

REPORT TO THE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 2021

SUBJECT Identification of Regional Transportation Priorities

ISSUE SUMMARY

To review municipal, electoral area and partner agency input on regional transportation priorities, and to set priorities and direct next steps based on a consideration of policy context and regional transportation and climate action needs.

BACKGROUND

On December 9, 2020, the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board directed staff to work with municipalities, electoral areas and agency partners to develop a list of regional transportation priorities, informed by the CRD's declaration of a climate emergency, and report back to the Board for prioritization. The Board also directed staff to consider options to improve coordination and governance for transportation.

In directing this work, the Board confirmed three core transportation issues affecting the region:

1. **Congestion:** Traffic congestion in the AM and PM peak periods increases travel time and decreases residents' quality of life.
2. **Mode Share:** The regional road network is largely built out, constraining infrastructure solutions because of cost and geography; as a result, there is a need to focus on solutions that shift mode share.
3. **Climate Change:** Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the region and with the declaration of a climate emergency, the region needs to act by substantially reducing GHG emissions from transportation.

As reported to the Board on March 10, 2021 the 2014 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) sets out a framework for addressing the above issues. The RTP identifies a multi-modal transportation network and eight outcomes for regional transportation. The RTP catalyzed the development of municipal level transportation plans and has supported the integration of multi-modal facilities in key infrastructure projects.

Full realization of the multi-modal transportation network will require additional infrastructure investments and a concerted effort to direct growth to designated centres and corridors. The development of travel demand management policies and programs is also needed to support mode shift. As noted in the December 9, 2020 staff report, there are four key implementation gaps that need to be resolved in order to progress action on regional transportation issues:

1. Develop a list of agreed-upon regional priorities to further catalyze action and attract funding;
2. Identify an agency that can act as a champion for regional priorities;
3. Incentivize regional prioritization of infrastructure projects through new funding sources; and,
4. Based on the agreed-upon priorities, identify whether a formal coordination or governance mechanism is needed to consider regional impacts of local or agency transportation decisions.

Priority Identification Process

Per Board direction, CRD staff worked collaboratively with staff from the following partners having jurisdiction over a transportation function to prepare a list of regional transportation priorities:

- 13 CRD municipalities
- 3 CRD Electoral Areas
- BC Transit
- Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI)
- BC Ferries
- Island Corridor Foundation

Partners were asked to identify their top three to four regional transportation priorities and assign points to indicate the relative level of importance *for their own respective priorities*. In collaboration with partners, CRD staff confirmed that priority areas accurately reflect all input. The summary of weighted partner input and a description of the priority identification process is available in Appendix A.

Key Findings

Partner input reveals several key themes to consider when reviewing the draft list of priority areas:

1. Two transportation priorities received broad levels of regional support – BC Transit's RapidBus initiative and active transportation / regional trails.
2. All other transportation priorities received varying levels of sub-regional support, reflecting the different needs of communities across the region; rural and remote communities require different solutions than the urban core and more densely populated centres.
3. Partners clearly identified that their internal point allocation was intentional to drive focus on the transportation priorities of most significance to them.
4. Partners noted that they support areas to which they did not allocate points, indicating some priorities have broader levels of support than the summary suggests.

Priority Areas

Given the different transportation needs of communities across the region, consideration of sub-regional priorities will build trust and consensus.

Staff have prepared a draft list of priority areas that seeks a viable path forward to resolve regional transportation issues and address implementation gaps. The proposed approach categorizes priority areas into the three types of action that will advance regional and sub-regional priorities, as shown below.

1. **Advocacy:** Priority areas related to multi-modal infrastructure investments garner cross-regional support or respond to sub-regional needs. These priority areas require action by agency partners (i.e., MoTI and BC Transit) and the CRD role is to advocate for the region's fair share of these investments.
 - **RapidBus (Bus Mass Transit):** Accelerate RapidBus Implementation.
 - **Highway Safety Improvements:** Advance highway projects that focus on multi-modal infrastructure and safety.
 - **SSI / SGI Connectivity:** Seek multi-modal and safety improvements to enhance connectivity to Salt Spring Island (SSI) and the Southern Gulf Islands (SGI).
 - **Transit – General:** Improve local transit service in rural areas.

2. **Action:** Several priority areas require regional direction or local action to implement, and all but active transportation reflect the sub-regional variations in priorities. The CRD role is to act where it has authority, coordinate where needed, and set direction on matters that are currently not the responsibility of any partner.
 - **Active Transportation:** Complete the regional trail network and seek dedicated active transportation funding.
 - **TDM:** Undertake transportation demand management (TDM) policy and programming.
 - **Safety Policy:** Develop and implement a “Vision Zero” policy approach that aims to keep all road users safe from the risk of being seriously injured or killed on the road network.
 - **Strengthen Land Use:** Continue to implement the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) Settlement Concept by directing growth to places that encourage walking, cycling and efficient use of public transit
 - **Parking and Access Upgrades:** Improve access to transit park-n-rides and parks.
3. **Pivot:** A few priority areas require careful consideration of context. These priority areas could be challenging for the region to advance successfully in the short- to medium-term given existing senior government policy direction, current context and costs, and could detract from advancing other priorities. The CRD role is to support a balanced consideration of needs before advancing this work.
 - **Governance:** Consider initiating a process to change governance and/or authorities once the region has been able to evaluate the success of prioritization.
 - **Light Rail Link and Westshore Passenger Ferry:** Consider taking action on these alternative mass transit approaches once ridership capacity can accommodate both bus rapid transit and light rail and / or passenger ferry.

The above approach balances the distinct needs of the region and focuses on actions that can address transportation issues in the short-term. Moving forward, this approach allows for priorities to be updated as they are successfully delivered. High-level implementation actions and fact sheets that describe each priority area are provided in Appendix B.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Transportation Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

- 1) That the categorized priority areas listed in Appendix A be confirmed;
- 2) That the list of confirmed regional transportation priority areas be shared with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, all CRD municipalities, CRD electoral areas and agency partners; and
- 3) That staff be directed to develop implementation strategies for each of the approved transportation priority areas and report back to the Board on the findings, including a consideration of cooperation mechanisms.

Alternative 2

That the Identification of Regional Transportation Priorities report be referred back to staff for additional information based on Transportation Committee direction.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental & Climate Implications

The CRD Board has declared a climate emergency. Partners clearly identified the importance of taking action to mitigate the effects of climate change throughout priority identification. All priorities have been considered against climate criteria, informed by senior government policy frameworks. These policy frameworks prioritize increasing the number of zero-emission vehicles available for purchase, greening fuel sources and improving multi-modal transportation. The priority areas align to this policy framework, as summarized in Appendix C.

From a regional transportation perspective, priority areas focus on improving multi-modal transportation. Jurisdictions such as BC Transit and BC Ferries have mandate direction to pursue fleet greening through electrification or use of alternate fuel. The CRD's Climate Action Service is investigating how to support priorities related zero-emission vehicles from a community-focused perspective and greening the CRD fleet from a corporate-focused perspective. While these actions help reduce GHG emissions, they will not address the transportation problems of congestion and mode shift.

Intergovernmental Implications

Responsibility for transportation policy, decision making and operations is shared across a number of jurisdictions, each with authority for different functional aspects of the transportation system. Given this context, a regional approach to transportation requires significant and ongoing collaboration to balance the needs of local, regional and higher levels of government. See Appendix D for a summary of regional priorities by transportation function.

Prior to this priority setting process most attention has been focused on the development of an authority to lead transportation decisions in the region. The region has not been able to reach consensus on the establishment of such an authority. Lessons learned from this experience is that municipalities and the electoral areas need assurance that they will not lose control over localized transportation decisions and that the potential for cost impacts are mitigated. Further, governance reviews and correspondence with the Province clearly state that the region must first establish agreed-upon transportation priorities before any consideration is given to a change in authorities. Governance did not receive high levels of partner support through this process.

Given the lessons learned and the current context, staff suggest:

1. Explore cooperation or governance mechanisms as an output of the prioritization process, rather than a priority in itself. This work could be undertaken, at a conceptual level, should staff be directed to report back on implementation strategies. Staff will be better able to provide meaningful input for consideration with a confirmed list of priorities.
2. Acknowledge that transportation solutions vary by sub-region, driven by the different needs of communities across the region. The proposed categories attempt to provide a path to success. If the region cannot reconcile sub-regional differences, any viable governance mechanism would need to significantly alter existing local government authorities to make a meaningful difference in transportation decision making.

Confirmation of regional transportation priorities follows from the 2020 release of the South Island Transportation Strategy (SITS). The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure has indicated that the findings of the regional prioritization work will help inform ongoing priority setting and resource allocations within MoTI.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

A mode share target of 42% is identified in the RGS. Land use patterns that support transit and active transportation – the densification designated centres and corridors – are needed to achieve mode share and climate change targets. The RGS sets out a settlement concept in Map 3(b) and policies to support such land use patterns.

The need for integrated land use and transportation was identified as a priority area by the region's two most populous municipalities. Generally local official community plans and transportation plans reflect the need for this integration. The 2020 RGS Indicators Report highlights that recent growth in the region has largely gone to parts of the region that do not have a high active transportation and transit mode share. Realizing the desired land use patterns set out in policy requires that growth be directed to designated locations and on-going monitoring to track progress against objectives.

Social Implications

A multi-modal transportation network supports equitable access to transportation options across the region. Different approaches, from infrastructure investment to TDM, is critical to delivering affordable and readily available transportation options. The regional priority areas reflect the needs of the people who live in the communities that make up the region.

Financial Implications

The CRD does not requisition any dedicated funding towards transportation other than for regional trails, regional information services and the Traffic Safety Commission.

Achieving the targeted mode share shift will require the investment of resources across all levels of government, as well as a strong commitment to change in terms of status quo. Some of the priority areas call on MoTI and BC Transit to fund significant infrastructure projects, while other priority areas require the identification of funding sources to drive regional and local action. The development of a funding strategy could be undertaken should staff be directed to report back on implementation strategies.

Within its authority for regional trails, the CRD would need to dedicate more or reallocate existing staff and financial resources to fast track improvements on the regional trail network and associated parking infrastructure. Within its authority for regional transportation planning, the CRD would need to adjust work planning to develop implementation strategies for each of the priorities.

Service Delivery Implications

The CRD has the service authority to manage regional trails, collect and analyze transportation data and collaborate with partners to plan for the region's transportation needs including the identification of regional priorities. The CRD does not have a mandate to operate transit, ferries or rail, build road infrastructure, prioritize regional grant applications or dictate road standards. No single agency has the responsibility or direction to develop TDM policies and programs, including incentives, or safety policy. The CRD would need to expand its transportation service function to deliver regional policies and programs related to TDM or safety.

As a regional government, the CRD Board is in a unique position to:

1. Advocate for regional priorities that would achieve objectives in its regional plans such as the RGS and the RTP; and
2. Develop and possibly implement region-wide TDM and safety policy.

The CRD can be most effective at addressing these gaps by undertaking strategic advocacy only once priorities have been confirmed, and driving regional action in areas where there is an agreed-upon need for regional action.

The RTP established mode share targets for the region at 15% for cycling, 15% for walking and 12% for transit. This total 42% target was seen as being ambitious. Since the adoption of these mode share targets and pre-pandemic, BC Transit increased its mode share target to 15%.

The region's mode share is currently 26.6%. The status quo will not deliver these mode share targets for several generations. Achieving these targets will require substantial investment and commitment to change across all priority areas. It should be noted that the full long term impacts of the pandemic on travel behavior and public transportation services are not yet fully understood. It is expected that it will take considerable effort and time to bring transit ridership back to pre-pandemic levels let alone surpass it. As such it is unlikely that mode share increases to transit will be seen in the short to medium term.

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

The 2019-2022 Board priorities identify two priority transportation initiatives:

1. Work with government/community partners to increase use of public transit, walking and cycling and to plan for and deliver an effective, long-term regional multi-modal transportation system.
2. Protect the E&N Corridor as a transportation corridor and participate in a provincial working group to come to agreement on the future use of the E&N corridor.

Both of the above Board priorities have informed the prioritization process.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

Identification of the regional transportation priorities was largely based on priorities identified in existing plans, strategies and bylaws at local, regional and provincial levels. See Appendix C for additional policy context. At the regional level, priorities align well with the RGS, RTP and the Regional Trails Management Plan. The priorities also align to plans and policies from other agencies and senior governments, including the BC Transit Future Plan, BC Transit's RapidBus Strategy, SITS and CleanBC.

CONCLUSION

Confirmation of regional transportation priority areas would be the first step to resolving a number of implementation gaps in the region. This would help all partners address transportation problems related to congestion and mode shift. The proposed list of transportation priority areas reflects input from partners around the region, organized by the type of action required for implementation. Once priorities are confirmed, CRD staff can inform partners and report back to the Board on implementation strategies. Taking action on these priorities will continue to require significant and ongoing coordination, in which the CRD plays a critical role.

RECOMMENDATION

The Transportation Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

1. That the categorized priority areas listed in Appendix A be confirmed;
2. That the list of confirmed regional transportation priority areas be shared with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, all CRD municipalities, CRD electoral areas and agency partners; and
3. That staff be directed to develop implementation strategies for each of the approved transportation priority areas and report back to the Board on the findings, including a consideration of cooperation mechanisms.

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ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: Summary of Partner Input and Priority Setting Process
Appendix B: Regional Transportation Priority Areas
Appendix C: Transportation and Climate Action Policy Context
Appendix D: Summary of Regional Priorities by Transportation Function