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Moving Forward Together for the Good of All

The Lekwungen Nations and Local Governments Sign a Partnership Agreement to Explore the Future of the Island Rail Corridor

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Victoria, B.C. — A coalition of First Nations and local governments announced today that they are working together on a shared vision to explore the potential for passenger rail service on the Island Rail Corridor between Victoria and Langford.

The **Reconciliation Corridor Initiative**, led by the **Lekwungen Nations – Esquimalt Nation (Kosapsum) and Songhees Nation** - responds to the provincial government's call for a shared vision for the corridor that will reflect the interests of all residents of the Capital Region and fully acknowledge the rights of the Nations.

Esquimalt Nation Chief Jerome Thomas and Songhees Nation Chief Ron Sam were joined by partners from the Capital Regional District, the City of Victoria, the Township of Esquimalt, the Town of View Royal, the City of Langford and the City of Colwood. Together, they signed a Reconciliation Corridor Agreement, marking their commitment to what is being described as a first-of-its-kind, reconciliation-based approach to regional transportation and community wellbeing.

The Initiative recognizes the Island Rail Corridor as an important regional asset and a potential catalyst for achieving shared benefits. A key element of this vision is the realignment of the Corridor to ensure it no longer bisects existing residential areas of the Esquimalt Nation's reserve lands. That part of the Corridor would be remediated and returned to the Esquimalt Nation's reserve lands. All parties in the coalition support investigating how this could be accomplished.

In addition to Corridor realignment and rail feasibility, the partners will explore broader opportunities – such as transit-oriented development and economic development opportunities for the Nations at key areas along the Corridor, including on reserve lands, where desirable.

The coalition will also explore how the Corridor could help address transportation challenges in fast-growing communities such as Langford, Colwood, Esquimalt and View Royal. Improved connectivity to major regional employers, including CFB Esquimalt and the Esquimalt Graving Dock, is among the potential benefits under consideration. Persistent traffic congestion in these areas has underscored the need for new transit solutions and the reactivation of underused transportation corridors.

Next Steps:

The Initiative partners are commissioning a technical feasibility study to evaluate the corridor, including alignment considerations, transit-oriented development opportunities, and financial and technical feasibility of supporting passenger rail service. The study is expected to provide results in 12 to 16 months. Findings will be shared with other organizations involved in transportation planning in the region.

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.

Quotes:

Chief Jerome Thomas, Esquimalt Nation

“This is a historic day; one filled with hope and the opportunity to correct some of the wrongs in our shared history. The Island Rail Corridor has bisected our reserve land and traditional territory for more than 100 years and we are now taking meaningful steps toward reconciliation.

This is reconciliation in action – working with local municipal leaders on a path that includes land back for our Nation and a shared vision to bring back a functioning rail line to help reduce traffic in our communities.

Our working group is grounded in community-led decision-making, which recognizes our title to the corridor lands and focuses on how these lands, guided by our Nations, can help improve public transportation for the benefit of everyone.”

Chief Ron Sam, Songhees Nation

“For the Lekwungen People, the story of the railway began in a time when our lands were taken and our voices were not heard. That brutal history can’t be separated from this conversation. But as we look to the future of reconciliation, this next chapter starts with Lekwungen leadership.

We’re looking at how a regional rail line could bring people together, connect communities, and support economic opportunities that work for everyone, starting with our Nations and our values.”

Capital Regional District Board Chair, Cliff McNeil-Smith

“This initiative represents an opportunity to demonstrate how the rail corridor can benefit transportation planning in the region and how this partnership contributes to the CRD Board’s regional transportation goals and meaningful collaboration with First Nations.”

Mayor Marianne Alto, City of Victoria

“The City of Victoria remains committed to reconciliation with our First Nations partners. Our inclusion in this agreement demonstrates our respect for the Lekwungen Nations’ right to determine the use of their current lands and to lead an exploration of one aspect of a regional transportation strategy that will provide economic vitality and community wellbeing for all.”

Mayor Barb Desjardins, Township of Esquimalt

“The Township of Esquimalt is grateful to the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations for providing leadership and a pathway forward that teaches us all how to understand the opportunity to use this rail corridor in the CRD.

With reconciliation as our focus, we can build stronger relationships for other regional needs and create a potential model for beneficial use of the whole corridor.”

Mayor Sid Tobias, Town of View Royal

“Today’s announcement is a precedent-setting moment where Indigenous leadership is the catalyst for the development of an informed and inspired vision for the rail corridor that will promote community wellbeing and shared prosperity for all citizens.

The rail corridor is a strategic infrastructure asset that already exists and this initiative is a demonstration of what reconciliation can look like at the local level.

Our region is growing. Our roads are slowing. Our climate is struggling. Our challenges are not hypothetical—they are here, now, and measurable.

The Town of View Royal is proud to stand with the Lekwungen Nations and our municipal colleagues in support of the Reconciliation Corridor Initiative.”

Mayor Scott Goodmanson, City of Langford

“Langford is honoured to work with the Lekwungen Nations and local governments on the Reconciliation Corridor initiative.

This project aims to improve transportation options, support economic growth, and strengthen communities. We are working together to create a shared vision for the Island Rail Corridor that will deliver long-term benefits to the whole region.”

Mayor Doug Kobayashi, City of Colwood

“Colwood is proud to stand with the Lekwungen Nations and our regional partners in shaping a shared vision for the Island Rail Corridor.

This collaboration represents a meaningful step toward reconciliation, while also giving us the chance to explore transportation solutions that reflect the needs of our rapidly growing West Shore communities.

By working together — respectfully, transparently, and guided by Indigenous leadership — we are ensuring that decisions about this corridor are thoughtful, evidence-based, and made with future generations in mind.”

CEO Island Corridor Foundation, Thomas Bevan

“It has been a privilege to witness the creation of the Reconciliation Corridor Initiative, a government-to-government partnership led by the Esquimalt Nation and Songhees Nation.

It has taken the will, creativity, patience, and respect of everyone involved to get to this unprecedented convergence of intention and purpose. The Corridor is an irreplaceable resource that has the potential to heal and unite regions in this manner all along the Island Rail Corridor.”

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Accompanying materials:

Backgrounder in the Island Rail Corridor

Media inquiries:

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