



Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC

Representing seniors in British Columbia since 1950

www.coscobc.org

September 29, 2025

The Honourable Mike Farnworth

Minister of Transportation and Transit

Provincial Legislature

Victoria, BC.

Dear Minister Farnworth

Re: The BC Railway: An Opportunity to Redevelop a Valuable Transportation Asset.

We are writing on behalf of the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of British Columbia. This year we are celebrating 75 years as an organization and now represent 80,000 members of our 70 affiliated organizations. We wish to apprise you of the potential importance of the BC Railway (BCR) to provide an effective transportation option for older adults as well as others in this province and would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss this with you.

Many of our members rely on public passenger transportation to move through their communities and to travel through our Province. Many seniors are aging in place in our Province's rural and remote regions and must rely on public transportation. Most communities along the BCR are served by community transit systems, however, intercity transportation is slim. A passenger service on the BCR would be greatly valued by these seniors who must travel to other towns for medical and other appointments where the services may not exist in their own community.

CN's announcement that it is starting the process of discontinuing operation of the BC Rail route is a wonderful opportunity for our Province. The railway is valuable, existing transportation infrastructure that belongs to the Province. Its potential can be developed at a much lower cost, and with minimal impact on the environment compared with building new transportation infrastructure.

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With CN stepping away from the line, the time is right for the province to move to protect and develop it. It is an opportunity to move us toward a safe, low carbon transportation system that will serve us well into the future.

Future possible uses of the route are numerous. There is exciting potential for passenger, tourist, and freight operation on the line. It is imperative for the future of the line that the province take control of it as soon as possible. Details of the possibilities are appended for your information.

COSCO would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss the future of the BC Rail line.

Thank you for your consideration. We would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to discuss this opportunity further.

Sincerely

Leslie Gaudette

President

Tim Larsen

Chair, Transportation Committee

Encl. (attached)

Cc:

Honourable Anne Kang, BC Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport,
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The Top Eight Reasons to Revitalize the BC Railway – from COSCO BC

1. Emergency Route

With climate change impacting our transportation systems, the BCR route could provide emergency access should other routes such as the Fraser Canyon be blocked by fires, floods, or landslides.

2. Preserving Existing Passenger Services

The BCR is currently used for two different passenger operations. The Koaham Shuttle is a very basic, daily rail bus service provided with a converted school bus between Seton Portage and Lillooet. It has been serving the St'át'imc Nation since 2002 when the BCR discontinued its passenger service. The Rocky Mountaineer occupies the other end of the scale with it's "Rainforest to Gold Rush" route. This high-end tourist excursion train runs one return trip weekly from April to October between North Vancouver and Jasper with overnights at Whistler and Quesnel. It does not provide any local service, running closed doors for the entire route. If the discontinuance goes through and nobody takes responsibility for the line, these services would gone.

3. Commuter/Recreational Service to Squamish and Whistler

Highway 99 between Vancouver and Whistler is facing more traffic pressure with each passing year. The highway is well known for many crashes, often involving fatalities. It has been estimated that the Sea-to-Sky region has seen a 60% growth in population since the 2010 Olympics. The local MP and MLA agree that the rail line should see passenger service reintroduced. The Squamish-Lillooet Regional District supports passenger service to Lillooet.

The North Vancouver-Whistler portion of the line is well suited for a bidirectional commuter-recreational service. Commuters travelling to Vancouver would be able to arrive at work relaxed and fresh, rather than frazzled by the white knuckle drive. Tourists would be even more attracted to the area by this convenient service. As the rail-bed was designed to accommodate slow freight traffic, a program of track improvements should be introduced to bring this portion of the line closer to modern passenger railroad standards. While that upgrading program is underway, passengers would be able to enjoy a safe, comfortable trip through the Sea-to-Sky corridor.

4. Connecting with our National Passenger Network

Via Rail is mandated by government to provide service in regional and remote areas, particularly areas where no other options exist. The Skeena running between Prince Rupert and Jasper is one such service. Last year VIA embarked on a program to replace all the Long-Distance, Regional and Remote (LDRR) fleet. The BCR line between Vancouver and Prince George is a route that qualifies for remote service. There are gaps in the highway system along the route that could be served by rail. For example, there is a 37 mile section between Darcy and Lillooet this train could serve. A strong case can be made that the route should be included in the remote rail passenger program. This is work that your government should be doing now.

5. Working Toward Reconciliation

Historically, first nations were confined to reserves with limited transportation services. This restricted members ability to access health, education, and other services off the reserves. The BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) has developed the First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project which is intended to advance First Nations' access to public passenger transportation in BC. There are many First Nations communities along the BCR that would benefit from the provision of passenger service. The BCAFN would be a natural choice to partner with to work for the return of passenger service on the BCR.

6. Taking Advantage of the Canadian Tourism Boom

With the new relationship that has developed between Canada and the United States, many Canadians are avoiding travel to the US. Domestic tourism in BC has boomed and is facing a capacity crunch. This is a nation building opportunity that must be exploited. Increasing rail capacity for passengers and freight would be a much better investment than pouring more money into supporting fossil fuels.

Other than the Rocky Mountaineer, the BCR is not utilized for tourist services. The line offers many opportunities for expanded tourist operations. For example, Rocky Mountaineer or another operator could be encouraged to launch a circle tour that offered rail travel between Vancouver and Prince Rupert via Prince George, and the Inside Passage with BC Ferries.

7. Short Line Development

Developments on the Canadian prairies illustrate yet another opportunity presented by CN's discontinuance of the BCR. During the 1980's and 90's, the CNR and the CPR closed rail lines serving hundreds of small towns. Using the abandoned track,

short line operations were developed to replace some of the lost service. Today there are about 24 short line railways operating in western Canada. As well as operating freight service and performing track maintenance, many of these nimble companies also offer various tourist attractions. The BCR route is well suited to short line operation. It offers a low speed line and smaller shippers, with connections to the major railways at either end.

8. Getting Serious About Clean BC

As the Clean BC site states, “Transportation connects us to the world, but it’s also our single largest source of emissions.” Trains are one of the most energy efficient transport modes we have. With every load of freight we shift from trucks to the railway, and every passenger we move from automobiles to rail, we are reducing the impact of the transportation sector on climate.

For more information. please contact the Council of Senior Citizens’ Organizations of BC (COSCO BC):

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