What are the issues, and why is efficient public transportation so important?

Our coastal regions have been suffering from a lack of public transportation for many years. If we had an efficient form of public transportation, it would allow our communities to be much more interconnected. Tofino specifically suffers from a serious housing shortage; the demand for appropriate and affordable housing far outweighs the supply. Parking is also at a premium especially in the core village area. With the increasing pressure put on the area by the tourism industry, these issues are coming quickly to a breaking point. There isn’t enough housing to support the workforce needed for the businesses, nor is there adequate available parking for customers, and employees alike. Public transportation would alleviate both of these issues by making the populations of Esowista, Ty-Histanis, Ucluelet, Hitacu, etc. more accessible.

For communities like Esowista, Ty-Hystanis, Hitacu, and Macoah, hitchhiking is a very common, and dangerous practice which is unfortunately relied upon by many residents as a means to get to and from either Tofino or Ucluelet, again, an efficient transportation system would cut down on this practice, and make it much easier to get these persons to and from work, appointments, groceries, etc.

What’s Working Elsewhere?

Gabriola’s GERTIE Model - Gabriola has been working tirelessly to implement a public transportation model to help get youth, visitors and employees alike around their community by means of increasing resident’s property taxes to support in large part the funding requirements of a small fleet of vehicles and the insurance, licensing, and maintenance of the fleet. GERTIE is operated as a non profit organization. From the outset, they applied for regional district of Nanaimo funding to get a pilot off the ground and running.

Mt. Waddington’s Gas Tax Model - The northern Vancouver Island communities have leveraged the availability of the Federal Gas Tax fund to support the cost of their public transportation model. The fleet is owned and operated by BC transit, and they are compensated through the use of the gas tax funds. The service began in large part due to a sizable donation from Island Health for a pilot to be run as a means of determining feasibility.

Various ride-share models: - Ride-share can be very efficient, cost effective, and user friendly. It is a great way to meet new people, and connect between communities. Generally speaking, these ride-share models are some form of online forum where people are able to offer or ask for either one time, or ongoing rides from point A to point B. The key here is that no payment can be asked of the passenger in these cases, and is more of a grassroots initiative.

What do we have here already?

Tofino Taxi -

This service has a growing reputation of being unreliable, and sometimes not available. It carries a high cost as a means of consistent transportation, and often is not readily available for pick ups if already on another call. The service is often backed up, and is certainly not a sustainable option to persons having to travel more than a few kilometers.

Pacific Rim Navigators -

New shuttle service available focusing on small tour groups, and rental shuttle services at a rate of $95.00 per hour. Again, this is not a viable solution to the need for sustainable, and affordable transportation.

Tofino District Beach Bus -

Available as a subsidized service focusing on tourists during the months of July and August. The service is run by Tofino Bus, and funded through the district of Tofino via the gas tax fund. This is the closest thing we have to a public transportation service, but its major shortcomings are that it is only between Cox Bay, and the Village of Tofino. It does show us some of the potential for and increased service.

Esowista ‘taxi’ -

Essentially a high cost taxi service. Rides are offered at a flat rate, per customer. The going rate is $20.00 one way to make it to Tofino, from Long Beach.

Tofino Bus-

Operates a full service inter-island bus service. They have twice daily runs between Tofino and Ucluelet, linking up with the schedule which carries onwards to Port Alberni and the rest of the island. The business has recently expanded, taking over the scheduled routes formerly operated by Greyhound.

Wheels for Wellness -

This service is focused on providing free rides to persons who are otherwise unable to make it to non-emergency medical trips to the hospital. The service is available for people needing to get out of town. There is a 70km trip length required to qualify for the use of the service.

What are the possible funding solutions?

Co-operative Membership -

This model would focus on a membership based, community supported co-op that would solicit memberships from businesses and individuals, as well as allowing ridership from walk on passengers at a per-ride fee. Business members would benefit from membership in the form of being able to provide bus-passes to their staff who don’t have their own transportation, or would prefer to commute to work utilizing a bus system to avoid parking issues/fees.

Gaming Grants

In referencing the non profit nature of the previous business model, it may be eligible for sizeable provincial grants like gaming grants etc as the organization would be providing a service to the community, this could reasonably help to fund the initial extended pilot

Existing Beach Bus -

The funding monies for the existing beach bus model that was aforementioned could be reallocated towards the creation of a year round, community oriented model such as the co-operative, and membership based model. This could be especially successful should the various communities band together with this funding like has been done on the North Island.

Federal Gas Tax Fund -

There is 1.3 million available annually by means of a federal grant, given to the provinces, and distributed based on the displayed need. The north island has taken great advantage of this fund, and could definitely be applied in this facility.

Property Taxes -

As evidence by the Gabriola model, this can be an individually low cost method of raising the capital required to get a public transportation system from idea to reality with a sizeable allocation of funds being sourced annually.

CCCU Building Healthier Communities Fund/Corporate Sponsorship-

This fund is available three times a year to applicants, as a means of acquiring capital for seed money to get initiatives off the ground and running. This would be a great means of capital acquisition such as purchasing or renting a vehicle for use during a longer pilot run, or covering the costs of other material goods required to keep operations running.

Suggestions / Vision:

Looking at the above examples, I think pieces of each model can be used to create a successful plan for our coast. Affordable Public Transportation is rarely a profitable business model. Furthermore, without subsidization, it is most often a source of significant deficit. With that in mind, our vision is to create a non profit co-operative organization which is eligible for, and attracts more donations/funding such as corporate sponsorship, gaming grants, etc. The co-op would solicit ‘memberships’ which would act as bus passes, and each membership would have voting rights for the board of directors. Businesses could purchase a corporate membership, which would contain one vote, and a number of bus passes, based on membership contribution.

This alone would not be able to support the operating costs of a service route similar to the one we provided in May. We would need to cultivate additional funding, this could be a combination of gas tax funds, gaming grants, corporate sponsorship, and nominal property tax increases.

Our Service:  
 - 11 days of service, 3 runs per day (3 hour loop - 7am,12pm and 4:30pm starts)

* Operated by Tofino bus (average of $644 per day, operating near cost)
* 15 passenger bus
* 472 riders overall
* 7am run not very busy, 12 and 4:30 run at times full
* Most popular stops: Hitacu, Murrays, School, Millstream, Ty-Histanis, Visitor Centre, Bus Depot

We had grassroots support for a night time run to support restaurant service staff, but the timeline was too tight to make it work. It is believed the morning run would be more suitable with more research into the working hours of potential riders, to accommodate to the busiest times for residents.

Surveys:

We conducted two separate surveys. The first through survey monkey (100 responses)

Notable data:  
 - 46.5% of respondents bike or walk to work (Another 14% hitchhike, another 13% carpool)

* While 55% drive their own vehicle 35% dont have a license, or can’t afford a car
* The two most needed times for transportation as polled were 6-9am, and 4-7 pm
* 55% indicated their main purpose for transit was for to and from work
* $3-5 was most preferential for a fare
* 21% could obtain employment with access to public transit
* 33% are either somewhat unsuccessful or very unsuccessful in finding transportation if they do not have their own vehicle

The second conducted through Google Forms/Surveys (68 responses, 33 online, 35 from pilot)

Survey data was only collected from the first three days of the pilot.

Notable Data from Pilot (over a long weekend)

- 65% of bus riders were locals

- 22% from Esowista/Tyhistanis, 11% from Hitacu, 25% from Ucluelet

- 31% worked outside of their community

- 56% would use the service to get to and from work

Data from Online:

- 30% worked outside of their community

- 24% would use the service primarily to get to and from work

- 36% primarily to and from community events

- 61% said they would use transit if available, instead of their own vehicle (or 90% of people with a vehicle, would use public transit)

- 75% would pay 1-3 dollars for a ride within their own community

- 42% would pay 5-8 dollars for a ride between communities

Projections:  
We believe the ridership numbers presented can be grossed up by a significant percentage with the following factors taken into consideration:

- short window for advertising/spreading awareness of pilot

- route not frequent enough to satisfy demand of those in need

- short pilot: potential riders not willing to sacrifice current source of transit

With the public seeing the service as a long term, viable option, over time, ridership will increase.