



MAYOR'S OFFICE

256174

VICTORIA, B.C.

November 24, 2016

Her Worship
Mayor Lisa Helps
City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria BC V8W 1P6

Reference: 256174

Dear Mayor Helps:

Re: Rapid Transit and Priority Bus Lanes

Thank you for your letters regarding bus priority lanes along the Trans-Canada Highway and your support for the request made by the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (VRTC) to amend the Motor Fuel Tax Act to fund BC Transit improvements. I apologize for the delay in my response.

In March 2015, the ministry made a commitment in our ten-year transportation plan, BC on the Move, to reduce congestion and improve commuter mobility along Highway 1 between Langford and Victoria. Construction of the McKenzie Interchange Project began this fall, with anticipated completion in 2018. As you know, this project will include shoulder bus lanes, traffic signal priority and strong cycling and pedestrian connections to transit. I anticipate that these dedicated bus lanes will help improve traffic flow in the region and encourage even more transit ridership.

During the first phase of public consultation for the McKenzie Interchange Project, we heard that accommodating transit was a priority for the travelling public. The construction of an additional northbound lane along Douglas Street between Tolmie Avenue and Saanich Road dedicated to buses will coordinate with transit improvements that will be constructed as part of the McKenzie Interchange Project, with the goal of improving the effectiveness of both projects. Construction for this work will begin this fall.

Additionally, I have recently announced that design work will also begin this fall on extending the northbound bus lane on Douglas Street between Saanich and the McKenzie Interchange Project limit. This work is intended to provide BC Transit with a dedicated bus lane, allowing them to bypass queues of vehicles and provide faster and more reliable service for their users.

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Our upcoming work is consistent with the Transit Future Plan and the bus priority investments made on the City of Victoria's portion of Douglas Street. The Ministry recognizes that the Plan identifies the need for the development of a rapid transit connection between downtown Victoria and the Westshore in order to effectively move people to their desired destinations and mitigate the effects of increasing congestion in the region. This rapid transit connection will take several steps to achieve, with investments in transit infrastructure and service phased over the next several years.

I support the important role of transit in connecting the Westshore and downtown Victoria. Traffic volumes along Highway 1 have grown significantly in recent years, and these volumes are expected to grow. At present, 40 per cent of commuters use public transit during peak periods in the downtown core; however, buses represent only three per cent of traffic on the road, making them a very efficient way to get travelers to their destinations. As opportunities arise, we look forward to continuing to work with our transit partners in efforts to enhance transit service between the Westshore and downtown Victoria.

Regarding the VRTC's request, the Capital Region has experienced significant transit growth, and the VRTC has indicated that an increase in gas tax is the only way it can pay for the crucial transit service and expansions that Victoria needs. New funding will mean an increase in HandyDART hours, more buses on the road, fewer pass-ups and more options to encourage people to take public transit.

Each year, the Minister of Finance reviews provincial taxes, including the dedicated motor fuel tax in the Capital Region and the South Coast British Columbia transportation service region, in preparation of the annual provincial budget. The VRTC's request to amend the Motor Fuel Tax Act to fund BC Transit improvements will be considered as part of this process.

As you will have heard, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, along with Premier Christy Clark, announced an agreement that will result in more than \$900 million being invested – by the Government of Canada, British Columbia and municipalities – in public transit projects across the province. \$90 million of the federal funding is allocated to support BC Transit systems over the next three years.

I am pleased at the additional support this funding represents for projects planned across Greater Victoria, which will reduce the region's required financial contribution for those investments. The provincial government will work with the VRTC to determine how the new funding will help offset costs to the region and affect its plans for the future.

Thank you again for taking the time to write.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Todd G. Stone', with a stylized, cursive script.

Todd G. Stone
Minister