



# Victoria Transit Riders Union 2025 Activity Report

## Acknowledgements

Although we have called our organization the “Victoria” Transit Riders Union (VTRU), we are mindful of the fact that we are operating on the territories of the Lekwungen, X̱wsep̱səm, and W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations. Restricting Indigenous people’s freedom of movement is a major mechanism of colonial control. Therefore, we regard the struggle against colonialism, capitalism, and for Indigenous self-determination as inseparable from our fight for fare-free and excellent public transit.

In 2025 we were very active and successful in this monumental fight – particularly for a fairly new, growing, and entirely volunteer-run organization. This report reflects that. There were numerous challenges, of course, but the dedication and commitment of our volunteers and supporters proved more than equal to the tasks at hand.

Congratulations, and big thank-you to all who pitched in to help!

Of course, this includes all those who supported VTRU financially in 2025, including the many individuals who contributed small donations, and our larger sponsors. Donations of \$100 or more were received from Unifor Local 333-BC, the Greater Victoria Teachers’ Association (GVTA), and the British Columbia General Employees’ Union (BCGEU). Our victories are also those of the organizations who sponsor and endorse us.

**Thank-you all for being on board with VTRU! Next stop: fare-free and excellent transit!**

In solidarity,

The VTRU organizing committee

(Christina Clemente, Liz Cronin, Nathan Bird, Alyssa Allen, Steven Barre, Ali Mijares, Grace Bodie, and Angelina Berlinic)



*VTRU organizers after a successful rally*

## Brief 2024 Summary

Because this is our very first annual activity report, it seems appropriate to begin by listing a couple highlights from 2024, many of which we built on in 2025. These were as follows:

- **Advocacy for Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) resolutions requesting fare-free transit for youth (18 and younger) and seniors (65 and older).** Most of our efforts in 2024 went towards advocating for the passage of these two UBCM resolutions. To this end, we attended and spoke at council meetings in Saanich, Oak Bay, and Langford, sent multiple emails to almost every municipal politician in the province, circulated numerous press releases, and gave numerous media interviews. This resulted in a partial victory, with the resolution for seniors failing to pass, and the resolution for youth passing after being watered down to include only those teens *in grade 12 and under*. A small sample of the resulting media coverage can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Many of our efforts in 2025 were focused on keeping up the pressure we helped build in 2024 to extend fare-free programs to include teens and seniors.
- **Influence on the 2024 provincial election.** During the 2024 provincial election campaign, we met with then BC Green Party leader, Sonia Furstenuau, and Victoria-Swan Lake Green candidate, Christina Winter, and urged them to include fare-free transit on their platform. We also met with the BC NDP's Oak Bay-Gordon Head candidate, Diana Gibson. Soon after our meeting with the BC Green Party they publicly promised “fast, frequent and free” transit if elected. Likely as a response to this, the BC NDP then promised fare-free transit for BC seniors in off-peak hours – a yet-unfulfilled promise that we continued to remind both the BC NDP and the general public of throughout 2025.
- **Transit Rider Survey.** We also conducted a survey of around 200 transit users across Greater Victoria. A majority of the survey participants were youth and young adults who identified as students and/or workers. The survey results indicated that across the board, Victoria Transit Riders want better transit services in Victoria – specifically, riders want fewer transfers, closer connections to their final destinations, and lower fares. The participants shared a variety of reasons for why they loved taking the bus in Victoria, which included: socializing with other riders, being able to relax and read while commuting, interacting with friendly BC Transit drivers, affordability, no need for parking, and accessibility.
- **The Case For a Fare-Free BC.** Our lead writer, Nathan (Harland) Bird researched, wrote, and self-published [an article](#) making a comprehensive case for abolishing fares in BC.



VTRU members at a protest against widening the highway in Goldstream Park in 2024

## 2025 Overview

In 2025, we waged three major campaigns, all of which help make VTRU unique: 1) to build VTRU into a membership-based mass organization, and to help build a community of Victoria transit riders; 2) to win fare-free and excellent transit across BC; and 3) to support transit workers. Although many of our 2025 activities could be categorized under two or more of these broad umbrellas, for the sake of convenience and coherence, we have presented them here under whichever campaign seemed to be the best fit.

It should also be noted that this report aims to be comprehensive, but that not all of our 2025 activities are recorded here for the sake of readability. As busy as this report makes it look like we were in 2025 – trust us, we were busier!

## Campaign to Build VTRU and a Community of Victoria Transit Riders

Because VTRU aims to be not just another transit advocacy group, but rather an organization representing a mass movement of transit riders, our first task is to build both our organization and a wider community of transit riders in Victoria. Following are the activities that most directly contributed to furthering these goals.

### *Spring Transit Celebration*

VTRU hosted its first community-building event on March 30<sup>th</sup> at the headquarters of the Greater Victoria Teachers' Association (GVTA), bringing together approximately 50 people – including seniors, children, and everywhere in between – for an afternoon of socializing, snacks and refreshments, and arts and crafts, including making “thank you transit worker” cards with pencil crayons and potato stamps, and custom silk-screened VTRU swag like T-shirts and tote bags.

Attendees included Stephen Bains, the president of Unifor Local 333-BC (which represents local transit workers), and Saanich City Councillor Teale Phelps Bondaroff, as well as representatives from [Climate Justice Victoria](#), [Better Island Transit](#), [Capital Bike](#), and the [Victoria Tenants Union](#).

In addition to building community, the event was held in appreciation of local transit workers and in protest of the huge fare hike that went into effect on April 1<sup>st</sup> (see below). Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, and we raised about \$50 for striking Cowichan Valley transit workers (see below) and another \$50 for VTRU. Overall, we considered our Spring Transit Celebration to be a huge success.



## ***Tabling***

We tabled at the Moss Street Farmer's Market (August 16<sup>th</sup> and October 4<sup>th</sup>), the Victoria Labour Day Picnic (September 1<sup>st</sup>), the Draw The Line rally (September 20<sup>th</sup>), and the Carnival Of Resistance rally (September 26<sup>th</sup>). These tables allowed us to promote our organization and politics and sell our new custom-made VTRU T-shirts to the general public. Also featured were our other new promotional materials: a banner, buttons, and brochures that explain who we are and what we stand for.

At the Carnival of Resistance rally, which was held outside the UBCM conference in downtown Victoria, VTRU's very own Nathan Bird was on the speaker's list alongside Pacheedaht Elder Bill Jones and then-brand new BC Green leader, Emily Lowan.

Altogether we raised \$120 from our tables in 2025.



*Tabling at the Moss Street Market*



*Marching at Draw The Line*

## ***Media interviews, public speaking, and social media***

In addition to the many interviews and speeches VTRU representatives gave on specific issues in 2025, we also did a few interviews that centred on us as an organization. For example, our primary media spokesperson, Liz Cronin, appeared on the [Camas Books](#) podcast [Seeds of Revolution](#), and was recently interviewed on the Rogers TV show, [Change The World](#). She is also booked to tell the Victoria-Habourside chapter of the Rotary Club all about VTRU on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

In addition we were very active on social media in 2025, thanks largely to our social media mastermind, Steven Barre. For example, we maintained active accounts on Instagram (401 followers currently), Facebook (86 followers), Threads, Tiktok, Mastadon, Bluesky, and X. We were also active on Youtube and Reddit, and are in the process of building a community on Discord. We also sent out numerous newsletters to our growing mailing list, which currently has 250 subscribers.

We also take it as a positive sign that media have begun contacting us for comment on transit news. For example, in 2025 media reached out to us as representatives of Victoria transit riders for comment on stories about [bus pass usage](#) and [service changes](#).



## ***Building alliances***

In 2025 we also started the process of building alliances with other like-minded organizations to help us punch above our weight. While this process is still in its early stages, we put considerable effort into alliance-building in 2025, and we look forward to having it pay off in 2026.

## **Campaign For Fare-Free And Excellent Transit**

As part of our ongoing campaign to abolish transit fares in Victoria and across BC, starting with those for teens (18 and younger) and seniors (65 and older), we took on many projects in 2025, including staging rallies, starting a letter-writing campaign, publishing press releases and doing interviews, meeting with government officials, writing articles, speaking at public events, and more.

Throughout, we have continued to remind all who will listen that UBCM requested free transit for all BC high school students and that the NDP campaigned on fare-free transit seniors in off-peak hours in 2024, keeping up the pressure we helped build last year for the expansion of fare-free programs. We have also continued to spread the message that abolishing fares is necessary to facilitate the massive expansion and improvement of transit service needed to combat climate change (among many other reasons).

Following are some of the more significant accomplishments we managed as part of this campaign in 2025.

### ***Launch of letter writing campaign for fare-free transit for teens and seniors***

Following up on the work we did in 2024 to advocate for the successful UBCM resolution calling for fare-free transit for all high school students (grade 12 and lower), on February 27<sup>th</sup> we launched a letter-writing campaign via [actionnetwork.org](https://actionnetwork.org), providing an editable template letter that allowed people to quickly and easily lobby the Minister of Transportation and his government to heed this call.

However, we have recently re-worked this letter-writing campaign to call for fare-free transit for *all teens aged 18 and under, seniors aged 65 and older, and for concrete steps towards the abolition of all fares*. We have also re-launched this campaign with help from the [Young BC Greens](#), the [Worker Solidarity Network](#), the [Centre For Family Equity](#), and other groups.

The latest version of the letter template can be accessed [here](#), and an Instagram reel produced by the Young BC Greens to promote the campaign can be seen [here](#). At the time of writing 148 letters have been sent.

### ***Mackenzie bus lane advocacy***

We advocated for the addition of a bus lane along Mackenzie Avenue to speed transit times in a corridor that many students use to get to and from UVic. encouraging our supporters to write and speak in favour of the proposal, and attending and speaking at public hearings on the matter at Saanich city hall on February 11<sup>th</sup> and July 7<sup>th</sup>.

### *Opposing the Victoria fare hike and evasion crackdown*

Unfortunately we ended up fighting a number of defensive actions in 2025, beginning with the fare increase that went into effect in Victoria on April 1<sup>st</sup>, raising the cost of a single ride from \$2.50 to \$3, day passes from \$5 to \$6, and 10-ticket HandyDART packages from \$25 to \$30.

We responded immediately to the announced increase, condemning it in a press release that was picked up by the [Times Colonist](#), allowing us to get our criticisms of the fare increase out to a wide audience.

Soon thereafter, when BC Transit announced that a new “Fare Awareness and Enforcement Program” to crackdown on fare evasion would commence on July 7<sup>th</sup>, we again immediately responded with a press release that was picked up by the [Times Colonist](#), [CTV News](#), [CHEK News](#), and [Victoria Buzz](#), taking the opportunity to point out that abolishing fares would be a much more effective, efficient, egalitarian, and pleasant way to end fare evasion.

### *Earth Day rally with Transit For Teens*

We staged an Earth Day rally at the Legislature Building April 22<sup>nd</sup> together with high school students involved in the [Transit For Teens](#) campaign. We used this opportunity to call for fare-free transit for teens, protest the April 1<sup>st</sup> fare increase, and draw attention to the fact that, while it’s great transit is free for all on Earth Day in Victoria, ideally *every day* should be “Earth Day.” Speakers included representatives of VTRU and the Greater Victoria Teachers' Association, high school students, and Saanich councillor Teale Phelps Bondaroff. We promoted this event with a press release, and the GVTA also sent out a press release promoting the event and announcing their endorsement of our campaign for fare-free transit for teens, resulting in coverage from various Black Press outlets like [Oak Bay News](#).



*VTRU and Transit For Teens on Earth Day at the BC Legislature*

### ***Meeting with Parliamentary Secretary for Transit George Anderson***

On April 30<sup>th</sup> we met with the newly-elected Parliamentary Secretary for Transit [George Anderson](#) to press the provincial government to invest heavily in public transit service expansion and improvements, and to take concrete steps towards abolishing all fares, starting immediately with those for teens and seniors. We reminded him of the 2024 UBCM resolution requesting a province-wide fare-free program for all students in grade 12 and under, as well as the NDP's own campaign promise of fare-free public transit for seniors in off-peak hours.

Unfortunately, Mr. Anderson was noncommittal, and he tried to put the responsibility for expanding fare-free programs back onto municipalities, making it clear to us that the provincial government has no intention of granting the UBCM request or fulfilling their own promise. We left this meeting with a renewed resolve to build a grassroots mass movement that can demand and make the political changes that transit riders – and future generations – need to see.

### ***Provincial budget consultation meeting address***

On June 2<sup>nd</sup> VTRU representative Liz Cronin addressed the Select Standing Committee On Finance And Government Services as part of the BC Budget 2026 Consultation, urging the government to make transit fare-free for all BC teens and seniors and to move towards introducing universal fare-free transit. Audio of her speech, as well as the following question and answer period, can be found [here](#).

### ***Fighting for a fare-free CRD***

When the Capital Regional District (CRD) Transportation Committee introduced a motion to study the possibility of expanding the municipality of Victoria's youth bus pass program – which allows teens up to the age of 18 to ride the bus for free – VTRU immediately came out in support of the motion, urging our supporters to write in favour of it and sending a representative to the relevant CRD Transportation Committee meeting (on October 22<sup>nd</sup>) to speak in support of it. This is despite the fact that we are very skeptical of the need to delay implementation of a CRD-wide youth bus pass program in order to study its costs and benefits – obviously it is the right thing to do!

The relevant parts of the Transportation Committee meeting at which the motion was passed unanimously can be viewed [here](#). Our advocacy on this issue resulted in coverage from [CHEK News](#), the [Times Colonist](#), [Victoria News](#), and [CFAX 1070](#).

Soon after this minor victory we were put back on the defensive when City of Victoria staff released the 2026-2030 Draft Financial Plan, which indicated that the Youth Bus Pass Program was on the chopping block. We immediately sprang into action to save the program, calling on our supporters to demand that it be maintained. Fortunately, the program was soon removed from the city's list of proposed budget cuts.

VTRU's media spokesperson Liz Cronin was interviewed live on this subject on [CFAX 1070](#).

## Campaign to Support Transit Workers

Building solidarity between transit riders and transit workers is an extremely important part of VTRU's values. This is in recognition of the shared class interests of riders and workers, as well as the fact that excellent transit, by definition, must work for both groups.

Most of our activities to support transit workers in 2025 focused on the transit workers employed by Transdev in the nearby Cowichan Valley, who went on strike on February 8<sup>th</sup>, calling for better working conditions, including adequate bathroom access for drivers, and for wages closer to those of transit workers in neighbouring municipalities. Eventually this became the longest transit strike in BC history, dragging out for over 200 days, leaving transit riders in the Cowichan Valley stranded and struggling to cope.

Transdev is a huge, privately-owned multinational corporation that makes massive profits mismanaging ostensibly “public” transportation systems around the world. In BC, Transdev operates the Cowichan Valley, Kelowna, North Okanagan, Shuswap, Vernon, and West Kootney regional transit systems – all of which have poor-quality service stemming in part from the low wages and poor working conditions endured by drivers. Transdev also runs HandyDART services in Vancouver and Victoria, which are notorious for their very poor-quality service and low wages. In 2024 its treatment of Vancouver HandyDART workers resulted in a 20-day strike. None of this is because Transdev cannot afford to treat its workers better: despite its dismal track record, the company reported a whopping [\\$16.17 billion in revenue in 2024](#).

VTRU is proud to have stood in solidarity with the Cowichan Valley workers – and riders – in their struggle against this corporation. Indeed, we actively supported them almost from the start, joining them for rallies in Duncan on March 1<sup>st</sup> and again on March 15<sup>th</sup>, and for rallies outside the BC Transit bus yard in Victoria on April 14<sup>th</sup> and August 25<sup>th</sup>. Among other things we took pictures at most of these events and made these available to the workers and their allies to help further the cause.



*Rallying with the striking Cowichan Valley transit workers and supporters in Duncan on March 1<sup>st</sup> . . .*



*. . . and in Victoria on August 25<sup>th</sup>*



## ***Worker-Rider Solidarity Rally***

VTRU also took the lead on organizing a rally in Duncan to support the Cowichan Valley workers on Aug 30<sup>th</sup>, just after the dispute had passed the 200 day mark. We collaborated with local transit riders and workers and organized transportation from Victoria on the [Community Action Bus](#). We also scheduled speakers for the event, prioritizing local riders and workers, and sent out a press release that called for solidarity between transit workers and riders, and singled out Transdev as the party responsible for the prolonged dispute that was depriving riders of service and workers of a fair deal.

We also called out BC Transit and the provincial government for their part in enabling Transdev's intransigence, and we called on the provincial government to act swiftly and decisively to ensure a resumption of service and a fair deal for the workers and to end all private transit contracting.

In addition, we demanded better service between neighbouring communities like Victoria and Duncan.

This rally we received press coverage from [Times Colonist](#), [CHEK News](#), [Victoria Buzz](#), and [The Tyee](#).

Happily, within a week of our rally the Province appointed veteran mediator Vince Ready to help the two sides come to a deal, and soon thereafter, on day 222 of the strike, 92% of the workers [voted in favour](#) of binding arbitration overseen by Ready, ending the dispute. While we are pleased by this outcome, VTRU will continue to call for truly *public* transit – which means public ownership and an end to all private contracting of transit systems, to the benefit of workers, riders, and communities.



*VTRU and allies on the Community Action Bus on the way to the Worker-Rider Solidarity rally*



*VTRU's Liz Cronin giving a speech while TV news cameras roll to kick off the rally*



*Striking Cowichan Valley workers lead the rally on a march through downtown Duncan*



*A local transit rider addressing the crowd*





*A group photo taken at the Worker-Rider Solidarity rally*



*Another group photo taken at the Worker-Rider Solidarity rally*

### ***Cowichan Valley Transit Riders Union***

Our intervention into the Cowichan Valley labour dispute helped inspire transit riders there to found the Cowichan Valley Transit Riders Union, a development that was covered by the [Cowichan Valley Citizen](#). We are incredibly proud to have played a part in the formation of this group and are continuing to do everything we can to assist its growth. We are also actively trying to encourage the formation of Transit Rider Unions in other transit systems in BC.

## Looking ahead to 2026

The work we did in 2025 has given VTRU significant momentum heading into 2026. In addition, increasing grassroots support for fare-free transit – evidenced by multiple resolutions calling for expansions of fare-free programs that were passed at the 2025 BC NDP convention, as well as the landslide election of Zohran Mamdani in New York city – suggests that we can expect the general public to be increasingly receptive to our message and demands. Moreover, the recent election of Katie Wilson – co-founder of the Seattle Transit Riders Union – as Mayor of Seattle could help to familiarize people with the concept of a Transit Riders Union and encourage them to get involved with us.

We are under no illusions that our fight will get any easier despite the increasing number of our allies and supporters, however. The politicians and bureaucrats making transit policy in Victoria and beyond show little inclination of making the massive investments in transit infrastructure needed to combat climate change and advance social justice – all while creating good, green, union jobs. The fare hikes and fare evasion crackdowns instituted across the country in 2025, and the latest federal budget, which shifts funds away from the transit-specific Canada Public Transit Fund towards the much broader Building Communities Strong Fund, are clear signs that the people in charge are not just dragging their feet but are actually pulling in the wrong direction.

To contest this backsliding, VTRU plans to continue prioritizing the campaign to build our organization, with our goals being to recruit two more organizers; establish a democratic, dues-paying membership structure; grow our membership; and hold our first AGM by the year's end. We also plan to continue the process of building a Victoria transit rider community by holding two public events similar to our 2025 Spring Transit Celebration in 2026. We also plan to continue building alliances with other like-minded organizations, beginning with the launch of an open letter that parallels our campaign letter (see above) but is signed by allied groups.

Our campaigns to win fare-free, excellent, and truly *public* transit across the province, and to support and build connections and alliances with transit workers, will of course also extend in to 2026 – these are, after all, expressions of VTRU's core, founding principles. In particular, we hope to become more involved with efforts to return HandyDART to the public domain, and to improve HandyDART service, wages and working conditions, all of which are currently woefully inadequate.

If 2025 is any indication, the future is bright for the Victoria Transit Riders Union. We are incredibly proud of what we have accomplished in our short existence. But we also know that our fight for better, more accessible public transit is just beginning, and that we must prepare ourselves for a long road ahead with many ups and downs. We don't know exactly what the end of this road will look like, but we can promise to keep fighting for our principles, and to conduct our fight transparently and democratically. We know that community organizing has won historic gains for the working class – including the 8 hour work day – and that excellent transit will likewise be achieved by regular people working together. And we look forward to fighting for it alongside you, whether you're an organizer, a member, a supporter, or an ally.

Solidarity forever!