

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vancouver Island, March 31, 2017

A group of Island residents has formed a support group for those advocating removal of the rails along the E&N corridor and re-purposing the rail bed as a non-motorized recreational trail. The group refer to themselves “Friends of Rails to Trails Vancouver Island” (FORT-VI).

Members of FORT-VI come from diverse backgrounds, but share a common concern regarding the current state of the Island Corridor Foundation (ICF) and its focus on re-establishing a rail service, despite a lack of success and dwindling public support over the past seven years. It is clear that a major infusion of government funds will be required to restore even minimal train service on the corridor and it would still be uncertain whether the ICF could be operationally viable as no feasible business plan has been produced. FORT-VI is also concerned the ICF has taken out demand loans which eventually could lead to the sale of assets.

FORT-VI also understands that trail development is already part of ICF's mandate and that they have approved development of some trails alongside the E&N tracks in a number of locations. However, the cost of such development is prohibitive for the overall length of the corridor, especially at the numerous gullies, bridges and trestles. They point to the example of the recent Parkville to Coombs trail which cost 3 million dollars to construct 7 km of trail on easy terrain adjacent to an inactive section of rail. For this reason FORT-VI opposes the development of side trails in the future.

FORT-VI feels the corridor is an invaluable legacy of the Island but that future train service is not feasible. They are promoting a better and more workable alternative use of the corridor both for Island residents and also visitors seeking a unique hiking/cycling experience. The ICF has acknowledged that the salvage cost of the rails would effectively offset the cost of removing the ties. If so, a low cost trail bed could be developed utilizing the existing valley crossings, bridges and trestles, which would remain inaccessible if rails remain in place.

FORT-VI members recently met with ICF Executive Director, Graham Bruce, and urged immediate action on implementing a corridor trail, beginning with the Nanaimo to Courtenay section, noting that the ICF has been silent on this section of the corridor for several years now. Although Mr Bruce did not agree to FORT-VI's proposal he invited their input into ICF's soon to be released draft business plan which will be asking for community feedback. He added that the FORT-VI's approach was timely and would no doubt generate useful discussion.

With the decline of rail in many parts of the world, numerous “Rails to Trails” groups now exist throughout North America. There are many examples of high quality trails being built and managed using a combination of public and private resources. FORT-VI would like to see such methods used in developing a Island Corridor Trail.

For more information, visit the FORT-VI website at fortvi.ca