

July 28, 2020, Committee of the Whole- Official Community Plan Process

Reporters: Hester Vair, Susan Belford

Agenda Item: BC Transit - Sooke Local Area Transit Plan

Presenters: Lisa Trotter and Adriana McMullen, BC Transit

Quick Summary

The SLATP (Sooke Local Area Transit Plan) looks good. It addresses the need for increased service to Langford and into Victoria, as well as substantially improving local and rural service. The only problem that I can see is that the time frames suggested may be too lengthy given the anticipated growth rate of the Sooke population. Short-term is defined as 1-4 years and medium-term as 3-7 years, and the plan says that by 2026 (within the medium-term time frame) the growth in Sooke expected to be similar to the District of Colwood. The proposed additions to Sooke transit would be excellent if they could happen now, but if growth continues there may be only a short period of time when service is sufficient to make transit more appealing than single-occupancy cars.

One unanticipated fly in the ointment is the effect of COVID on public transportation. Ridership is way down and significant revenue has been lost. Maja Tait asked the presenters from BC Transit if the revenue losses would delay the changes - the answer is yes. Pre-covid there was an intention to have new buses working immediately, but with revenue and ridership down that move has been put off and councillors were told that "it is premature to speculate on dates". The SLATP has not been endorsed by the Transit Commission.

Some Details of the Plan

Some of the factors considered in the analysis of Sooke's transit needs are: future growth expectations that by 2026 Sooke will have the population of the District of Colwood; Sooke community has a high number of transit users, (regionally 12.5% of trips are by transit). Mode share during rush hour in 2017 showed 22% of trips from Sooke were by Transit. This is comparable to Esquimalt. The bus route into Victoria does not have the capacity to meet the need; and the local bus routes are woefully inadequate.

The plan is to add to the capacity of the Sooke-Victoria route, adding 4 new weekday roundtrips in the short-term, and an additional 4 in the medium-term. There will also be expansion in the Sooke-Langford route, adding earlier trips on the weekend, and a later Sunday night trip.

Two rural transit routes are also planned, one out to East Sooke via Beecher Bay and one in the Otter Point / Kemp Lake. This is slated for short-term action; weekend service and increased weekday service would be added to these in the medium-term.

Three local routes will also be added, each with weekday hourly service: one covering Sunriver & Billings Spit; one along Grant Road and out to Wiffin Spit, and a third around Sooke core and into Broomhill. The first two of these new routes are slated for short-term action, with weekend service added in the medium-term, defined as 1-4 years, and the third as medium-term action, defined as 3-7 years.