Public Transit on Salt Spring Island

Introducing public transit on Salt Spring Island has been a great success, with ridership and revenue higher than anticipated.

Initiated by the Capital Regional District and BC Transit, Salt Spring Island bus service will reduce automobile dependency and reduce GHG emissions. Additionally, this service will provide transportation access to residents who do not drive, including students, the elderly and disabled.

Engagement and Governance
This initiative is a partnership of the Capital Regional District (CRD) and BC Transit, who provides a portion of the funding. Ganges Faerie Mini-shuttle operates the system. The transit service was established following feasibility studies and public consultation.

Policy Framework
On July 11, 2007 the Capital Regional District Board approved a bylaw establishing a community transit and transportation service on Salt Spring Island. See the bylaw at: CRD Bylaw No. 3438 A companion bylaw to establish the advisory Salt Spring Island Community Transit and Transportation Commission, was adopted on August 8, 2007. See the bylaw at: CRD Bylaw No. 3450

Implementation
On November 27, 2007, a Public Transit Open House was held to give residents a chance to learn about the proposed transit system. Service began on January 7, 2008 with two 20 passenger mini-buses. The routes are tailored to local needs, linking residents to the island ferry terminals and community facilities. Although the buses operate on fixed routes and schedules, drivers will detour to pick-up and drop-off passengers where and when possible. Service levels and fares were established based on consultation and input from Island residents.

The budget for the first year of operation is $180,000, with 15% of this to come from the fare box. The balance comes from local service tax and core funding provided by BC Transit.

Barriers and Breakthroughs
The actual number of transit trips is 2.6 times, and the fare revenue three times, the projections for the first year of operation.

This is not the first time that Salt Spring Island has tried to develop a public transit service. Past efforts were not successful. Creating awareness about the system, online and through the open house, was very important.

Since the introduction of the buses in early January 2008, the level of service has increased on the four initial routes and an additional route (to Fernwood Village) has been added. Maintaining service and developing the new route required working with the operator to maximize the utilization of the two buses.
Results

Ridership for the service has greatly exceeded expectations, with the number of trips an estimated 2.6 times more than originally projected. The estimated annual fare revenue for 2008 is about three times the projected revenue of $23,000. Actual GHG emission reductions resulting from the service have not yet been calculated. However, it is reasonable to suggest that they will be significant. Using a conservative assumption that 75% of the trips taken on the bus would have otherwise been taken in another vehicle, the bus service has replaced about 31,000 auto trips.

Other benefits that Salt Spring Island residents expect to gain from the bus service include:

- Better access for those without vehicles to services and shopping on the island
- Reduced parking demand in the villages, particularly in the busy summer months and on “Saturday Market” day
- Reduced summer congestion at ferry terminals, particularly Fulford Harbour
- New jobs created for four part-time drivers and a full-time position for the contractor.

For more information on these transit and transportation services visit the Salt Spring Island Electoral Area webpage.

Contact: Director, Capital Regional District, Salt Spring Island

Related tools:
- Community Car Share Program
- Transportation Plans