

September 21, 2020

The Hon. John Horgan, MLA-Premier of British Columbia  
Via email

We are writing today to express our deep dissatisfaction with the South Island Transportation Plan your government released last week.

When this study was announced the Ministry made the following statement:

“The South Island Transportation Plan will also include studying the feasibility of commuter rail along the E&N corridor.”

Despite this statement, the plan is devoid of any discussion about rail on Vancouver Island beyond one sentence that states “Exploring the potential of commuter rail on the Island Rail Corridor between Westhills and Victoria” is a long term goal to support the strategies within the Plan.

The reports boasts:

“The ministry held more than 40 meetings, workshops and presentations with Indigenous, local and regional governments, transportation authorities and key stakeholder groups over the course of the creation of the Strategy.” It speaks volumes, as to the consideration given to rail, when the owners of the rail line were not consulted or involved in a single meeting, workshop, or presentation. We also were not invited to be part of the technical advisory group when we have much expertise to offer.

When we met in 2018 you expressed two concerns about moving forward with the restoration of rail service on Vancouver Island:

- 1) You were unsure as to what “stakeholders” felt should be done with the corridor
- 2) You were unsure as to the actual costs associated with restoring rail on the corridor

To address these concerns you took the following actions:

- 1) You called a meeting with approximately 35 stakeholders consisting of First Nations, Regional Districts, Municipal leaders, and the ICF.

The stakeholders overwhelmingly stated that restoration of rail on the island was a key Infrastructure project and that work to restore service should not be delayed. That meeting was followed by a letter asking you to move forward with rail from the 13 Mayors of the CRD along with letters from the Mayors of Duncan, North Cowichan, Ladysmith and Nanaimo. The Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities and the BC Chambers of Commerce have both endorsed rail and the South Island Prosperity Project recommended restoration of rail as part of their Rising Economic Task Force which was submitted to the Province.

We believe it is very clear what the people of Vancouver Island believe should be done with the rail corridor.

- 2) The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure commissioned a cost assessment of the corridor to determine the cost of restoration.

The study that was completed earlier this year and outlined several options, at varying cost levels, to restore rail service. A report the ICF, as the owners of the corridor, publicly acknowledged, that while requiring some clarification, provided a realistic view of the costs. Your government, despite having paid for the assessment, still has not provided any substantive comment on the assessment beyond saying it would provide guidance for the South Transportation Plan, which now advises we are once again going to “explore” the potential of rail.

With all due respect to the SITP report writers we have been “exploring” the potential for rail for over 15 years. Meanwhile the corridor continues to deteriorate, our congestion problems are increasing, and we continue to add to our greenhouse gas problems. The goals in your plan include taking action on climate change, connecting communities, reducing vehicle dependency, ensuring sustainable travel options and growing the economy. ICF’s rail services meet all these goals.

We have stated that restoring the rail on Vancouver Island is a shovel ready economic stimulus package where we would source materials from the Island and utilize Island companies and workers.

You had asked ICF to wait until the transportation plan was complete and now that we see the report, there is nothing in the plan that restores rail to Vancouver Island, in particular, for the South Island.

We are asking you to make rail for Vancouver Island a top priority and to immediately commit to moving forward, with the ICF, and all the stakeholders who have voiced their support for rail, to finally restore service to the Island. Rail is sustainable transportation, is beneficial to every person on Vancouver Island and is important to moving people and cargo on the Island. Rail will also contribute to tourism that needs support to ensure its viability.

Sincerely,

The image shows three handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature on the left is a cursive signature that appears to be 'Phil Kent'. The second and third signatures are also cursive and appear to be 'Judith Sayers'.

Phil Kent and Judith Sayers  
Co-Chairs  
Island Corridor Foundation

Copied to The Honorable Carole James , MLA - Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier  
The Honorable Claire Trevena, MLA Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.