

3. Transportation

The ability to get around is essential to a good quality of life. In our culture generally we equate mobility with life and immobility with illness and death. That's not so surprising really but when we combine issues of wealth and mobility we soon realize that getting around is made a whole lot easier with money. People with money can buy any mode of transportation they wish. They are not likely to ride the bus or bike to work. If they do ride bicycles it's for exercise or sport rather than as basic transportation. There are exceptions to this rule, of course.

It's obvious, however, that the favoured mode of personal transportation in Canada, including the Comox Valley, is the private automobile (or truck). Seventy percent or so of people in Metro Vancouver use private vehicles for getting to work but that percentage goes up to over 92% in the Langley/Abbotsford area. In the Comox Valley, we do love our cars and trucks. About 80% of us use our cars or trucks to get to work and we use them for our other transportation needs like shopping or recreation. We are still a very car oriented society and our zoning bylaws and urban plans reflect that. Still, Courtenay has recently approved a bicycle lane for Fitzgerald Avenue and Comox has done a lot to make its roads more bicycle-friendly.

People who are physically disabled can find it very difficult to get around but for some, scooters and motorized wheelchairs, while relatively expensive, increase mobility. However, accessibility remains a constant problem for the disabled. There are good news stories (see adjacent photo), but people with physical mobility issues also experience a lot of frustration trying to get around. A short video by Alex Carey shows how difficult it is, for example, to access stores along Fifth Avenue in Courtenay. (Carey, Push to Open Video, 2013) The Courtenay Heritage Riverway is a wonderful paved pathway extending from 6th Street to 31st Street providing a safe, comfortable 'highway' for scooters and wheelchairs travelling from one end of the city to the other.



The photo, taken by Ross Hunt, is of Judy Norbury on the 2 kilometre Centennial Loop Trail on Mount Washington which is fully accessible for all mobility devices. For more information on accessibility in the Comox Valley go to the Comox Valley Accessibility Committee's website: <http://www.cvaccess.ca/>

3.1 Commuting (n)

As noted elsewhere in this report, most residents of the Comox Valley work and most work away from home. This is true of Canadians as a whole. Commuting times vary a lot in the major cities in Canada. Still, it's safe to say that commuting times in Canada's cities are significantly higher than in the Comox Valley. A report in The Surrey Leader quotes statistics from the 2011 Statistics Canada National Housing Survey. They conclude that commuters in Metro Vancouver spend an average of 28.4 minutes commuting. Maple Ridge commuters use on average 35.2 minutes on their commutes. Commutes by transit are generally longer in duration. (Surrey Leader, 2013) This article also reports that 8% of British Columbians work at home.

Table 3 notes that the Comox Valley median commuting duration is 15.2 minutes. We spend significantly fewer minutes commuting to work than residents of Metro Vancouver. *Median* commuting time means that half of all commuters have longer commuting times and half have shorter commuting times but it doesn't tell us anything about the range of commuting times. The *range* is the distance in a distribution of commuting times between the fastest commute time and the longest one.¹⁵ Median commuting times are

15 We think that commute times in the Valley tend to cluster around the median and aren't spread out too much. A tight range might be between 10 minutes and 20 minutes when the median is 15.2. A wide range might be between 5 minutes and 45 minutes.

longer in electoral area C at 20.5 minutes than anywhere else in the Valley. Comox and Courtenay residents have median commutes of around 10 minutes. It's not surprising that people in the rural areas take longer to get to work. If they had to cover the same distance in Metro Vancouver that they do on their way to work here it's obvious that it would take a whole lot longer. The added aggravation alone would raise blood pressure and mental distress. There really is no comparing driving in the Comox Valley with driving in Metro Vancouver or the Capital Regional District. We don't have the traffic tie-ups and the congestion that exist in large cities and hence, for drivers, the quality of life here is much better than in Metro Vancouver. Table 3 shows that most commuters leave home for work between 7 and 9 AM. If we have a morning rush hour at all it's between 7:30 and 8:30 AM.

Table 3: Mode of Transportation, commuting durations and times leaving for work in the Comox Valley Regional District.

Mode of transportation	CVRD					
	Total	Male	%	Female	%	% of Total
Total*	25975	12755	49.10	13225	50.90	by Mode of Transportation
Car, truck or van - as a driver	20,725	10,065	48.56	10,665	51.45	79.8
Car, truck or van - as a passenger	1,475	710	48.13	765	51.86	5.7
Public transit	465	255	54.83	210	45.16	1.8
Walked	1,485	630	42.42	855	57.57	5.7
Bicycle	890	525	58.98	365	41.01	3.4
Other methods	930	565	60.75	365	39.24	3.6
Median commuting duration						
Median commuting duration	15.2	15.4		12.9		
Time leaving for work						
Between 5 and 6:59 a.m.	5,755	3,645	63.33	2,110	36.66	22.15
Between 7 and 9:00 a.m.	14,730	6,755	45.85	7,980	54.17	56.70
Anytime after 9:00 a.m.	5,495	2,355	42.85	3,140	57.14	21.14

*employed population aged 15 and over with a usual place of work or no fixed workplace address

Source: Compiled from Stats Can National Housing Survey Profiles, 2011. (Stats Can, 2011b)

3.2 Public Transit

Ridership on the Comox Valley Transit system has risen consistently over the years and is currently at around 600,000 rides per year. Students are the largest users of the system, followed by adults, people with disabilities and seniors.

Buses run every half hour to hour for routes within the core and less frequently in the rural areas and on weekends. The system operates 7 days a week from approximately 6 am to 11 pm and provides service to Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland and the rural electoral areas as far south as Fanny Bay and north to the Oyster River where it connects to the Campbell River transit system. For commuters who enjoy biking, there are bike racks on the front of every bus. BC Transit recently put out a press release highlighting the use of a smartphone 'app', Google Transit that uses Google Maps for determining transit travel times and destinations. (BC Transit, 2014) We've tested it and it works like a charm. As well as giving bus transit commuting times, schedules and detailed directions, it does the same for walking and automobile travel. Vey handy.

3.2 Accessibility Services (+)

Comox Valley Transit also provides services to patrons who have mobility difficulties, or use wheelchairs or scooters. The Comox Valley offers two types of accessible services: handyDART and the conventional bus service. All conventional buses are low floor buses with the ability to kneel and extend a ramp. Each bus has spaces that can accommodate two wheelchairs.

HandyDART is a direct pick-up and drop-off service that operates Monday through Friday with a fleet of six vehicles and two spares. HandyDART allows people who are disabled the ability to travel in the community and can accommodate up to 20 passengers or 12 passengers plus 4 wheelchairs or 2 scooters. On average the length of time for pick up/drop off is an hour.

3.3 Mobility Impairment Permits (-)

As reported in our 2009 report, mobility impairment permits allow special access to parking close to many community facilities including public buildings, stores and parks. There were 1,101 permit holders in 2007, mostly in Courtenay, Comox and a few in Cumberland, Royston and Merville. In 2013, the Social Planning and Research Council of BC reported the following numbers for Comox, Courtenay and Cumberland for a total of 887. The numbers are not comparable to 2007 although there seems to be a decreasing number of permits issued.

Table 3.1: Mobility Impairment Permit Holders in the Valley

Comox	295
Courtenay	539
Cumberland	53

Source: SPARC BC (email correspondence)

3.4 Comox Valley Airport Usage (+)

The Comox Valley Airport (YQQ) experienced its highest passenger volumes ever in 2012 with 327,827 passengers moving through the gates. Previously, it had hit a high of 310,450 in 2007 before dipping slightly to 289,978 in 2009. Since then the numbers have increased every year but 2012 was a banner year.

Air Canada via its affiliate Central Mountain Air flies out of YQQ to Vancouver's (YVR) main terminal. Pacific Mountain Air flies to YVR's south terminal, but there is a shuttle from there to the main terminal. WestJet also flies directly to Edmonton and Calgary as well as to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, some months of the year starting in October. (Comox Valley Airport, 2013)

3.5 Cycling in the Valley (n)

The City of Courtenay website has information about the Cycling Task Force:

Cycling Task Force

The Cycling Task Force is made up of members of all local governments, working together to develop a comprehensive cycling strategy. Our goal is to improve cycling access in the Comox Valley, both recreationally and for commuting, and to improve safe travel for all members of the public and safe access to regional bikeways.

The Task Force will focus on education, recreation, and transportation. Making cycling safe, enjoyable and efficient in the Comox Valley will lead to more people getting on their bikes - improving their health and creating a clean environment and community! (Courtenay, 2014a)

There is some commitment to improving the lot of cyclists in the Valley. Comox installed bike lanes on Comox Avenue and Courtenay, after some debate, is doing the same on Fitzgerald Avenue. The bridges are hazardous for cyclists at the best of times. Courtenay has recognized the problems on the Fifth Street Bridge and has modified the rules of the road for it. Biking is big in Cumberland with mountain bikes all over the place and the BMX track is full speed ahead, but it's still dangerous to ride a bike to get out of the village along Cumberland road. The new Cumberland Official Community Plan has provisions for improving bicycle safety and accessibility from the Highway 19 interchange to 4th Street.



So, we still love our cars and trucks. We couldn't get along without them, at least not now or in the foreseeable future. Few people take transit because of the spotty service, but BC Transit is doing its best with the resources it has and has educational programs to let people know about their work. Accessibility is always an issue for many people who have mobility issues. There have been improvements but there's still a long way to go to bring equity to our transportation systems.