-for-profit societies provide community bus service on Galiano Island, Mayne Island, North Pender Island and Saturna Island. Bus service has been provided on Mayne Island and on Saturna Island for several years, while community bus pilot projects have been initiated on North Pender Island and Galiano Island. Community bus programs on the islands are challenged with

an over-reliance on volunteer labour and grants, low ridership, and difficulties streamlining bus service with ferry schedules.

Community trails are provided on each island through the Parks and Recreation Commissions and smaller community groups, while regional trails are planned and managed by CRD Regional Parks.

Inter-island passenger-only ferry service is provided by private water taxi companies, including the School District 64 charter boat which transports high school students and staff back and forth from each the Southern Gulf Island communities to SSI during the school year. Annually, in June the *Tours des Iles* event provides inter-island connection by private boats to promote tourism and demonstrate the potential of a more direct transportation network serving the Southern Gulf Islands.

There is a Transportation Commission on SSI which is funded through the SSI Community Transit and Community Transportation services. The SSI Community Transit service provides a public passenger transportation system. The costs are shared between the CRD and BC Transit. The SSI Community Transportation service provides transportation studies, sidewalks, traffic calming, and demand management programs. The Transportation Commission provides advice to the Electoral Area Director and the Regional Board with respect to the organization and conduct of transit and transportation services within the Service Area.

There have been a number of reports developed to document and analyse the various initiatives and transportation options on the Southern Gulf Islands. These reports have been summarized and are provided in Appendix 1. The full reports have been provided previously and are available by request.

## **BC Transit**

As previously reported to the EAC, CRD staff met with BC Transit staff on June 22, 2018 to discuss alternative methods of delivering transportation services to SGI. Key actions from the meeting included:

- BC Transit staff acknowledged the concept for an integrated transit service for SSI/SGI connecting with Sidney had merit.
- BC Transit will consider what is required to do a refresh of the 2014 feasibility study and expand it to include water-based passenger service.
- BC Transit will seek clarity/confirmation as to whether there may be any concerns or complicating factors from a legislative interpretation in introducing a water-based passenger service.
- CRD staff will provide BC Transit staff with information to assist in developing the Terms of Reference for a refreshed feasibility study.
- Prior to proposing any changes to existing or new establishing bylaws that would enable a transportation service, CRD staff will prepare a report to be circulated to stakeholders (applicable Commissions and Committees) outlining options, including service and funding implications.

At the January 9, 2019 EAC meeting, the committee received a verbal update that discussions with BC Transit have not generated uptake on the proposal to explore a broader definition of transit to include inter-island ferry transportation, but it was clarified if inter-island ferries were defined as transit they could be eligible for a transit subsidy under the province.

Since that time, BC Transit has updated its 2014 report, "Southern Gulf Islands Service Discussion Document." A summary of this report is included in the appendix. Highlights include:

- 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 Emission savings compared with single occupancy vehicles.
- 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.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

### **Alternative 1:**

That the Electoral Areas Committee recommend to the Regional Board:

1. That staff consult with community groups, BC Transit, and BC ferries to define a service model that would best serve the transportation needs of the Southern Gulf Islands.
2. That staff consult with the community bus service providers within the Southern Gulf Islands to determine operating requirements, costs, and service levels to support a CRD transportation service for the Southern Gulf Islands.
3. That staff include the establishment of an SGI transportation service in service and budget planning for 2020.

### **Alternative 2:**

That the Electoral Areas Committee recommend to the Regional Board:

That staff defer any further work on this initiative until new project funding is approved.

## **DISCUSSION**

The studies referenced by this report demonstrate dedication and capacity within the SGI communities for community based transportation initiatives in the Southern Gulf Islands. These studies also reveal the difficulty of sustainable funding for alternative transportation modes on the islands. Even without a detailed feasibility study, it is clear that due to the dispersed geography and low populations of the Southern Gulf Islands, there are real challenges to expanding sustainable transportation services for the islands. The Islands Trust Act mandates the islands be preserved and protected for all British Columbians. Indeed, while the resident communities of the SGI are small, the populations of the islands can more than triple on a seasonal basis when visitors come to enjoy the beauty of the islands. In the summer, BC Ferries exceed capacity and the roads can be overwhelmed with cars. Servicing the Southern Gulf Islands with low carbon and alternative transportation options should continue to be advanced as a collective responsibility. The transportation needs of the Southern Gulf Islands would benefit from dedicated collaboration towards partnerships between BC Ferries, BC Transit, and the CRD.

At this time there is no SGI Transportation Service to support the request to create a Transportation Commission. Prior to proposing any changes to existing or new establishing bylaws that would enable a transportation service for the Southern Gulf Islands, there is a need for a feasibility study that outlines detailed options, including service and funding implications. The

CRD's service establishment process requires this feasibility study to include a business case for the service.

### **CRD Service Establishment Process**

Due diligence is required when considering requests for new service establishment to ensure the following key requirements are met:

- A purpose that aligns with the CRD's mandate;
- A service area that specifies who will benefit from and pay for the service;
- Demonstrated financial viability of the service's ability to cover all direct and overhead costs;
- Legislative authority for the service;
- Community support.

The CRD process for service establishment must follow a number of steps:

1. New service is requested by the EAC and Board;
2. Staff conduct preliminary viability analysis;
3. Electoral Areas Committee (as the relevant Board Standing Committee) consideration and approval to prepare a business case. The business case should include:
  - a. Cost of the service;
  - b. Ratepayer impact;
  - c. Electoral approval method;
  - d. Implementation schedule;
4. Subject to CRD Board approval, the Corporate Officer oversees the Service Establishment process inclusive of Board, Electorate, Municipal Inspector and any other approvals as per the LGA.
  - a. Draft bylaw
  - b. Draft agreements (as required)
  - c. Submit to the Board (1st,2nd,3rd reading)
  - d. Seek Elector Consent and Inspector of Municipalities approval
5. If all required approvals are obtained, the CRD Board adopts the bylaw and establishes the service.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Currently, there is no identified funding allocated to support a transportation feasibility study in the current SGI Administration budget. With EAC direction, however, CRD staff can initiate the process towards approval to create a business case that could be advanced in the 2020 fiscal year.

The following next steps are recommended:

1. Staff further consult with community groups, BC Transit, and BC ferries to define a service model that would best serve the transportation needs of the Southern Gulf Islands.
2. Define operating requirements of each island's community bus and shuttle services as a first step towards enabling consideration of broader transportation services (such as inter-island water transport, ride sharing options, or electrical vehicle car share co-operatives).
3. Staff prepare a preliminary viability analysis;
4. EAC and Board considers the preliminary viability analysis and give direction to prepare a business case for service establishment through the 2020 service planning and budget process.

## **CONCLUSION**

The SGI is underserved by transportation options that would enable a reduction of vehicular traffic and resulting greenhouse gas emissions. The communities of the SGI have an economic and social need for better connection between their islands. Providing a transportation service to meet these needs requires creativity and a sustainable funding model. For the CRD to establish a Transportation Commission, it would need to first establish a Transportation Service. More specific consultation and analysis is needed to support the CRD's consideration of establishing a Transportation Service for the Southern Gulf Islands.

## **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

That the Electoral Areas Committee recommend to the Regional Board:

1. That staff consult with community groups, BC Transit, and BC ferries to define a service model that would best serve the transportation needs of the Southern Gulf Islands.
2. That staff consult with the community bus service providers within the Southern Gulf Islands to determine operating requirements, costs, and service levels to support a CRD transportation service for the Southern Gulf Islands.
3. That staff include the establishment of an SGI transportation service in service and budget planning for 2020.

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WRITERS INITIALS:js

Appendices:

1. Summary of Transportation Reports for the Southern Gulf Islands