

## City of North Vancouver, Lillooet to petition for return of rail

### Sea to Sky passenger service makes sense, mayors say

Jeremy Shepherd / North Shore News

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file photo Cindy Goodman, North Shore News

There's almost 250 kilometres between them, but the City of North Vancouver and the District of Lillooet are hoping to get on the same track.

The two communities plan to work together to petition the provincial government to bring back passenger rail between North Vancouver and Prince George, following a council meeting Monday.

"I would love to see that," said Mayor Darrell Mussatto.

The challenge will likely be working with CN, according to Mussatto. The national railway company owns the tracks and tends to relegate passenger rail to their lowest priority, according to the mayor.

"My understanding is that there's a lot less freight going up and down the tracks then their used to be," he said. "There might be an opportunity for us to have that passenger rail back again."

It's been nearly 14 years since the former B.C. Rail line was leased to CN, who subsequently discontinued the Budd Car, a rail car Mussatto and other skiers rode on their way to Whistler.

Closing the line left rural communities struggling to fill an economic void, according to Lillooet Mayor Marg Lampman.

Lampman appealed to North Vancouver council after garnering unanimous support from Lillooet council.

Lampman cited increasing pressure on highways, greater costs to travelling residents and a larger burden on the environment as reasons for restoring rail travel.

North Vancouver Coun. Linda Buchanan agreed.

The loss of the rail line has hampered the B.C.'s ability to showcase the province to tourists, she said. It's also been a huge inconvenience for Lillooet residents, particularly in light of the loss of Greyhound service, she added.

"If you're a senior or don't drive in the District of Lillooet, you're a little bit stuck."

While the restored rail line could be a "wonderful link" for UNBC students, Coun. Pam Bookham said ticket prices should be kept low.

The new line shouldn't emulate the Rocky Mountaineer tour trains, "where only those tourists with deep pockets can afford the luxury of rail travel," she said.

After being founded in 1912, the Pacific Great Eastern railway – running from North Vancouver's Pemberton Avenue to Prince George – became the B.C. railway in 1972.