



Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC

Representing seniors in British Columbia since 1950

www.coscobc.org

February 15, 2025

**The Honourable Mark Farnworth
Ministry of Transportation and Transit**

PO Box 9041 Stn. Prov Govt

Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

By email: Minister.MOTI@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Farnworth

Re: The transportation needs of BC Seniors.

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Transportation and Transit. Today, I am writing on behalf of the Council of Senior Citizens' Organization of BC (COSCO) regarding the transportation needs of BC Seniors. Formed in 1950, COSCO represents over 80,000 members of our 70 affiliated seniors' organizations. As the voice of BC seniors, our motto is "plan with seniors, not for them."

Prior to the recent Provincial election, COSCO developed and published a comprehensive twelve point document outlining the issues we felt should be addressed by the platforms of the three major parties in the election. Three of the twelve policy items involved transportation, indicating how important this issue is to our members. Those three items are as follows:

Affordable Transit

As transit is often the only means seniors can use to travel about their community, it must be affordable. Transit offers seniors access to shopping, social opportunities, medical appointments and entertainment that would otherwise not be available. Many seniors take pride in being able to navigate the transit system to meet their daily travel needs. A significant number of seniors live on a fixed income. They have seen living expenses increase to the point where they are forced to make hard choices between rent, food, medication and transportation.

The 2024 Poverty Strategy recommends that the province increase access to transportation to more seniors, including assessing the feasibility of expanding the bus pass for people with disabilities and seniors to include HandyDART, so everyone can stay connected to their community.

COSCO asks that all parties commit to ensuring that transit and HandyDART passes for low-income seniors will be available at minimal or no cost.

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HandyDART

People who are unable to use regular transit rely on HandyDART to move about their community. Many HandyDART passengers are seniors.

HandyDART is managed by Translink in Metro Vancouver and by BC Transit in the rest of the province. When HandyDART service is provided in-house, the drivers are well trained, better paid and motivated to do the job well. When not operated in-house, operators are contracted to provide the service with TransLink or BC Transit equipment. In many cases, non-profit organizations such as charitable societies or local governments provide very good service. When for-profit entities are involved, evidence shows that the quality of service will be sacrificed for profit. When taxis are substituted for HandyDART, neither the operators nor the equipment are able to match the high quality of in-house service.

In areas where HandyDART is offered, demand for the service often outstrips supply. Many communities have no service at all.

COSCO asks that all parties commit to ensuring that HandyDART services will be expanded to areas where needed and provided as a public service, or if that is not practicable, by not-for-profit agencies.

Province-wide public Transit Service

Many seniors living on a fixed income are not able to operate their own cars due to economic or health challenges. While some destinations may be within walking distance, many are not. These seniors require dependable transit service. For the regional travel required for health care and other needs, intercity bus service is required.

In our major urban areas transit service is falling behind demand, making it more challenging for seniors to get around. In Metro Vancouver there is a fast-approaching short fall in funding. The Seniors Advocate Report Resilient and Resourceful; Challenges Facing BC's Rural Seniors, details the unique struggles of seniors aging in place in rural communities. One recommendation of the report is to "Make transit more reliable, frequent and affordable especially in rural, remote and Indigenous communities where many people without cars struggle to get around" The report also mentions the challenge that rural governments face in paying their share of the cost of transit service. The only source of funds for transit is property taxes. This funding source makes it difficult to maintain an adequate amount of funding for transit service.

The 2024 update of the Poverty Reduction Strategy from the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction included seniors as a concern for the first time. The strategy recognizes that public transportation is an important part of social inclusion for seniors who don't drive. The report also specifies that both local transit and regional passenger transportation are important to seniors.

COSCO asks that all parties commit to ensuring that sustainable and ongoing funding for public or not-for-profit public transportation service will be available within, and between, all areas of the province.

Please visit <https://coscobc.org/wp-content/uploads/formidable/4/REVISED-COSCO-NEWS-SEPT-2024.pdf> to view the full issue.

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We were encouraged to see some of the above items mentioned in your party's platform and further delineated in your mandate letter. The points most relevant to older adults are (note that items directly related to COSCO Election asks are in italics) :

1. Support improvements in BC's road infrastructure balanced with *integrated transit opportunities*
2. Find ways to support low-income people including *seniors* and young people in *accessing affordable transit*.
3. Drive the development and expansion of transit across the province and work with communities across BC to find ways to *strengthen key rural and intercity transportation services*
4. Ensure that our provincial transit services are being delivered in a way that is cost effective for taxpayers, responsive to the concerns of transit riders, and not duplicative of administration by *reviewing the private delivery model for provincial transit systems starting with handyDART*.
5. Work with BC ferries to address administrative costs and ensure *affordable, reliable, and sustainable ferry services*.
6. Identify *affordable and efficient opportunities for expansion of SkyTrain, RapidBus, and rail service in the province* to meet the transportation and goods movement needs of growing populations.

Due to health concerns or financial factors, many seniors are not able to operate their own private vehicle. When driving is not an option for people, especially in rural areas, they are not able to participate fully in community activities and services that others take for granted. An effective transit service is needed for senior to access the health care they need/ Most seniors intend to age in place, in the communities they have belonged to for many years. In rural communities lacking services – especially affordable, reliable transit and intercity bus systems – seniors can be forced into moving to urban areas.

A robust public passenger transportation system is a most effective poverty reduction tool. The development of such a system not only makes life more affordable for all citizens, but also contributes to the fight against climate change.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. We would be happy to meet with you to discuss how we can work together to ensure the voice of BC seniors is heard as you proceed with your mandate. We look forward to hearing from you further.

Yours sincerely

Leslie Gaudette
President

Tim Larsen
Member, COSCO Transportation Committee

cc. Dan Levitt, BC Seniors Advocate
Harman Bhangu, Opposition Shadow Minister, Transportation
Jeremy Valeriote, Interim Leader, BC Greens

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