



City of Powell River

## REPORT

File No. 5830-20-0014

**DATE:** March 15, 2021  
**TO:** Mayor and Council  
**FROM:** Anastasia Lukyanova, Sustainability Planner  
Meriko Kubota, Social Planner  
**SUBJECT:** Powell River Transit Analysis and Recommendations

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. That staff be directed to work with BC Transit on a Service Discussion Document to explore improved alignment and integration options between Zunga Bus service and BC Transit conventional service and implementing the *Powell River Transit Analysis and Recommendations* attached as Appendix A.
2. That staff be directed to include \$75,000 in the 2022-2026 financial plan from the COVID-19 Safe Restart Reserve to maintain the existing Zunga Bus service with one bus in Westview area through 2022.
3. That staff be directed to include the Zunga Bus service in the 2023 financial plan at a cost of \$188,500 funded through a combination of 50% Climate Action Reserve Fund and 50% general revenue.

### **CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER'S COMMENTS:**

I concur with the recommendations.

Russell Brewer, CAO

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### **ORIGIN/PURPOSE:**

To provide an analysis of the Zunga Bus pilot and outline the path forward for improving our community's transit system in alignment with the *Powell River Transit Vision and Goals*.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The City of Powell River was the first community in BC outside of Metro Vancouver to pilot an on-demand bus service. The Zunga Bus pilot launched on February 1, 2021, with one bus servicing the Westview Area. The goal of the pilot was to test an on-demand service in Powell River and use the pilot outcomes to improve transit services in our community.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY:**

Improving our transit system aligns with the following priorities of the City of Powell River 2021-2022 Strategic Plan:

*Community Health: Active Transportation & Active Living*

*Economic Resiliency: Improved Transportation & Digital Connections*

*Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation*

**EXISTING POLICY:**

**Sustainable Official Community Plan (SOCP)**

Improving our community's transit service aligns with the following SOCP objectives and policies:

**Public Transit Objectives:**

- 7.4.1 (a) Continue to work with BC Transit and the PPRD to provide efficient, reliable, and affordable public transit for the City;
- 7.4.1 (b) Encourage ongoing increased public transit ridership in conformance with the environment and sustainability objectives set out in this Plan;
- 7.4.1 (c) Achieve public transit transportation share target of 5% by 2020.

**Public Transit Policies:**

- 7.4.2 (a) The importance of transit as a key public good is recognized, and the City will therefore continue to support public transit and encourage increased ridership through collaboration with BC Transit, School District 47 and 93, the PPRD, and Tla'amin Nation;
- 7.4.2 (b) Work towards 100% accessible bus service. Implement transit-supportive measures within the City. (i.e., Introduce low floor buses; provide transit route and schedule information at bus stops; establish transit amenity standards for shelters, accessibility features, and lighting; consider the application of transit priority treatments at signalized intersections to improve transit service in key areas);
- 7.4.2 (i) Maintain adequate funding to ensure that affordable, reliable and convenient public transit services can continue to be provided;
- 7.4.2 (j) Council acknowledges the changing demographic profile of the community and the potential for increased demand for transit service due to an aging population.

**Smart Growth Principles:**

- 2. Build well-designed compact neighborhoods. Residents can choose to live, work, shop and play in close proximity. People can easily access daily activities, transit is viable, and local businesses are supported.
- 3. Provide a variety of transportation choices. Neighborhoods are attractive and have safe infrastructure for walking, cycling and transit, in addition to driving.

**Powell River Regional Social Planning Program**

The City's social planning work has highlighted that access to transportation is one of the greatest barriers that impact the lives of vulnerable people by preventing their access to grocery shopping, health appointments, employment, socialization, and other important community amenities and services. The lack of ability to get to work or access community offerings is due to not having access to or ownership of a vehicle. This is a barrier for people to thrive in our community.

Working to improve access to affordable, active and public transportation is an important part of the City's social planning efforts.

As highlighted in the *2016 Community Social Plan for the Powell River Region*, "Reliable, accessible and frequent transportation is vital to a community. Through our public consultations, it has been made clear that transportation to and around the Powell River region is inadequate to meet the needs of many community members. As with other areas of this social plan, the gaps in our transportation services also affect the most vulnerable amongst us, creating further marginalizing from opportunities that could enhance wellbeing. Barriers to transportation increase food insecurity, unemployment, unattended health issues, and loneliness."

### **qathet Region Ending Poverty Strategy**

The recently completed poverty strategy includes the following relevant actions:

- Work to improve and expand public transit services to enable affordable and convenient access to employment and educational opportunities and other community offerings
- Work to improve all-ages-and-abilities active transportation infrastructure to allow affordable access to community offerings by all
- Complete a transit service review and identify what community needs are not being met by the existing transit system

The strategy highlights that the more public supports and services are available (i.e., public health care, extensive and subsidized public transit, public childcare services), the lower the wage that must be earned, which helps reduce poverty in our community.

### **Powell River Transit System Vision and Goals**

In February 2020, Council adopted the following *Powell River Transit System Vision and Goals*:

#### **Vision:**

An efficient, convenient, reliable, accessible, and affordable public transit system that is well used by the community, contributing to a sustainable, vibrant, and equitable quality of life in Powell River.

#### **Goals:**

The Powell River transit system will:

1. **Grow ridership**
2. **Be direct and connect the community's key centers**
3. **Work together effectively with other modes of transportation**
4. **Be efficient and cost-effective**
5. **Be safe and accessible to all**
6. **Reduce community greenhouse gas emissions**
7. **Be agile, technologically innovative, and customer-focused**
8. **Connect communities from Lund to Saltery Bay, the Lower Sunshine Coast, the Lower Mainland, and Vancouver Island**

### **ANALYSIS AND IMPACT:**

The Zunga Bus pilot has been operating with one bus in Westview area since February 1, 2021. In July of 2021, Council allocated additional funding to add a second bus to the pilot and expand the service area and hours. Due to driver shortages the second bus was not launched, and the service continued with one bus in Westview only. While the pilot operated with one bus and a limited service area, it allowed the City to become familiar with the on-demand technology, collect valuable data on ridership patterns, and gather extensive community feedback on the service.

During the pilot, staff were approached by many communities interested in implementing a similar service, including but not limited to the District of Lake Country, Squamish, City of Cranbrook, Ponderay, Idaho, and Bunbury, Australia. This highlights that other small communities face similar transportation challenges and are seeing a growing need for better public transportation. The Zunga Bus pilot was also featured in the *Small Towns, Big Steps in Active Transport* report by the BC Alliance for Healthy Living.

To analyze the pilot and prepare recommendations for next steps, staff have worked with David Cooper of Leading Mobility and Erin Toop of WSP. Both Erin and David have extensive experience in transit planning and particularly in reviewing existing and potential on-demand transit services in small communities. They have completed a thorough review of the Zunga Bus pilot and our community's existing transit services and prepared recommendations for the future of Powell River transit system in alignment with the *Powell River Transit Vision and Goals* and other existing planning documents. Their recommendations are attached to this report as Appendix A – *Powell River Transit Analysis and Recommendations*.

BC Transit is recommending that in order to review inputs from BC Transit, the City's Zunga bus pilot and the WSP report in a shortened period, that a revised planned Transit Future Service Plan process be considered as suggested in Appendix C. In its place, BC Transit would develop a Service Discussion Document that would be created through collaboration with the City. This would shorten the timeframe to review possible integration and system improvement options, including integration options between conventional transit and Zunga Bus on demand and longer-term integration and funding.

Staff therefore recommend working with BC Transit on a Service Discussion Document with a view to also implementing the report's recommendations. This includes the following two main actions (more details are provided in the full consultants' report in Appendix A):

1. Secure a BC Transit funding agreement for the Zunga Bus service and replace the existing conventional Route 3 service with on-demand (estimated net costs to the City are \$31,000 to -\$51,000, depending on the BC Transit funding ratio for the Zunga Bus)
2. Combine routes 1&2 to create a new crosstown high frequency service (estimated net cost to the City is \$231,500)

In the short term, staff also recommend extending the current single bus Zunga Bus service through to the end of 2022 and transitioning it to a stop-to-stop model with special accommodation for people with mobility challenges as recommended by the consultants.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

In order to operate the current service (11am-6:30pm, 7 days a week, Westview area, one bus in service with one spare bus) past the current pilot end date of April 30, staff are requesting an additional \$75,000 in funding (details are provided in the table below):

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| Allocated from Climate Action Reserve Fund                              | \$170,000        |
| <u>Allocated from COVID-19 Resilience Fund</u>                          | <u>\$130,366</u> |
| <b>Total Allocated to Date</b>  | <b>\$300,366</b> |
| Spent as of February 14, 2022   | -\$191,762       |
| Remaining Funding   | \$108,604        |
| <u>Funding required to operate from February 15 - December 31, 2022</u> | <u>\$175,000</u> |
| <b>Additional funding requested (includes 15% contingency)</b>          | <b>\$75,000</b>  |

\$75,000 is therefore being requested from the COVID-19 Safe Restart Reserve to maintain existing service through 2022 as recommended in the *Powell River Transit Analysis and Recommendations* report included in Appendix A. The COVID-19 Safe Restart Reserve currently has an uncommitted balance of \$358,098.

Staff also recommend including the service in the financial plan for 2023 in the amount of \$188,500 to be funded from a combination of climate action reserve funding and general revenue. Should a funding agreement be established in 2023 with BC Transit, the service would be funded through a combination of BC Transit and general revenue and the amount of funding required from the City would be reduced from \$188,500 to approximately \$62,205 to \$81,055 as outlined on page 36 of Appendix A. However, in the absence of an agreement currently, the full funding amount of \$188,500 for 2023 is recommended for the financial plan.

**COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT:**

As part of the transit service review process, extensive user feedback was gathered from the Zunga Bus pilot, including phone interviews with riders and comments and reviews left by riders through the app. Consultants also reviewed input received by the City from community organizations (Youth Community Action Team, LIFT Community Services, Inclusion Powell River Society, and First Credit Union). Conventional and HandyDART rider feedback received as part of the 2015 BC Transit Service review was also included in the transit review process. The report appendices include phone interviews, rider reviews, and letters received.

**OPTIONS:**

1. That staff be directed to work with BC Transit on a Service Discussion Document to explore improved alignment and integration options between Zunga Bus service and BC Transit conventional service and implementing the Powell River Transit Analysis and Recommendations attached as Appendix A.

That staff be directed to include \$75,000 in the 2022-2026 financial plan from the COVID-19 Safe Restart Reserve to maintain the existing Zunga Bus service with one bus in Westview area through 2022.

That staff be directed to include the Zunga Bus service in the 2023 financial plan at a cost of \$188,500 funded through a combination of 50% Climate Action Reserve Fund and 50% general revenue.

2. That Council provides an alternate direction to staff.

Attachment(s)

*Appendix A (Powell River Transit Analysis and Recommendations)*

*Appendix B (Powell River Transit Analysis and Recommendations - Presentation Slides)*

*Appendix C Memo from BC Transit regarding Powell River Transit Analysis – Next Steps*