



REGIONAL DISTRICT OF NANAIMO 2025 – 2026 SERVICE EXPANSIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Board approve the January 4, 2026, annual service expansion for the Conventional Transit Service of 4,000 hours and the corresponding lease of three (3) heavy duty vehicles.
2. That the Board approve the January 4, 2026, annual service expansion for the Custom Transit Service of 3,000 hours and the corresponding lease of two (2) light duty vehicles.

BACKGROUND

On October 22, 2024, staff presented the *Transit Improvement Program – Three Year Expansion Plans* report at the Regular Board Meeting. This report includes the three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for future transit expansion plans within the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) Transit Service Area and interregional transit service. The Board passed the following motion:

‘That the Board approve the BC Transit – Transit Improvement Program – Three Year Transit Service Expansion Plans Memorandum of Understanding for 2025 – 2026 and the subsequent two years.’

This report summarizes the 2025-2026 transit service expansions confirmed by BC Transit for the 2025/26 fiscal year (Attachment 1).

Following the request to BC Transit for expanded service hours, the RDN was notified on April 11, 2025, of the approved annual service hours for Conventional, Custom, and the Nanaimo-Cowichan Express (NCX) services, as outlined in Attachments 1 and 2.

The following outlines the approved service hours and how they will be allocated within the RDN Transit system.

Conventional Transit January 2026 Expansions

Starting January 4, 2026, with the Winter schedule change-over, an additional 4,000 service hours will be implemented into the transit system. The original expansion hours proposed in the MOU were 16,100 hours; however, 12,100 of these hours have been deferred to the next annual transit expansion cycle. We plan to target improved service levels during peak and off-peak periods (as described in Transit Redevelopment Strategy (TRS), Strategy 2¹) on the existing routing for Route 1 – Nanaimo Rapid Line and Route 40 - VIU Express.

¹ <https://www.getinvolved.rdn.ca/4654/widgets/39300/documents/113789>

We will hold off on re-branding or re-routing Route 40 to Route 2 - VIU Line, as doing so as described in the TRS would eliminate Frequent Transit Network (FTN) service from the north end of the current Route 40, specifically the Mary Ellen Dr., Dover Rd. and Uplands Dr. areas. Without the addition of Route 11 as proposed in the TRS (part of the remaining 12,100, Year 2, Strategy 2, hours mentioned in Attachment 1), this area would experience a significantly reduced level of service compared to current schedules, with only the Route 20A variant serving the area. As this segment of Route 40 consistently sees 200-250 average daily boardings across the stops cumulatively, staff do not believe this change to be beneficial at this time. This approach also supports a more seamless strategy for marketing efforts under Strategy 2 and avoids the need for new signage and web/map updates year-over-year.

Custom (handyDART) Transit January 2026 Expansions

Starting January 4, 2026, with the winter schedule change-over, an additional 3,000 Custom service hours will be implemented. Custom Transit will expand 2,000 service hours on weekends and introduce holiday service to more closely reflect Conventional Transit Service. The weekday span will also see improvements with 1000 expansion hours to allow more booking times throughout the system.

Nanaimo/Cowichan Commuter (NCX Interregional) January 2026 Expansions

On Jun 10, 2025, staff presented the Nanaimo - Cowichan Express 1,000-hour Sunday Service Expansion report at the Regular Board Meeting (Attachment 2). This report included the service expansion implementation of Nanaimo/Cowichan Express (NCX) with the introduction of Sunday service and improvements to on-time performance, supported by 1,000 additional annual service hours. The Board passed the following motion:

‘That the Board approve the Nanaimo - Cowichan Express 1,000 hour Sunday Service Expansion starting August 31, 2025, and amend the 2025-2029 Financial Plan accordingly.’

This Board approved service expansion improvement will be implemented August 31, 2025.

The Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) and BC Transit indicated a preference to implement Sunday service on the NCX in September 2025. This aligns with CVRD’s other interregional expansion priority to introduce Sunday service on the Cowichan Victoria Express (CVX). BC Transit’s Scheduling team has coordinated Sunday schedules on routes 66 CVX and the 70 NCX to support bi-directional travel between Victoria and Duncan throughout the day.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Conventional Transit January 2026 Expansion Costing

The 4,000 hours expansion has an estimated annual cost of \$742,848. This amount will be cost-shared with BC Transit covering 46.69% of the total cost, leaving the remaining 53.31%, or \$352,639 to the RDN (Attachment 3, Table 1).

Custom (handyDART) Transit January 2026 Expansion Costing

The 3,000 hours expansion has an estimated annual cost of \$295,739. This amount will be cost-shared with BC Transit covering 66.69% of the total cost, leaving the remaining 33.31%, or \$107,311 to the RDN (Attachment 3, Table 2).

As both expansions were included in the MOU approved by the Board on October 22, 2024 (motion 24-559), they are reflected in the 2026 year of the 2025-2029 Financial Plan. The hours deferment in the Conventional expansion and any other cost differences between the MOU and Attachment 3 will be adjusted for in the 2026-2030 Financial Plan.

All financial implications outlined in this report are to be funded by the City of Nanaimo, with no cost-sharing from other jurisdictions unless otherwise specified, as the route impacted by this expansion are only within the City's limit. Given that there is currently no direction to explore a reduction in service levels specific to the City of Nanaimo, this recommendation does not require delay. However, if any proposed changes are found to have financial impacts on other parties, further consultation and review may be necessary. Staff are preparing a report that will explore potential service reductions and any such findings will be brought forward separately.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT

Planning and Managing for Growth - Understand and develop an inter-connected framework of strategies and plans to manage growth to support complete communities, including planning, transportation, infrastructure, and fiscal sustainability.

REVIEWED BY:

- J. Lumb, Manager, Accounting Services
- T. Moore, Chief Financial Officer
- C. Crabtree, General Manager, Corporate and Transportation Services
- D. Holmes, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS:

1. 2025-26 Expansion Confirmation Letter RDN
2. Nanaimo - Cowichan Express 1,000 Hour Sunday Service Expansion
3. 2026 Custom and Conventional Expansion Costing