

First, I'd like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional lands of the Snuneymuxw First Nation and that the Island Rail Corridor is located in the traditional territory of the Coast Salish.

Welcome, thank for your interest and for coming out - and, a big thank you to our supporters, the FORT-VI board and all our volunteers and donors and to Sandy for making the delicious food.

At our last AGM the province and federal governments had just returned rail corridor lands to the Snaw-Naw-As which was generally seen as the last spike for the railroad, but not for the trail. They had also just announced an 18 month process for the Regions and First Nations on the corridor to discuss options for its future. We are now more than halfway through that process; more on that later.

We had also just completed our feasibility study for a trail on the rail bed of the Island Corridor - it's on our website at fort-vi.ca.

We are in Nanaimo. Nanaimo is one of the regions we believe could take a lead in putting a trail on the rail bed once the rails are gone. The Nanaimo Regional District (RDN) did a study in 2009 showing that the only way a continuous trail through the region could be done was by using the rail bed. A few years ago they did another study for a trail through the middle of town which showed the same - the costs were too high unless the trail was on the rail bed.

A few months ago our treasurer Wilfrid Worland made a presentation to the RDN asking them to do a study for a continuous trail through the region on

the rail bed, partly because they had already written a letter to the federal government where they said, and I quote:

“While the Island Corridor Foundation (ICF) was created to shepherd the restoration of rail, there is now a greater recognition of alternative approaches and varying perspectives on the future uses of the corridor”.

That sounds to us like progress and we believe we have some good news for the RDN.

A few days ago David Slade, our Vice President and I had a meeting with a representative of the Trans Canada Trail project. They told us that they have a serious interest in the Island Corridor trail to be, particularly the section from Nanaimo to Courtenay, and that they were willing to support the project.

We believe this is as a result of a meeting we attended last year with MP Gord Johns and Eleanor McMahon, CEO of the Trans Canada Trail project. We spoke with them, gave them our feasibility study, and asked them for support. We did not hear anything about our request until last week. They had spoken with other organizations who support the idea of a trail on the corridor including 4VI (Tourism Vancouver Island), and had done their own evaluation before contacting us. They didn't need convincing. The Trans Canada Trail is funded by Parks Canada and their support will make a difference.

The return of land on the corridor to First Nations will also clearly make a difference. Nanaimo's letter to the federal government also pointed this out and I again quote:

“The interests of First Nations are a critical consideration for the Province

of British Columbia, for the federal government, and for us as a local government.”

You may remember that the Snaw-Naw-As just north of Nanaimo were the first First Nation on the corridor to have their land returned but they will not be the last. Also they were one of the First Nations who left the ICF Board last year because the board would not consider alternatives to rail on the corridor. Like Nanaimo we recognize the FN's to be crucial in the discussions on the future of the corridor. We have spoken to the Snaw-Naw-As and they have said publicly that they liked the idea of a continuous trail on the corridor though probably not through their reserve. We also spoke with Cowichan Tribes in 2020 and they seemed to take a similar position. When David Slade, our Vice President met with them last year they were still non-committal but not opposed (David may say more about that later).

We are not seeing opposition to the trail from First Nations, although it is likely not a priority among their issues of concern.

The next development I'll mention is the big change at the Island Corridor Foundation. Some of you may know that the CEO Larry Stevenson resigned last week. Larry, as many of you know, was Mr. Rail. He rarely spoke about anything else. Interestingly though, in his press release announcing his resignation, he said that he thought the future of the corridor was bright and that it had a crucial role in the sustainable development of the Island.

That's something we also could have said and it's probably the first time Larry has said anything that we could agree with.

In a later interview with CFX he said that discussions about the Island Corridor had changed and that trains were no longer the subject of the conversation with decision makers. He also said that there remained a need to protect the corridor and allow new perspectives and different hands to be involved in that. Again, we were pleased to hear that message although it was surprising considering past statements and positions.

Myths, and I know some would use a use a stronger word, that we often have heard, especially from Mr. Stevenson, include:

Myth 1. "If the rails are lifted the right of way will be lost".

The rails actually are already lifted on part of the corridor which now has a trail on the rail bed (Cowichan Valley Trail.) The Galloping Goose trail in the Capital Region was also part of the Canadian National Railway and the rails were lifted many years before the trail was built. In neither case was the corridor "lost"

Myth 2. "Rail with trail is an option."

It is if we want 60 short trails going nowhere because the 59 bridges are too narrow for both trail and rail. A continuous trail would need 59 separate bridges which would be prohibitively expensive. A short section has been built this way, with separate bridges, in the Capital Region, at a cost of between \$2-3 million per km, which is many times the cost of a trail on the existing rail bed with the rails lifted.

Myth 3. "Government will fund rail."

It is very clear that there is no money for rail from either the federal or the provincial governments. The railway has gone 14 years without a

cent in funding and almost 30 years since a court found that the federal government was not required to fund it.

There are several sources of funding for active transportation trails.

- Parks Canada (through the Trans Canada trail) \$50 million
- Federal Active transportation Fund \$400 million (likely to be renewed)
- The Federal gas tax rebates to regional districts
- Two streams of the Federal Infrastructure Program (the green infrastructure stream and the recreation stream) more now that they have announced that they will not fund new roads.

Myth 4. “If the corridor is used for a trail it can’t ever go back to rail. Rail banking is illegal in Canada.”

(Rail banking is a rule in the US where unused rails can be removed for a trail and restored if required again)

Not so. There is an agreement that the Galloping Goose right of way in the Capital Region can revert to rail if the province decides it should.

These “Myths” are wrong ideas we must change.

Just a few more notes and then I’ll spare you:

- We met with Rob Fleming, the transportation minister, for the fourth time a few months ago. We were concerned that maintaining the continuity of the corridor might get lost in the many faceted discussions during the 18 month First Nations and Regions deliberations.

We were pleased to learn from the minister’s staff that there was a strong sense of maintaining the continuity of the corridor evident during the dis-

cussions. We believe it was a constructive meeting we look forward to further meetings as the discussions continue.

- We met with Lana Popham the tourism minister and her staff late last year. They were unequivocally enthusiastic and supportive of our project. They clearly understand and appreciate the economic impact and benefits that our feasibility study projects for residents and businesses on the corridor and the impetus it will have on getting visitors out of the CRD and up the East coast of the Island in a sustainable way.

Our next steps:

- Rob Fleming, the transportation minister, invited us back and we will be taking him up on his invitation. Our #1 priority is keeping the corridor as intact as possible and we believe it should be his #1 priority too.

- Our promotions group is also contacting the five regional districts again with our trail feasibility study asking them to ensure that it is included in the options being considered in the 18 month process.

- and we all need to talk up our active transportation option for the Island Corridor on social media and with our elected representatives - letter writing templates on our website.

Remember, and spread the word:

- Lifting the rails does not mean the loss of the corridor

- Rail with trail is not an option for a continuous trail

- There is no funding for rail, government or otherwise

- Rail banking is an option