

CVRD: Island Rail Corridor - Planning Towards Shared Vision

Friends of Rails to Trails Vancouver Island (FORT-VI) Submission

Stakeholder Interview, submitted 8 July 2024 Drafter: Alastair Craighead, FORT-VI

Q1 *Tell me about the organization you represent and its work in the CVRD*

Friends of Rails to Trails Vancouver Island is about converting unused rail corridors to active transportation routes. We believe active transportation is of growing importance as we move to safer, healthier transportation options and to a lower carbon economy, and that it is increasingly an important element of federal, provincial and regional transportation policies. The CVRD already has part of the E&N corridor converted to a successful trail.

Two of our board members were involved in the old CNR rail corridor which is now the Galloping Goose trail in the Capital Region.

We believe that the Island Corridor can be an important active transportation component of the province's active transportation strategy as set out in the South Island Transportation Strategy. We also believe it is important to put this valuable public asset into public use now.

Q2 *What is your familiarity with the Island Rail Corridor?*

Most of our board members travelled it by train and a few have walked it. We are very familiar with the provincial studies on the corridor including the IBI evaluation in 2010, the WSP Island Rail Corridor Condition Assessment in 2020, the Island Corridor Freight Analysis in 2022 and the priorities identified in the South Island Transportation Strategy in 2020. One of our board members chaired the advisory committee for the provincial/BC Transit study for a future LRT route in the CRD which recommended the Island Highway/Galloping Goose Corridor and not the E&N corridor for the future role of a light rail system.

The Island Corridor Freight Analysis suggested that 10,000 to 25,570 truck loads of freight could be diverted from the Island Highway each year. The same study quotes MoTI data showing that there are 1,318,745 truck trips on the island highway per year which means that only 0.7% to 1.9% of the truck traffic would be diverted, a result similar to a study done on the Malahat in 2007 by IBI Engineering.

Q3 *Could you please describe what potential role you see the Island Rail Corridor playing in Island Transportation in the future?*

We believe that the Island Corridor is an important and irreplaceable transportation asset. We believe it is important to keep the corridor as intact and continuous as possible. We believe that the corridor presents a great opportunity for a continuous active transportation trail which can play an important role in providing an alternative to driving for tourism, recreation and commuting for the 40 or so communities on the corridor which are on average only 10 km apart. It is important that the trail be continuous so that it actually connects places and population nodes to effectively meet the growing public demand for safe active transportation routes. Because of bridges and other obstacles which prevent a continuous trail beside the rails, the trail needs to be on the railbed with the rails removed.

Q4 *If transportation modes are possible along the IRC in the future, what transportation modes would you prioritize and why?*

Active transportation trails are a proven successful use for similar corridors in North America and Europe. We believe that because the very large investments by government required to allow other transportation modes to use the corridor are very unlikely to be made, and because the province's and BC Transit's priorities and investments for public transportation are in bus rapid transit supported by active transportation, a trail is the best option for the corridor. The preferred route for eventual light rail service in the Capital region is on the Galloping Goose/Trans-Canada Highway corridor, not the E&N corridor.

Q5 *Can you indicate any specific locations where there is more (or less) potential for transportation modes or other activities along the corridor?*

In addition to a continuous active transportation trail, there is potential on the (100 foot wide) corridor for linear parks, local agriculture and campgrounds and First Nations cultural and other uses.

Q6 *From your perspective, what do you see as the main transportation constraints along the corridor?*

The width of the 50 bridges and trestles and the narrowness of the corridor in other places prevents a continuous trail beside the rail all along the corridor. The

bridges alone are on average less than 5 km apart. The Nanaimo Region did a study showing at least 40 places where it is not practicable to have a continuous trail with the rails in place. For a continuous trail the trail needs to be on the rail bed. Our study puts this cost at \$5 - 6 hundred thousand per km, similar to the estimates for the North Okanagan Trail now under construction. (A trail beside the rails being constructed in the Capital Region is costing \$2-3 million per km because of the costs of obstacles and separate new bridges) The cost of other options in the studies (Q2, Q4) makes them unlikely at the present time.

Q7 *From your perspective, what potential activities or future uses of the Island Rail Corridor could be of most impact for the CVRD? For example: trails for walking or biking, or other ancillary uses such as urban farming, sightseeing, areas to gather, recreational activities, or utilities.*

We believe an active transportation trail with ancillary uses suiting individual communities would best serve the communities it would connect (see Q5)

Q8 *From your perspective, are there any 'no-go' activities or uses?*

FORT-VI takes no position on any particular use though we believe an active transportation trail is the best use to ensure that the corridor is used now. We also believe that its past use as a rail corridor is highly unlikely now due to very high capital costs, large subsidies required and low performance in moving people and freight indicated in studies when compared to more cost effective and lower environmental impact alternatives such as buses and trucking.

Rail banking is possible which allows the ROW to be used for active transportation until such time as it might be needed for rail. This agreement is in place for the Galloping Goose Trail in Victoria.

Q9 *Does your organization have preferred uses you would like to see along the Island Rail Corridor in the future?*

We believe that an active transportation trail coupled with other First Nations and community uses is the best option.

We also think that in many places a 4-6 metre wide trail could serve as an emergency route if required. (The Galloping Goose in the Capital region is being widened to 6 meters to accommodate increased traffic)

Q10 Overall, what is your vision for the future of the Island Rail Corridor? If time allows:

Our vision:

- A world class active transportation trail, supporting lower impact tourism and giving Island residents and visitors a safe alternative to driving.
- Anchoring the growth of the communities on the corridor with an active transportation trail which would support transit and help communities to be less dependent on automobile travel.

Q11 Future use of the Island Rail Corridor will need to align with the 2020 South Island Transportation Strategy. Do you have suggestions on how to better align the corridor with the South Island Transportation Strategy and incorporate it with other transportation and land use development initiatives?

The 2020 South Island Transportation Strategy outlines 4 goals:

1. Ensuring sustainable options for a variety of travel modes that include growth and densification and promoting transit and active modes
2. Strengthening connections between travel modes and improve connections between communities
3. Improving the safety and reliability of the transportation network especially as it relates to active modes and vulnerable road users
4. Supporting and encouraging active transportation options by prioritizing improvement in accessibility and infrastructure.

FORT-VI believes an active transportation trail on the rail bed of the Island corridor advances all four goals. The feasibility of the trail is confirmed by the feasibility study funded by the Federal Active transportation Fund

Q12 Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

4VI (formerly Tourism Vancouver Island) is supportive of our active transportation trail project. Our feasibility study was supported by the Federal Active Transportation Strategy which has \$400 million available for projects (we understand that this fund is likely to be continued). The Trans Canada Trail has given us a letter of support (available on request) for an Active Transportation Trail on the Island Corridor. They have a particular interest in the Nanaimo to Courtenay section. They have a \$50 million fund for new projects such as the Island Corridor Trail.