

# A Community Bus for Gabriola Island

**Request for Community Works Funding submitted to Howard Houle, Area B Director,  
Regional District of Nanaimo**

**Gabriola Community Bus Committee<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Introduction**

Our goal is the establishment of a community bus service on Gabriola Island. The primary objective of this initiative is to enhance transportation options for Gabriola Island residents and visitors, however we also believe that an efficient bus service is the single most effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on Gabriola. Of all of the green initiatives that Gabriolans could take, a bus has the greatest potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions because it will encourage car-owners to leave their cars at home, or to leave them uninsured for part of the year or to take them off the road altogether, and it will allow others to avoid calling for a ride home from the village or the ferry.

We are proposing to start with a pilot project that will extend for two or three years. Over that time period we plan to consult with bus users and the community to develop and refine routes and schedules that will best serve the transportation needs of Gabriolans. At the end of the pilot period we will be in a position to either recommend the establishment of a subsidized BC Transit bus service or the continuation of the community-operated service. Alternatively, we might have to conclude that public transit is not currently viable on Gabriola.

A great deal of work has been carried out regarding transit on Gabriola Island, including the 2008 transit survey and a number of well attended and supportive public forums before and after that time. Budgets have been created and routes have been planned. Detailed feasibility studies by BC Transit in 2000, 2009 and 2011 have all recommended a public transit system for Gabriola

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<sup>1</sup> The Gabriola Community Bus Committee is an official division of "Island Futures", a registered non-profit society.

Island. This proposal acknowledges the efforts of previous public transit advocates on Gabriola, and the research undertaken by BC Transit, and seeks to establish a pilot project that will serve Gabriola and may allow us to assess the potential for a conventional transit service in the future.

## Proposal

We are proposing a bus service that will be designed on the basis of ongoing input from the Gabriola and Mudge Island communities, and, at least during the first year, will be subject to flexibility in routes and schedules so that we can create a service that best meet the needs of users. We

anticipate that only one bus will be in use at any one time (at least to begin with), but that it will be necessary to have one primary vehicle and one secondary (back-up) vehicle in order to



ensure continuity of service. In this proposal we are requesting funding from the portion of Community Works Fund (CWF) that is allocated to Area B to purchase the primary vehicle, an 11 to 15 passenger Mercedes Benz Sprinter equipped with a driver-operated passenger door<sup>2</sup>, and a rear-mounted wheel-chair lift<sup>3</sup>. We are currently exploring other funding options for the purchase of a secondary vehicle.

The amount of CWF funding requested is \$112,000. This includes the \$102,000 cost of a vehicle currently available at 3-Point Motors in Nanaimo, \$6,145 for purchase and installation of a rear-mounted wheel-chair lift, \$2000 for communication equipment and \$1,699 for a 3-year maintenance contract.

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<sup>2</sup> Different approaches to fare collection will be explored as it is not practical to mount a traditional fare box in the Sprinter.

<sup>3</sup> According to the Motor Vehicle Act (Section 10.10), a passenger vehicle with seating capacity for 11 or fewer, does not need an emergency exit, while one with 12 or more must have one towards the rear. If the lift is installed, the rear-exit will not be functional, but there will only be 11 passenger seats. If the lift is removed, and extra seats are installed, the rear exit will be functional.

We favour the use of this particular vehicle for a number of reasons, as follows:

- it has a reputation as being reliable, with minimal need for repair and maintenance,
- it is very fuel-efficient compared to other similar vehicles,
- it is well suited to the narrow, steep and winding roads of Gabriola Island, and
- it is about the right size for this trial service in our market (a vehicle with twice the capacity that runs only one-third full most of the time would send a negative message to the community).

While the Sprinter is our first choice for this trial service, we are also willing to consider other options. An overview of the pros and cons of the Sprinter and some other possible vehicles is included as Appendix 1.

## **Budget**

As summarised in Appendix 2, expense items include insurance for the primary vehicle, insurance and maintenance for the secondary vehicle, the coordinator's salary, administration expenses, communication costs and fuel. Revenue items include fares and on-vehicle advertising. Additional revenue may be derived from various forms of community sponsorship. The least predictable of these estimates will be the fares per operating hour. In our budget assumptions we have considered 8, 9 and 10 one-way fares per hour. We anticipate that, to begin with, the number of fares may be less than this projection, but will increase over time as the existence and reliability of the service becomes better known. We also anticipate that there may be more fares in summer than at other times because of the large number of summertime residents and visitors to Gabriola Island. Fully qualified and licensed (Class 4, unrestricted) volunteer drivers will be used for the pilot project, and the paid coordinator (also Class 4 licensed) will be available to drive when volunteers are not available.

Our financial forecast (Appendix 3) is based on the assumption that the capital cost of a vehicle can be funded through the RDN's Community Works Fund and that this can also include a 3-year maintenance contract. We estimate that operating costs, such as insurance, the coordinator's salary and fuel will be met from the revenues from fares and advertising.

Operating costs and projected revenues are summarized in Table 1. Details are provided in Appendices 2 and 3.

Table 1 Financial forecast summary for the Gabriola Shuttle-bus Project

	8 passengers/hour	9 passengers/hour	10 passengers /hour
Annual operating costs	\$37,571	\$37,571	\$37,571
Projected annual revenue	\$29,160	\$37,805	\$41,450
Annual balance	-\$3,411	\$ 234	\$3,879

We are requesting a grant from the Regional District of Nanaimo's Community Works Fund in the amount of \$112,000. The funding will be used to purchase a Mercedes Sprinter 11 to 15 passenger bus for the proposed Gabriola Community transit service.

There is a possibility that we will not meet our ridership objectives to begin with, and we have developed a contingency plan to cover the costs of 6 months of operation with ridership of 5 passengers per hour. The budget and contingency plan is outlined in Appendix 4, and it involves raising just over \$3000 to supplement our existing reserve of \$5000. In the very unlikely situation that we operate with a ridership of only 2 or 3 passengers per hour for as long as 3 months, we will have to conclude that a bus service is not viable on Gabriola. In that situation the pilot project would be cancelled at that time.

### **Community support**

Although there is a long history of community support for public transit on Gabriola demonstrated through the 2008 survey and subsequent public meetings, we felt it would be worthwhile to organize a petition campaign in December 2012 specific to this Community Works Fund request. Over a 10-day period from December 15<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> we received the support of over 700 residents from all parts of Gabriola, plus at least 9 from Mudge Island. Petition signers were overwhelmingly positive and excited about the prospect of a bus service. The petition wording, along with a summary of the number of signatories in person and on-line, plus a sampling of some of the comments left at the on-line petition site, is provided in Appendix 5.

## Evaluation

The “pilot” nature of this project is critically important, and we plan to commit significant volunteer resources into studies of the ridership, routes, schedules and fares, so that we can provide the best transit service for Gabriola. We will keep careful records of ridership numbers with respect to time and location, and, during the first few months, will adjust the routes, schedules, and wheelchair use to best meet the needs of riders and ensure our financial commitments are met. We will survey riders and the general population about the transit service and how it could be improved to meet their needs. The final evaluation report will outline the results of the pilot project in terms of routes, schedules, fares, and management, and provide recommendations regarding next steps, including financing (with or without tax implications) of a Gabriola Island public transit service.

## Conclusions

We believe that a community-operated bus service for Gabriola Island is feasible providing that the capital-cost of a vehicle can be secured from the RDN's Community Works Fund, and, for the proposed trial period, most of the driving is done by volunteers and the system is operated in a flexible way, responding to the needs and suggestions of riders.

Our expectation—based on the experience on both Salt Spring and Bowen Islands—is that ridership will exceed our forecasts before the end of the trial period, and that, once the service has proven to be effective, Gabriolans will actively seek expansions to the routes and the schedule. Another benefit of a trial service is that it will provide us with a clear understanding of the best transit routes and schedules for Gabriola, and of the amount of tax revenue that will be required to follow through with a fully funded public transit system on Gabriola if we conclude that that is the best option.

## Appendix 1 Gabriola Shuttle-bus Project – Vehicle options

Vehicle	Seating capacity	Fuel consumption	Approximate purchase cost
Mercedes Sprinter <sup>1</sup>	11 to 15	17 L/100 km	\$110,000
GM ARBOC <sup>2</sup>	23 seats	46 L/100 km	\$185,000
Yangzhou Yaxing Vicinity <sup>3</sup>	23 (plus standees)	33-36 L/100 km	\$305,000

### Notes:

The **Sprinter** is much more fuel-efficient than the other two options, and will be much easier to manoeuvre on Gabriola's winding roads. BC Transit is in the process of purchasing 12 Sprinters for use in various parts of BC, stating that: "The fuel economy and maintenance cycles reduce environmental impact over the incumbent fleet, and no available alternate vehicle has been identified that fulfills the functional requirements and environmental constraints."<sup>1</sup>

The **ARBOC** is manufactured by GM and is used by several transit systems in BC, especially in community shuttle and paratransit services. The fuel consumption of this vehicle is almost 3 times that of the Sprinter, and since the viability of our pilot project is predicated on keeping operating costs low, this would be a significant disadvantage.

The **Vicinity** is manufactured by Yangzhou Yaxing in China, and is currently being operated by Victoria Transit. So far, BC Transit is the first North American transit service to use a Yangzhou Yaxing vehicle, so options for servicing and repair might be very limited, and reliability is an unknown factor. The vehicle cost is almost three times that of the Sprinter, and the fuel consumption about twice the amount.

1: [http://www.bctransit.com/corporate/rfps/pdf/20120913\\_00130\\_bctransit\\_REI.pdf](http://www.bctransit.com/corporate/rfps/pdf/20120913_00130_bctransit_REI.pdf)

2: [http://www.arbocsv.com/media/testing/Exec\\_Summary\\_Altoona.pdf](http://www.arbocsv.com/media/testing/Exec_Summary_Altoona.pdf)

3: <http://www.transitbc.com/regions/vic/news/commission/pdf/cmtg-ra-754.pdf>

## Appendix 2 Gabriola Shuttle-bus Project – Assumptions

### General Assumptions

Mercedes Sprinter 5 trips/day +4 trips on Saturday (split equally between North end & North/South Loop)  
Back-up vehicle purchased by community group

<b>Cost &amp; Revenue Assumptions</b>				<b>First 6 months</b>	<b>next 12 months</b>
Operations	Number of buses in operation			1+ backup	1+backup
	Operating hours (Mon-Fri)			5	5
	Operating hours (Saturday)			4	4
	Operating days	250	Mon-Fri	125	250
		52	Saturday	26	52
	Months in operation			6	12
Administration costs	Dispatcher/Coordinator	\$1,667	monthly	\$10,000	\$20,000
	Administration/communication	\$90	monthly	\$540	\$1,080
	Maintenance (second vehicle)	\$125	monthly	\$750	\$1,500
Fuel costs	Assumed litres/100 km			17	17
	Fuel cost / litre			\$1.30	\$1.30
	Litres per hour (based on 29 km/hr)			4.9	4.9
	Fuel costs per day		Mon-Fri	\$32	\$32
			Saturday	\$26	\$26
Insurance costs <sup>4</sup>	Sprinter	\$ 280	monthly	\$1,682	\$3,363
	Second Vehicle	\$ 190	monthly	\$1,142	\$2,284
Passengers	Passengers per operating hour			5	9
Fare Revenue	Fare per passenger			\$2.50	\$2.50
	Revenue per operating hour			\$13	\$23
	Revenue per day		Mon-Fri	\$63	\$113
			Saturday	\$50	\$90

<sup>4</sup> An ICBC insurance agency has confirmed that this policy applies to all qualified drivers, whether paid or not.

### Appendix 3: Gabriola Community Bus Budget Forecast 6 months & annual

## Financial Forecast Gabriola Community Shuttle Project

<b><u>Grant Funded - Infrastructure</u></b>	<b>6 months</b>	<b>12 months</b>
New Vehicles : capital cost, warranty & maintenance contract	\$110,000	
communication tools	\$2,000	
Grant funding applied for - Capital	\$112,000	
<b><u>Operational Costs</u></b>		
vehicle Insurance (Sprinter)	\$1,682	\$3,363
Vehicle Insurance (second vehicle)	\$1,142	\$2,284
annual vehicle maintenance second vehicle	\$750	\$1,500
Administration/communication	\$540	\$1,080
Dispatcher/Coordinator/backup driver	\$10,000	\$20,000
Class 4 licensing support for volunteers	8   \$150	\$0
Fuel	\$4,672	\$9,344
<b>Total Operating Costs</b>	<b>\$19,986</b>	<b>\$37,571</b>
<b><u>Operational Income</u></b>		
Based on passenger/hr:	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>
Passenger fares @ \$2.50	\$9,113	\$32,805
<b>Operational Balance (Operational Costs - Operational Income)</b>	<b>\$10,873</b>	<b>\$4,766</b>
<b><u>Other Revenue</u></b>		
Vehicle advertising, charters	\$2,500	\$5,000
Fundraising	\$3,373	
Climate Change Dividend funds	\$5,000	
Reserve Fund	\$8,373	\$0
<b>Other Revenue Total</b>	<b>\$10,873</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>
<b><u>Balance</u></b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$234</b>



## **Appendix 4 Gabriola Community Bus - contingency funding in the event of lower than expected ridership**

Initiating a bus service requires a solid financial contingency plan. The first six months of the planned service involves start-up expenses as well as the possibility of low initial ridership. In view of this we have developed a 6 month start-up budget (see Appendix 3) that includes a total of \$10,873 for *Other Revenue*. Included in this total is \$2,500 anticipated revenue from advertising and charter operations and the sum of \$5,000, noted in the budget under *Other Revenue* as *Climate Change Dividend Fund*. This money was donated by Gabriola residents in 2008, for the expressed purpose of a trial bus run on Gabriola Island. The \$3,373 figure, beside *Fundraising*, is the amount that we will have to raise in order to establish the \$8,373 reserve fund to cover any shortfall during the first 6 months of operation, and it includes projected revenue from the fundraising strategies laid out below.

We have good reasons to believe that there is strong support in the Gabriola business committee for a bus service, and that will be one avenue for fundraising. We also know that there is enthusiastic support amongst Gabriolans in general, and that will be another avenue.

Four possible options for accumulating a reserve fund prior to the start of transit operations are outlined below:

### **1) Sponsored bus runs**

It is our vision that an important way in which the Gabriola Community Bus can serve the community is through sponsored bus runs for special events that are either generally inaccessible to residents without their own cars, or popular to the point where greenhouse gases emissions and parking congestion are an issue. Corporations and other organizations on Gabriola will be approached to contribute in advance, so that their name can be associated with these community bus runs. Some examples include:

- Concerts at the Community Hall and the Haven
- The Salmon Barbeque
- The Concert on the Green
- Halloween Fireworks at Twin Beaches
- Fall Fair at the Commons
- The Gabriola Theatre Festival in the village
- Dancing Man Music Festival
- Various craft fairs
- The Gabriola Arts Council Studio Tour
- The Gabriola Home and Garden tour

- Remembrance Day ceremony at the RCMP station
- The Brickyard Beast 10 km run
- Oceans Day
- The Potato Cannon Contest
- The Farmers Market
- The PHC Spirit Feast at Christmas

It is likely that there are many other relevant events at places like the Commons, the Rollo Centre, the Gabriola Elementary School, the Aggie Hall and the Community Hall, and other important events like voting days and special community meetings.

Some of these events might require just one bus run (there and back), while others could involve either a series of runs (e.g., Theatre Festival, Concert on the Green, Fall Fair) or a loop (Studio Tour, Home and Garden Tour).

Sponsors will be asked to contribute in units of \$100, where each unit corresponds with approximately 2 hours of bus/driver time. Sponsors could choose to select which event they want to be associated with, and these would be listed on the website. (Other sponsors would be listed as well.) The bus-run sponsor's name and logo will be prominently displayed on the inside and outside of the bus. Those using the service will be invited to make a small donation in support of the Community Bus.

Event organizers (excluding events that already have specific bus-run sponsors) will be able to apply for a bus-run to and from their event. In order to qualify they will have to describe how they plan to publicize the availability of the bus for transportation to their event. If there are insufficient donors for these extra sponsored runs, they might also be asked to identify and approach a sponsor.

Sponsored bus-runs will be in addition to the regularly scheduled service. In many cases it will be necessary to use the backup bus for these extra runs.

## **2) Sponsored bus tickets**

Some members of our community may have difficulty paying for bus tickets, and hence would be unlikely to use the bus if it means giving up some other amenity. We will offer businesses, organizations and individuals the opportunity to purchase bus tickets that can be provided free of charge to those in need. If desired, the name of the sponsoring entity can be printed on the backs of the tickets. The tickets could be distributed through Gabriola's People for a Healthy Community organization (<http://www.phcgabriola.org/>).

### **3) Gabriola Island guided tours**

We have been told that many Gabriolans and visitors would be interested in guided bus tours to visit various locations of interest on the island. These might include tours of interesting geological, geographical, botanical, marine, First Nations, historical, scenic or other features guided by knowledgeable Gabriolans or others. It is anticipated that the half-day tours would cost approximately \$10/person, with a minimum of 10 participants.

### **4) Pre-paid tickets**

In light of the strong expression of public support for the Gabriola Community Bus, it should be relatively easy to raise a significant amount by selling pre-paid bus tickets (in books of 10). The tickets will be printed with numbers in order to limit fraud, and will be sold at face value (no discount). Additional revenue will be raised by using the back side for advertising.

Pre-paid tickets will go on sale as soon as we have confirmation that the project is going forward. Gabriola retailers will be asked to display them prominently on their counters and sell them (probably on a cash-only basis). It is likely that most retailers will recognize the value of the bus to their business, and will therefore be willing to contribute to the project by selling tickets.

In order to avoid the situation where we do not take in enough cash fares to pay expenses, only a minor proportion of the \$8,373 in reserve funds (no more than \$1000, or 400 tickets) will be in the form of these pre-paid fares.

## Appendix 5 Gabriola Shuttle-bus Project – overview of December 2012 petition numbers and comments

Petition version	Number of unique signatures (Jan. 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2013)
Version 1 on paper (see text below)	70
Version 2 on paper (see text below)	588
Version 2 on-line	77
Total	735

**Version 1** (Initiated in November 2012 with the following wording):

*Dear Howard, We the undersigned, are in favour of a publicly funded community transportation system for Gabriola Island and will support your efforts towards establishing one. We base our support on the belief it will be good for our Island, socially economically and environmentally, and is therefore a good value for our tax dollars.*

**Version 2** (Initiated in December 2012 with the following wording):

*We, the undersigned — residents of Gabriola, Mudge or DeCourcy Islands — support the use of \$110,000 from the RDN Area B Community Works Fund for a community-based pilot bus service on Gabriola. We base our support on the belief that a bus will be good for the islands, socially, economically and environmentally, and therefore is good value for public money.*

The on-line petition, which is located at <http://gabriolacommunitybus.com/>, allowed petitioners to leave comments. A small selection of the comments posted by January 3<sup>rd</sup> are included below:

*I support the proposal for the RDN Community Works Funding to establish a pilot bus project. Many people do not have cars. It would help these people to get to the village, ferry, medical, etc. Kudos to the volunteers for initiating this project.*

*A bus on Gabriola is something I've dreamed of for the 23 years I've lived here!!! For me, transportation without needing a vehicle is more important than just about anything else.*

*Even though I live walking distance to the ferry, I strongly support a bus service as well. What a wonderful idea. Also, don't forget the visitors who come to this island. It would be great for them to get around as well without having to bring a car over.*

*It is wonderful to have the opportunity to show my support for a community bus pilot on Gabriola. I will also support the investigation of a system of economic access to said Community Bus for those in need on Gabriola.*

*I strongly support the trial bus service plan. It should cut down on unnecessary car trips to the Village and provide much needed mobility for those who rely on others to get around the island.*

*A bus service on Gabriola is long overdue. I fully support a pilot bus project and expect it will have a successful outcome. Definitely a worthwhile venture that will benefit the community. Bravo!*

*I totally support it. It's about time for a bus service on Gabriola!! It's necessary on so many levels...for students, seniors, low-income individuals, let alone the numerous environmental impacts & responsibilities we each share a role in. Please, PLEASE!... do the right thing & support Gabriola's initiative for a bus service.*

*Count me in! I not only support the idea of a bus, I will actually use it. Public transportation is the way of the future.*

*Yes, it's time we get some wheels under this idea!! I support it and have been looking forward to this for some years. Thanks*

*Great Idea! We totally support the proposal for RDN Community Works funding to be used to establish a community bus pilot on Gabriola!! It will be great for our community! And for us the Whalebone Drive area!!*

*This service would be a blessing for me. I am grateful for and support this initiative.*

*We need a bus service to connect the South end with the North end of the island, helping people, kids and teenagers to get around the island without a car.*

*I fully support the bus proposal as a pilot program with the thought that it will eventually be a fully supported program on Gabriola Island.*

*I hope to see this bus service soon! I regularly ride my bike and hitchhike on Gabriola and a bus service would be of great help. Not to mention a bus would help cut back on greenhouse gas emissions as less people would have to drive their cars.*

*Yay to having a bus on Gabriola to help people get around!!*

*A bus on Gabriola will be so beneficial for reduced traffic, reduced ferry line ups, and be essential for those who don't have a vehicle...YES..YES...AND YES.....it is about time! I support the bus idea!*

*I TOTALLY APPROVE OF AND WOULD SUPPORT A BUS ON GABRIOLA. way too long in coming.*