



# ISLAND CORRIDOR FOUNDATION

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27 April 2026

TO: CRD Board

Mayors and Council:

City of Colwood  
City of Langford  
City of Victoria  
District of Central Saanich  
District of Highlands  
District of Oak Bay  
District of Metchosin  
District of North Saanich  
District of Saanich  
District of Sooke  
Township of Esquimalt  
Town of Sidney  
Town of View Royal

CC: Directors, Southern Gulf Islands and Juan de Fuca Electoral Areas

Dear CRD Board Directors, Mayors and Councils,

We are writing to encourage your Board and Council to formally include the E&N Reconciliation Corridor Initiative as a strategic priority for the upcoming term.

This initiative represents a rare alignment of reconciliation, transportation, and long-term regional planning. It is grounded not only in mobility needs along the Island Corridor, but in a meaningful partnership opportunity with First Nations, including the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, whose interests, rights, and history are directly tied to the corridor. Advancing this work is not simply a transportation decision; it is a demonstration of how local governments can move from acknowledgement to action on reconciliation.

The timing is particularly important. With a municipal election this fall, there is a natural risk that momentum built to date could be lost or diluted through transition. At the same time, there has already been significant investment—financial, political, and relational—by local governments, the CRD, the Province, and First Nations partners. Allowing the

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initiative to fall off priority lists now would undermine that investment and signal uncertainty at a moment when consistency and commitment are required.

From a transportation perspective, the pressures facing the West Shore and the broader region are not easing. Congestion along the Trans-Canada Highway and through key corridors such as the Colwood Crawl continues to affect economic productivity, climate goals, and quality of life. The E&N corridor remains one of the few continuous, publicly held transportation assets capable of supporting a step-change in how people move through the region. Preserving its advancement as a strategic priority ensures that viable transportation alternatives remain actively under development rather than deferred indefinitely.

Equally important is the need for continuity in governance. Strategic priority designation provides direction to staff, signals intent to partners, and ensures that inter-municipal collaboration can proceed with clarity. Without that signal, the initiative risks becoming episodic, dependent on individual champions rather than embedded commitment.

This is not a request to predetermine the final form of rail on the corridor. Rather, it is a request to maintain the initiative as a priority so that the work—technical, financial, and relational—can continue in a deliberate and coordinated manner. The decisions ahead will require careful analysis, but they also require sustained attention.

For these reasons, we encourage your Board and Council to include the E&N Reconciliation Rail Initiative in your strategic priorities for the next term, ensuring that the progress made to date is not lost and that the region continues to advance a project that carries both practical and generational significance.

Sincerely,

Sid Tobias MSM, CD, MA  
Director, ICF Board

Barb Desjardins  
Co-Chair, ICF Board

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## Reconciliation Corridor Initiative (RCI)

### Background

- The RCI is a partnership between the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations and local governments.
- The initiative was formally announced in December 2025, when representatives from Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, as well as the Mayors of Victoria, Esquimalt, View Royal, Langford and Colwood and the CRD Board Chair signed the RCI agreement.
- The purpose of the Initiative is to explore the potential for passenger rail service in the CRD, using that portion of the E&N/Island Corridor running from VicWest to Westshore Parkway in Langford.
- The parties to the Reconciliation Corridor Initiative have agreed to conduct due diligence on a proposed rail service on the Corridor to:
  - Understand the potential to contribute to transportation, affordable housing and economic development goals in the region, and
  - Assess the technical feasibility of the project, and
  - Assess the feasibility of a realignment through Esquimalt Nation's reserve lands. That part of the original alignment would be remediated and returned to the Nation.
- As a condition of the project, Songhees and Esquimalt Nations will be assessing the extent to which there could be economic development opportunities or other benefits for both Nations in relation to an active rail corridor.
- At this stage, no specific outcome is being endorsed or predetermined. The focus is on gathering the information required to make informed, evidence-based decisions that reflect community needs and obligations.
- In March 2026, the CRD Board voted unanimously to grant \$1.7m in legacy capital funding to the Reconciliation Corridor Initiative, as managed by the Island Corridor Foundation.

### Governance

- The initiative is currently governed through a Steering Committee which provides strategic guidance for the project. Steering Committee representatives come from Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, the CRD, local governments along the Corridor, CFB Esquimalt, the Island Corridor Foundation (ICF), and local MLAs.
- Island Corridor Foundation staff provide project management services for the RCI, with the assistance of a Working Group.
- RCI members are currently engaged in a governance review for the next stage of work together.

### **Transit and transportation planning connections**

- The ICF CEO sits on the CRD's Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) and will report to RTAC on the RCI at each meeting, or when requested.
- RCI participants meet with BC Transit and MOTT staff at regular intervals for project updates and coordination.
- The CRD is working with consultants to explore integration between the RCI and the Regional Transportation Plan.

### **What's new:**

While the Island Corridor has been studied extensively in the past, there are important differences with the RCI's approach and in the timing.

- The Reconciliation Corridor Initiative brings parties together to address the transportation issues of the region with First Nations leadership and within a framework of reconciliation and mutual benefit. The partnership between First Nations and local governments in addressing regional transportation issues and exploring the Corridor's future is entirely new.
- The ridership context has changed significantly since previous studies. Between 2011 and 2024, the population of Colwood and Langford increased by 72%. Travel time by private vehicle between Westhills and CFB Esquimalt can now take an hour during peak times, with the same or longer time needed to travel between Westhills and Douglas at Johnston.
- Given a new emphasis provincially and federally on transit-oriented development, as well as multiple policies to support affordable housing close to transit, the Reconciliation Corridor Initiative can now consider the potential for transit-oriented development along the Corridor.
- Previous studies assumed a "heavy rail" use, including freight. The Reconciliation Corridor Initiative is not focussed on heavy rail or freight. Instead, the RCI is focussed on some version of light rail for passenger use, depending on where the evidence leads.

### **Project results to date**

- As of April 2026, the RCI partners and provincial Shared Vision funds have supported \$580K in technical work to advance the Initiative.
- A design study by Perkins and Will confirmed that the Island Corridor in the CRD is wide enough to accommodate double tracking as well as a trail beside the rail and major utility infrastructure. The Perkins and Will study also confirmed potential for transit-oriented development at critical sites along the Corridor.
- Preliminary ridership and costing studies indicate rail service on a revitalized Island Corridor could provide significant ridership at a relatively low cost compared to creating new infrastructure.

- Transportation planning firm The Stewart Group has mapped out the project work required to complete a business plan by 2027.
- With CRD funding of \$1.7million confirmed, local partners have now secured a total of \$2.3million for the due diligence phase, or 57% of the total required to complete the project business plan. Federal and provincial representatives are being approached for next stage funding.

### **The Island Corridor:**

- The Island Corridor is a 289km rail corridor that runs from Victoria to Courtenay and from Parksville to Port Alberni on Vancouver Island. Passenger service last operated in 2011, but shortline freight service operates in the Nanaimo area today and basic maintenance and clearing of the line is ongoing.
- The Corridor was built by private interests between 1886 and 1914 under the name Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway (E&N). The project was made possible with federal funding and a federal-provincial land grant, mandated by the Act of Union by which BC entered Confederation. The land grant alienated almost 2 million acres of unceded First Nations traditional territories. Some sections of the Corridor were also taken out of pre-existing First Nations reserve lands. Recently, there has been a court decision upholding First Nations' rights to Corridor lands on reserve in certain circumstances.
- As the historic spine of Vancouver Island's settlement patterns from colonial to modern times, the Corridor runs within a few kilometres of 70% of the Island's population and is a land base for critical infrastructure such as water, sewer, gas, fibre optic and electricity.
- The Island Corridor Foundation (ICF) now holds the Corridor lands and assets in common on behalf of its members: 14 First Nations and 5 Regional Districts. The ICF is a non-profit and a federal registered charity.

The work of parties to the Reconciliation Corridor Initiative will provide due diligence on the potential for establishing commuter rail in the CRD, providing future decision makers with information for transportation planning with respect to the Corridor, based on the principles of reconciliation and mutual benefit.