



# More Affordable Housing Through Strategic Investments in Urban Transit

Mayors' Council Submission to the Government of Canada  
in Advance of the 2024-25 Budget

November 23, 2023



## RECOMMENDATIONS

As the Government of Canada prepares its 2024-25 Budget, Metro Vancouver's TransLink Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation asks that the Government:

1. **Support the building of three new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects in the region by committing to work in a formal partnership with the Province of British Columbia and TransLink to complete project planning and funding** so that procurement can begin in late-2025 and service by 2027. Initial cost estimates for the on-road infrastructure required to deliver BRT service on these three corridors are **\$250-\$300 million each** (to be confirmed in final business cases in early 2025), with additional funding also needed to expand TransLink's bus fleet and associated maintenance facilities (see recommendation #2 below). The first three BRT corridors to begin construction, out of the nine proposed in the region's transit and transportation expansion plan, *Access for Everyone*, are:
  - Park Royal (North Shore) to Metrotown (Burnaby)
  - Langley to Maple Ridge along 200<sup>th</sup> Ave, the Golden Ears Bridge and Lougheed Highway
  - Surrey to White Rock along King George Boulevard
  
2. **Commit new capital funding by mid-2024 from the Permanent Transit Fund to support the immediate delivery of the first phase of the *Access for Everyone* Plan** that will begin alleviating overcrowding as soon as possible, ready the system for BRT, and enable substantial service expansion in the next several years with investments to:
  - a. **Expand TransLink's Bus Fleet (\$375 million):** To enable peak period bus expansion by 2027 and support Bus Rapid Transit delivery. Long procurement timelines require early investment decisions so that expansion capacity is available before overcrowding hits crisis levels in the face of record-setting population growth.
  - b. **Add Bus Depot Capacity (\$1.4 billion):** TransLink's ability to expand bus service and deliver BRT are constrained by bus storage. New depots are required to deliver BRT and other bus service expansion. Sites must be confirmed to begin work on depot expansion. In addition, considerable



investment is required to transform TransLink's current bus fleet and depots in order to store, charge, and maintain a zero-emissions bus fleet.

- c. **Deliver Active Transportation & Road Safety Projects (\$70 million):** Investment in active transportation and road safety in the Metro Vancouver region will support the achievement of the Province of BC's *Clean Transportation Action Plan* and *Move Commute Connect* strategy that aim to double active transportation trips and move toward Vision Zero through reducing road-related fatalities and serious injuries. The *Access for Everyone* plan commits to significant investment in protected active transportation infrastructure and road safety infrastructure improvements across Metro Vancouver, which are estimated to cost around \$300M per year.
- d. **Initiate the Golden Ears Way BRT-readiness and goods-movement project (\$120 million):** Since toll removal on the Golden Ears Bridge in 2017, the Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows area has experienced traffic volume changes and industrial growth along the Golden Ears Way corridor. There is increased demand on the corridor due to the growth of the surrounding areas which includes significant industrial growth. This project identifies opportunities for infrastructure modifications to increase the reliability of the corridor to support future travel patterns. The proposed infrastructure modifications would enable BRT in this corridor (one of the first three priority BRT corridors) and enable important economic development opportunities for Katzie First Nation.

3. **Join the working group between the Province of British Columbia and TransLink which launched in mid-2022 to return TransLink to long-term financial sustainability** by avoiding overreliance on regressive sources such as transit fares and property taxes, and that grows with the population and economy. A new funding model will ensure that TransLink regains long-term financial sustainability to deliver existing transit service and has access to new revenues required to expand service to support record-setting population growth, affordable housing development, GHG emission reduction targets and to help to reduce household transportation costs and congestion on the regional road network.

We propose that the Government of Canada's contributions to a new transit funding model include:

- a. Complete the **program design and intake process of the new Permanent Transit Fund (PTF)** by May 2024 so that TransLink can confirm and begin



- planning its PTF funding allocation in a mid-2024 Investment Plan (see recommendation #2 above).
- b. Add an **annual cost escalator of at least 5% to the PTF** so that its allocation grows in line with TransLink's other major revenue sources and increasing demands on the transit system due to population and economic growth.
  - c. Work with the Province of British Columbia to **expand transit fare discounts or refundable transit pass tax rebates for lower-income residents** to offset the regressive impacts of future fare increases on those who can least afford it.

## Introduction

In Canada's big cities, public transit is a basic utility, like electricity, drinking water or roads – an essential service that keeps our cities moving, working and successful. Transit services must be provided at the levels and quality required to meet the mobility needs of residents and contribute to a well-functioning urban transportation network that enables the efficient movement of goods.

Today, transit is also playing a pivotal role in enabling the development of affordable housing, with local and provincial governments – such as in British Columbia – working together to plan for significant increases in housing densities along frequent transit corridors. This strategy is key to unlocking affordability, but the reality is that service must be frequent and reliable for residents in order to make transit-oriented development successful.

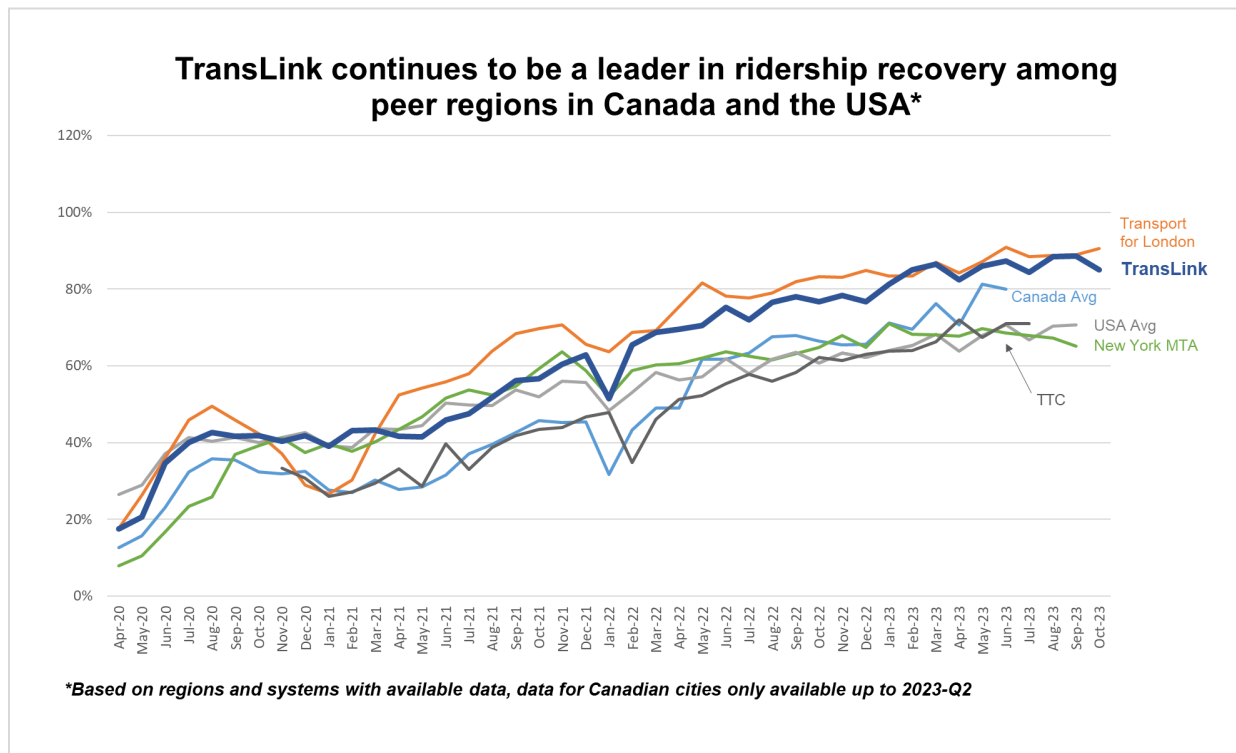
The governments of Canada and British Columbia are well aligned with municipalities in the Metro Vancouver region around our shared goals of improving affordability and reducing GHG emissions. But despite the investments our three levels of governments have made in transit in recent years, Metro Vancouver's transportation system is struggling to meet the needs of residents and businesses due to surging demand.

Our regional transit agency, TransLink, serves more than 400,000 people every day, with the system acting as the transportation backbone for 23 communities – including some of the fastest growing cities in the country.



## Growing Pressures on Transit

Coming out of the pandemic, demand for transit in Metro Vancouver has exploded, with ridership recovery surpassing all other major transit systems in Canada and the United States. In some parts of the region, ridership is 20% higher than it was in 2019, and ridership on some busy routes have more than doubled over the same period, leaving thousands of customers waiting in long line-ups to board overcrowded trains and buses.

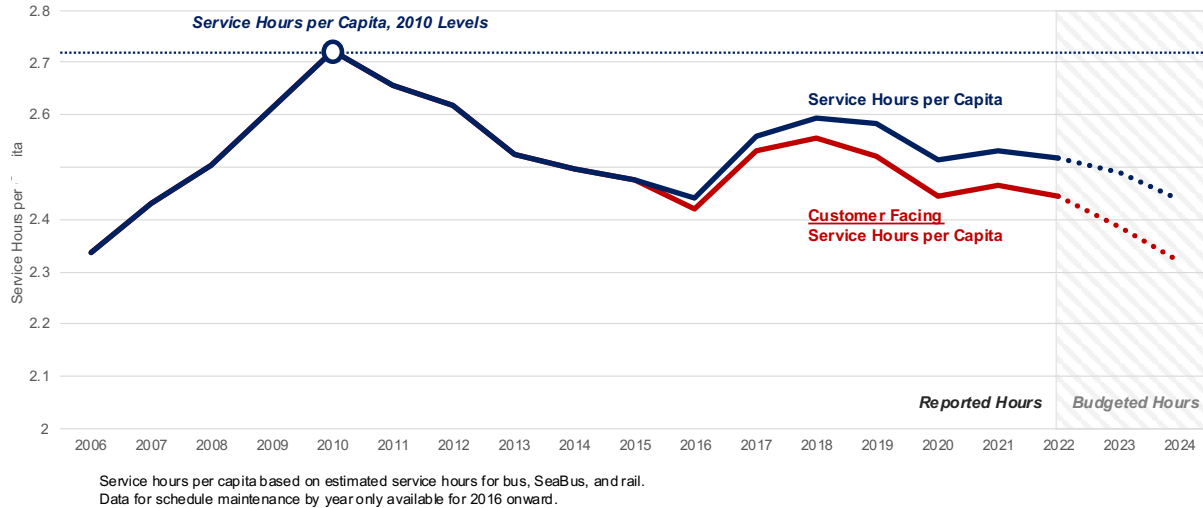


While this return to transit is welcome and encouraging, the region’s transit services are essentially frozen at 2019 levels while over the same period the region’s population has grown by almost 200,000.



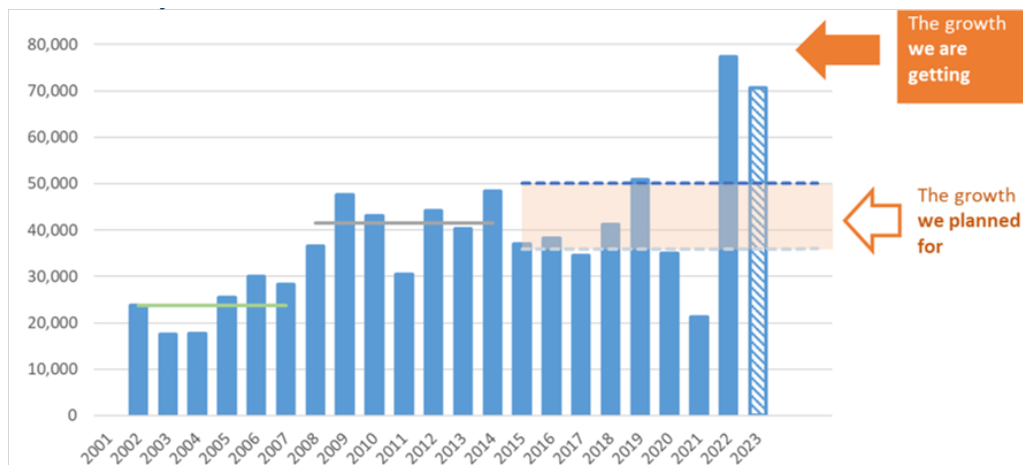
### Transit service lagging population growth

Transit service per resident is now back to where it was ten years ago. Without new investment we will fall further behind as population grows.



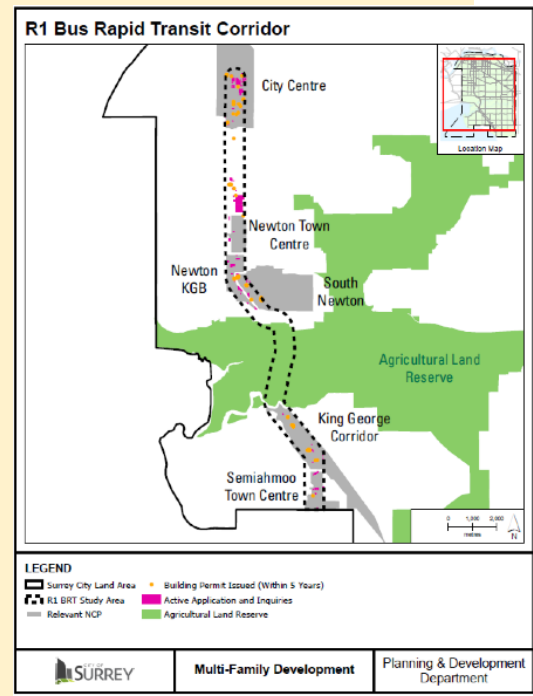
Looking ahead, federal immigration targets will contribute to growth of 50,000 to 70,000 people per year, or more than one million by 2050 – the equivalent to adding the population of the City of North Vancouver annually to our already crowded region. We must act now to ensure transit service is keeping up with this growth.

### Metro Vancouver is forecasted to grow by 50,000 new residents each year – but the last two years have seen more than 70,000 new residents.



### Case Study: Land-use planning on King George Boulevard in Surrey

The King George BRT corridor intersects six major secondary plan areas in the City of Surrey: the City Centre Plan, the Newton Town Centre Plan, the Newton-King George Boulevard Plan, the South Newton Plan, the King George Corridor Plan, and the Semiahmoo Town Centre Plan. This corridor is a prime location for multi-family development, in particularly low and high-rise apartments. In the last five years between 2019 and 2023, nearly 7,000 multi-family units were issued building permits within the BRT corridor. This accounted for 36% of the city's total multi-family unit and 44% of apartment unit issuance within the same time frame. Furthermore, based on Surrey's development application records, we can expect the level of multi-family development activity to remain high in the near future. There are currently over 21,000 multi-family units within the development application process with 5,000 units given conditional approval.



Looking beyond the short term, based on the approved land-use designations of the six major secondary plan areas, the BRT corridor still contains capacity for over 14,000 multi-family residential units that are still available for redevelopment activities that have not received development applications. There is evidence of strong interest from the development industry in these remaining areas. Within the last two years, over 120 acres of redevelopment site area have received development inquiries from the development industry.

### A New Plan for Growth and Affordability: Access for Everyone

The Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation has unanimously agreed on a plan for the new and expanded transit services we will need to accommodate population growth and put affordable housing within reach for everyone in our communities.

The *Access for Everyone* plan will reach every corner of the region, helping people get where they need to go. It takes a "bus-first" approach – doubling local bus service and building approximately 170 km of rapid transit, as well as initiating planning for additional rapid transit corridors across the region. The plan also includes investments in active



transportation and road infrastructure, with the goal of providing sustainable transportation options for everyone, no matter where they live in the region.

**The Access for Everyone Plan will:**

- More than double bus service over 2022 levels
- Add up to nine new traffic-separated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines
- Increase HandyDART service for people with disabilities by 60 per cent and provide 24-hour service
- Increase SeaBus service start and end times to match SkyTrain’s service hours
- Expand cycling and pedestrian infrastructure and make improvements to the region’s major road network
- Build the Burnaby Mountain Gondola to Simon Fraser University and extend the SkyTrain to the University of British Columbia



**Bus-based transit expansion for quick action**

TransLink plans to begin rolling out the first phase of the *Access for Everyone* plan in mid-2024, in response to increasing public demand and to ensure services will be there to support the new housing currently being built in our communities. The first phase includes three new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) routes – new technology that will provide the region’s most frequent and most reliable bus service – as well as additional buses, bus



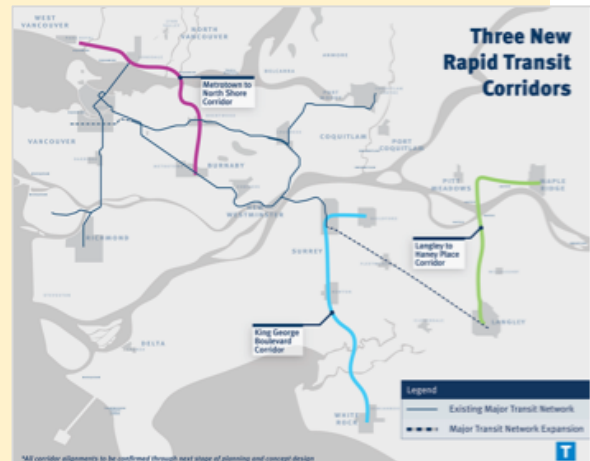


depot expansion to serve the new BRT lines and begin expanding bus service across the region again, active transportation projects and the Golden Ears Way BRT-readiness and goods-movement project.

### First steps towards Bus Rapid Transit in Metro Vancouver

Bus Rapid Transit, or BRT, is a high-frequency rapid transit service with dedicated bus lanes and rail-like stations. With up to nine BRT and RapidBus priority corridors identified in the *Access for Everyone* plan, more customers will experience the benefits of rapid transit across the region and we will support the Government of B.C.'s new transit oriented development requirements. These nine corridors include:

- King George Boulevard
- Langley – Haney Place
- Metrotown – North Shore
- Hastings Street
- Lougheed Highway
- Lynn Valley – Downtown/Lonsdale
- Marine Dr Station – 22nd Street Station
- Richmond Centre – Metrotown
- Scott Road



On November 16, 2023, the Mayors' Council announced King George Boulevard, Langley – Haney Place, and Metrotown – North

Shore as the first three corridors to advance to further planning, engagement, and implementation. The three corridors were selected based on their potential to maximize outcomes for the region (including their potential to increase ridership and improve access), future housing and development growth projections, the feasibility of implementing new transit priority infrastructure, and early support from local governments to implement infrastructure changes in their communities.

The specific alignment, roadway designs, associated costs, and timelines have not yet been determined for each of the three corridors. TransLink and local government partners will immediately begin work to develop concept designs and engage with the public on these three corridors. As these projects are currently unfunded, a business case will be developed for each corridor to be included in a future update to the Investment Plan.



## Action on Affordable Housing

The Province of B.C. recently introduced legislation to require transit oriented development (TOD) of up to 20 stories adjacent to SkyTrain and planned BRT stations as well as near important transit hubs that, province-wide, are aimed to provide up to 100,000 new homes over the next decade.

The provincial government has also announced legislation to require Metro Vancouver municipalities to allow a minimum of 4 to 6 units on all residential lands. Province-wide estimates indicate this will create 130,000 new, small-scale multi-unit homes over the next decade. Along with other legislation targeting short-term rentals and changes to local approval processes, these recent changes will transform housing development in B.C. and put the province at the forefront of the housing affordability agenda in North America. Predating these provincial actions, local governments in Metro Vancouver were following aggressive transit-oriented development plans set by the regional government that has resulted in the deliberate densification of regional lands adjacent to TransLink's transit network.

### **Case Study: Langley Township growth planning along future BRT on 200 Street**

Township of Langley Council has initiated a new 200 Street 2040 Plan. An 'overlay' plan is needed to weave together the policy directions of the Willoughby Community Plan and accompanying neighborhood plans to establish both a future vision for 200 Street as a frequent transit growth corridor with the coming Bus Rapid Transit project. The plan will guide consideration of higher densities and taller buildings, particularly around future transit stops and transfer points. The plan updates will extend 800m east and west on 200 Street from Highway 1 in the north to 64 Avenue in the south where it will interface with the Willowbrook Community Plan updates, ultimately covering over 900 acres of land. Considering the transit-oriented development focus it is anticipated that densities of over 150 units per acre will be considered, with as many as 45,000 new homes created as a result.

Taken together, these provincial and local actions have supercharged transit demand. Denser communities drive a greater shift to active transportation modes like transit, while at the same time accommodating more people and more demand on the transportation network. Transit-oriented development is a key component of the province's and region's plan to respond to the housing affordability crisis, but without federal support to help deliver additional transit, this approach will not be successful.



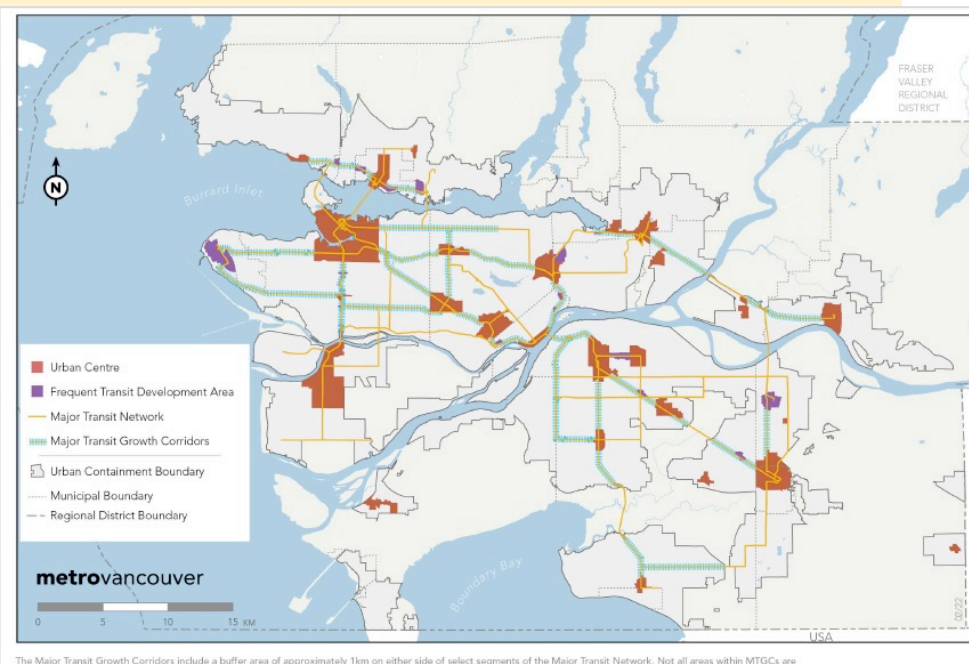
The *Access for Everyone* plan is designed to quickly expand new Bus Rapid Transit lines along which new TOD can be planned; at the same time, the plan’s target to double bus service will be an important support for the province’s efforts to densify residential areas further from the region’s key transit corridor with 4- and 6-plex zoning. Record-setting population growth adds even greater pressure to rapidly expand transit in Metro Vancouver to ensure that both current and future residents and businesses have access to transit as a basic utility and building block for high quality, affordable communities.

### Integrated regional land-use and transportation planning in Metro Vancouver

Major Transit Growth Corridors are select areas along TransLink’s Major Transit Network within which Metro Vancouver local governments, in consultation with Metro Vancouver and TransLink, have identified new Frequent Transit Development Areas. The intent of these corridors is to provide a framework for the region in an effort to support the regional planning principle of directing significant proportions of the region's growth towards Urban Centres and areas around transit.

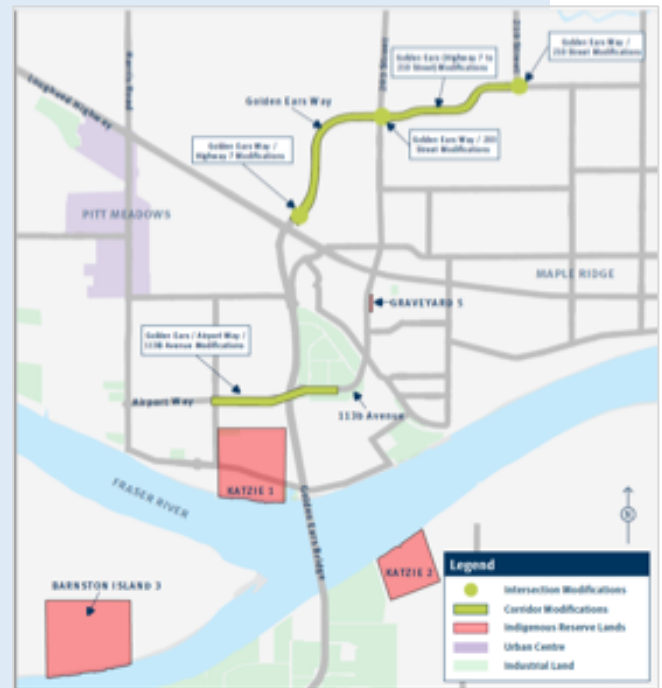
The Major Transit Growth Corridors are also a growth monitoring tool to assess performance on transit-oriented development objectives. The Major Transit Growth Corridors have been identified as good potential locations for regionally-significant levels of transit-oriented growth based on a consideration of the following principles: anchored by Urban Centres or FTDA, connected by the Major Transit Network, generally resilient to natural hazards, accessible to jobs and services, and walkable. The Regional Growth Strategy, Metro 2050, has been endorsed by all member jurisdictions and all cities in the region are now required to align their OCPs with the RGS and the Major Transit Growth Corridors.

#### Major Transit Growth Corridors and Major Transit Network



### **Case Study: Maple Ridge BRT-readiness and goods movement project on Golden Ears Way**

The area along the Golden Ears corridor has experienced travel pattern changes and industrial growth since tolls were removed on the Golden Ears Bridge (GEB) in 2017. Meanwhile, adjacent municipalities are positioning themselves as leaders in regional industrial development, with affordable land in proximity to Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, and Katzie First Nation is exploring opportunities to develop Katzie 1 reserve lands to include industrial and/or warehousing developments. This development requires access to the regional road network, specifically Golden Ears Way. TransLink is proposing five projects (three intersections and two corridors) to address key transportation issues and promote goods movement, Bus Rapid Transit, and reconciliation.



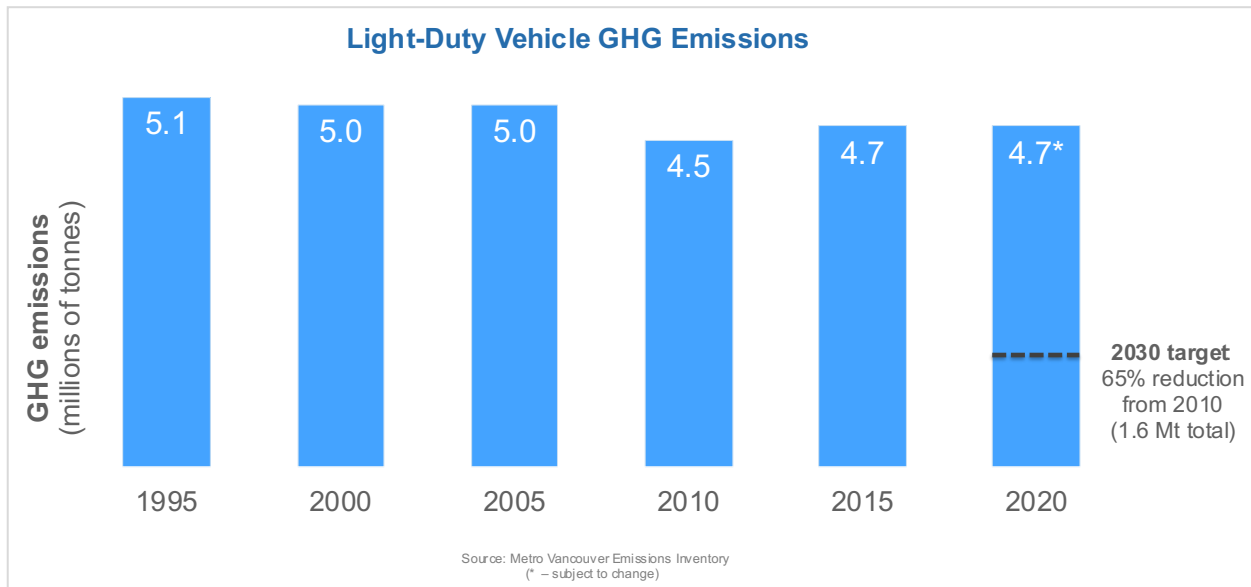
### **Climate action**

The Government of BC is striving for net-zero GHGs by 2050 in its *CleanBC Roadmap to 2030*. CleanBC targets a 40% reduction in GHGs by 2030 (relative to 2007). Metro Vancouver’s regional government and TransLink are working together to identify an implementation pathway for the region to meet its target to reduce GHG emissions from passenger cars and trucks by 65% by 2030 (relative to 2010 levels). The accelerated national and provincial transition to emissions-free and low-emission passenger cars and light trucks will help the region meet about 50–60% of its 2030 targets; the remainder will need to come from making more efficient use of existing transportation modes, including a modal shift to transit and active transportation.

Unfortunately, while regional and municipal transportation investments and strong land-use policies have laid the foundation for a relatively sustainable transportation system by



North American standards, people in the Metro Vancouver region still largely prefer to drive. Around 70% of trips in the region are made by cars and the remaining 30% by walking, biking, rolling, and transit. These trends have slowed over the last decade but fall well short of the absolute decreases required to meet national and provincial emission reduction targets.



Every year that GHG emissions are not reduced contributes to worsening climate change impacts and makes achieving the targets in the remaining time period even more difficult. Achieving the 2030 targets are critical to minimize those compounding impacts, while also setting the region on a trajectory to become carbon neutral by 2050.

The climate action plan has two additional impacts on TransLink: it requires significant capital investments to convert our buses to a zero-emission fleet, while at the same time as reducing TransLink’s fuel tax revenue as the region converts to zero-emission vehicles.

Dramatically expanding transit supply – as an alternative to driving – is a necessary precondition to achieving these targets (although not sufficient on its own to meet the targets; additional measures are required, all of which will rely on substantially increased transit). TransLink’s *Transport 2050* plan includes most of the transit expansion needed to meet the supply-side solutions required, but the pace of the expansion needed is so aggressive that even short delays in planned transit expansion will put the targets out of reach.

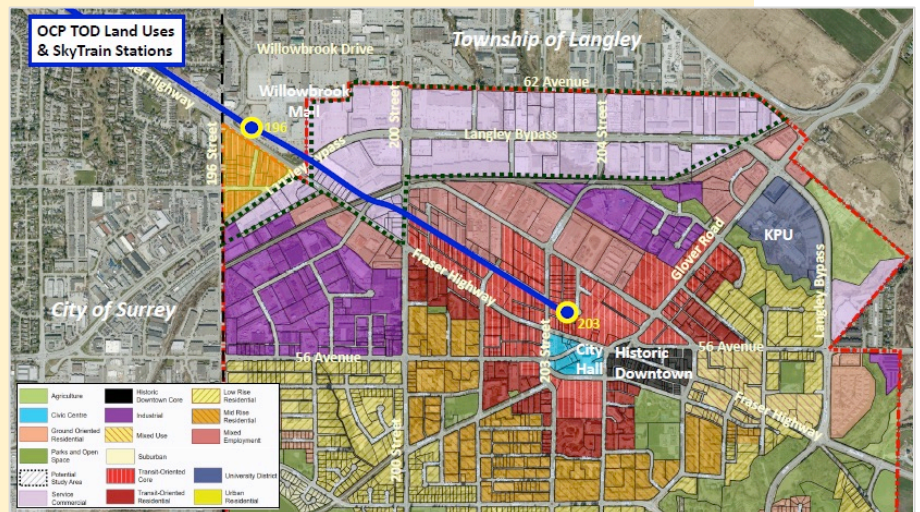




### Case Study: City of Langley readies for new SkyTrain and BRT with TOD plan

The City's new OCP (2021) is a large-scale Transit Oriented Development (TOD) land use plan around SkyTrain that closely aligns land use and growth with transit. The OCP will shape the City's future development and focus almost 90 percent of new population growth (12,000 residents by 2050) and housing units within a 5 to 10 minute walk of the new stations. The new OCP is a significant departure from the former 2005 OCP, as the 2021 OCP greatly expands TOD lands relative to the 2005 OCP and opens up large areas of redevelopable area just south of the 196 Street Station and surrounding the 203 Street Station. The TOD lands around the 203 Street Station are also directly adjacent to the proposed BRT route connecting to this Station in the heart of the City. This land use approach shows how the City is actively transforming the community around transit, and it is supported by policies and requirements that call for reduced parking requirements, pedestrian and active transportation friendly design, and community amenities to create the complete TOD package.

Forthcoming updates to the City's OCP will create over 100 acres of new TOD lands within immediate walking distance of the new BRT route and SkyTrain – which will accommodate a significant amount of much needed new housing units to further boost housing supply (and another ~7,000 more residents near rapid transit).



### Transit's Broken Funding Model

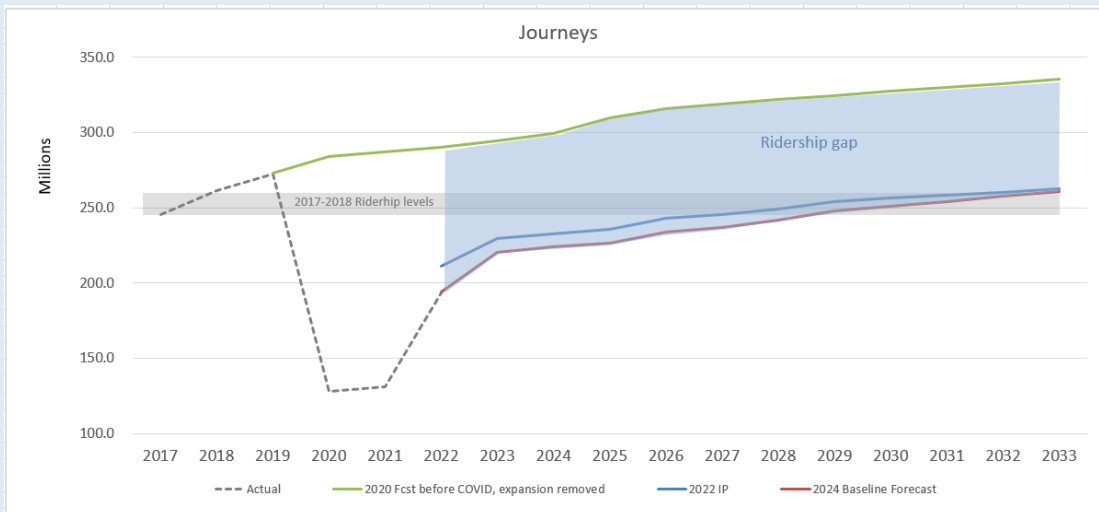
In order to stay on track with service expansion proposed in the *Access for Everyone* Plan, TransLink needs both the provincial and federal governments to join the region in making the commitments necessary for TransLink to begin rolling out the first phase of *Access for Everyone* in late 2024. But before expansion is possible, TransLink's funding model must be returned to sustainability, and its \$600 million annual structural deficit – over 30% of its annual budget – addressed.



Like other urban transit agencies, TransLink experienced a significant decline in ridership during the pandemic, which dramatically suppressed fare revenue, while at the same time continued delivering about the same service levels to protect the mobility of essential, front-line workers. While ridership has been recovering quickly, TransLink is facing rapidly growing costs as a result of inflationary pressures, particularly labour and construction costs. Thanks to pandemic relief funding from the federal and provincial governments, we have protected transit service which has encouraged and supported North America leading ridership recovery. However, expenditures will continue to outpace existing regressive revenue sources, even without increasing services, and by 2026, without new revenue sources, transit service reductions will be required.

### TransLink's \$600 million structural deficit

The largest single contributor to TransLink's structural deficit – as is the case in all other large urban transit systems with high fare-box recovery ratios prior to the pandemic – is lower fare revenue, at approximately \$188 million annually. Most of this is due to the change in ridership from pre-pandemic levels. While system-wide ridership has now returned to approximately 90% of 2019 levels, the pandemic has had a long-lasting impact: ridership in 2023 is lower than had been forecast before the pandemic for this year.



This structural deficit is not the result of mismanagement or inefficient spending. It is the inevitable result of the transit funding model that prevailed in North America prior to the pandemic. This model relies on highly regressive user fees set at much higher rates than any other core public service. In addition, transit's other primary funding tool, the property tax, is also regressive and does not grow at the same



rate as the growing needs on transit such as population, the economy or senior government expectations around housing affordability, climate change or reconciliation. While this model worked, although barely, prior to the pandemic, inflation, changes in ridership patterns, accelerated population growth rates as a result of higher federal immigration targets, and new transit-oriented development requirements have combined to sever the relationship between transit revenue sources and the needs and expectations to deliver expanded services.

We need to move beyond this unsustainable model and move towards a new way of funding transit that reflects current realities and prepares major urban centres like Metro Vancouver for population growth. Already, the Mayors' Council and Government of BC have embarked on a collaborative work program to **return TransLink to long-term financial sustainability** by 2025 and we need the federal government at the table.

Now is the time for all three orders of government to recommit to the importance of transit and ensure that the resources are available to fulfill its role. Now is the time to put transit in Canada's largest urban regions firmly on the road to recovery and deliver the new and expanded service our cities, provinces and country needs – now and into the future.

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## About the Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation

*The Mayors' Council is the collective voice of Metro Vancouver residents on transit and transportation. Our members include representatives from each of the 21 municipalities in TransLink's service area, as well as Electoral Area 'A' and the Tsawwassen First Nation. It is responsible for approving TransLink's transportation plans, identifying local funding and negotiating with other levels of government to make those plans a reality.*

[www.accessforeveryone.ca](http://www.accessforeveryone.ca)

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