

PRESS RELEASE

Friends of Rail to Trail Vancouver Island (FORT-VI)

March 14, 2023

The Island Corridor, the Way Ahead

The federal government and the Province of British Columbia today announced the return of a short section of the Island Corridor to the Snaw-Naw-As First Nation. The Snaw-Naw-As have indicated strongly that they do not want rail going through their reserve and have stated that they want to see alternative uses for the corridor considered.

The Island Corridor has been subject to years of neglect because there has been no business case for funding rail service for the Island's small population base. The Island Corridor Foundation (ICF) who own the corridor have focussed on restoring rail service even though a much more successful use for unused rail corridors has been demonstrated in Canada, across Europe and in the US. There are more than 30,000 km of rail corridor converted to active transportation trail in the US alone.

The ICF was not formed with only rail in mind. The organization's primary purpose was to save the continuity of the corridor as far as possible. The ICF, the owners of the corridor can change the purposes of the organization to exclude rail and emphasize another of their purposes, trails, also known as active transportation routes. This use would preserve the corridor indefinitely or until it was needed for future use.

The ICF members, the five regional districts and five First Nations on the corridor are not in agreement in support of rail. The First Nations members clearly do not support rail and at least some, like the Snaw-Naw-As, want control of the short parts of the corridor which cross their reserves. Since they comprise half the ICF membership they need to be listened to. This will not affect a trail on the corridor which can go around the reserves as a trail beside the rails does at the Songhees Reserve in Esquimalt.

Friends of Rails to Trails Vancouver Island (FORT-VI) are close to releasing a feasibility study of an active transportation trail on the rail bed of the Island Corridor, funded by the Federal Active Transportation Fund. An early draft of the study shows the trail cost per km to be similar to a rail trail now under construction, the Sicamous to Armstrong North Okanagan Rail Trail in the BC interior. This trail project was led by the Splatshin First Nation in partnership with regional districts using a Federal Active Transportation grant.

FORT-VI was recognized as a stakeholder in the recent provincial government public input process on possible future uses for the Island Corridor. While there is no federal money for rail, the federal Active transportation Fund has \$400 million for active transportation with up to \$50 million per project. We will be forwarding the results of the study to the federal government and to the provincial government as input into their future planning for the corridor.

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