



Transit Future Service Plan

Elk Valley Transit System

February 2020

Regional District
of East Kootenay



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1 Introduction

The Elk Valley Transit Future Service Plan outlines improvements for transit service and infrastructure over the next 3-5 years in the Elk Valley Transit System. This Plan will build upon the Elk Valley Transit System Long-Range Plan (2011) and includes:

- An evaluation of community changes that are impacting transit demand now and over the next five years;
- An update of existing priorities identified in the 2011 Long-Range Plan; and
- Identification of requirements to meet emerging transit demand in the near and medium term.

Transit Future Service Plans provide a number of defined service improvements for implementation over the next five years and ensure transit improvement priorities are consistent with evolving local priorities, emergent transit demands, and BC Transit's operational capacity. The Plan is informed by public engagement processes, analysis of the existing transit system, and feedback from local governments; in addition, it takes into account long-term planning documents for communities in the Elk Valley area.

1.1 Plan Area

The geographic scope for this Plan is shown in the Map below. The area encompasses the jurisdictions of the District of Elkford, the City of Fernie, the District of Sparwood as well as Regional District Electoral Area A.

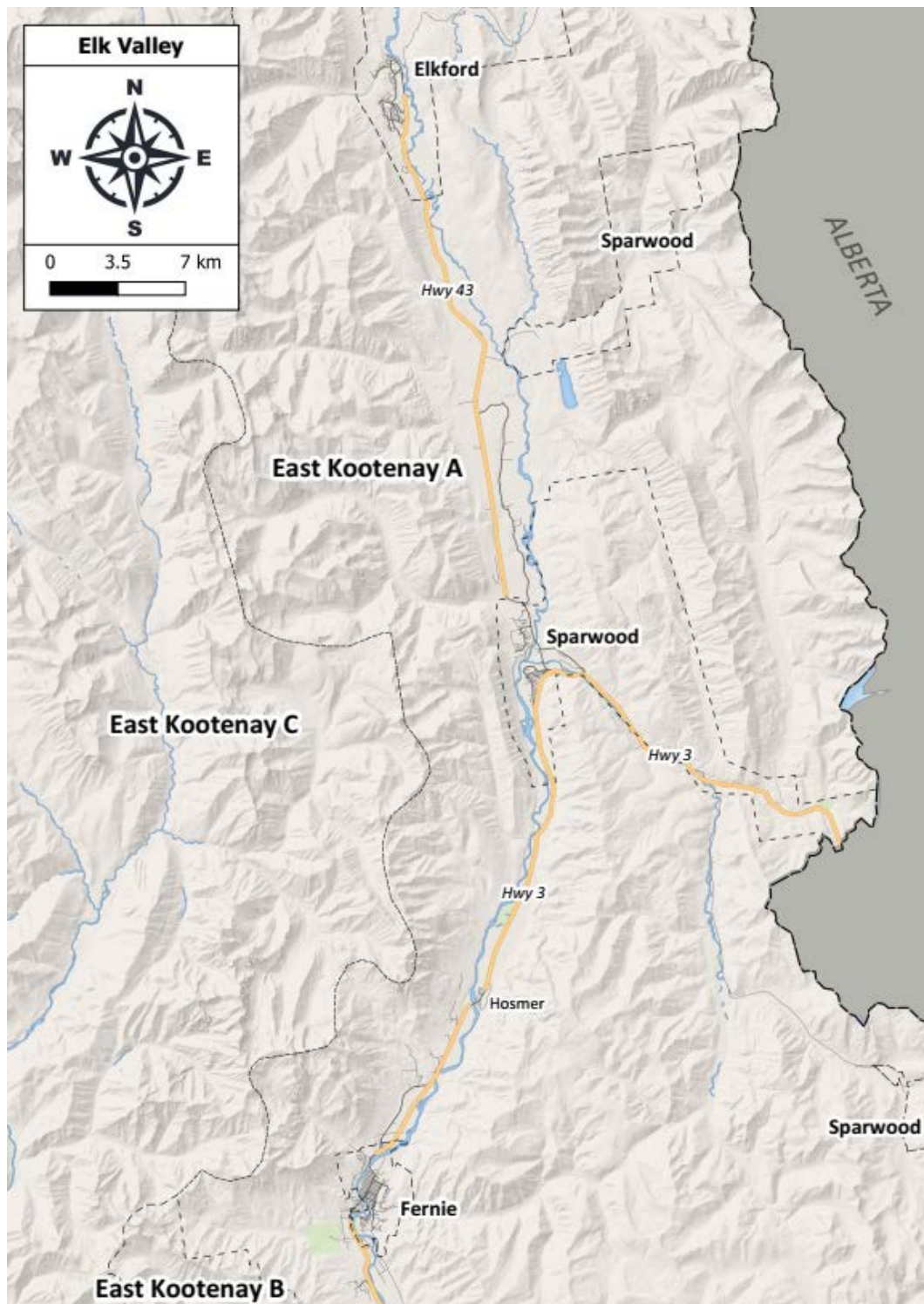


Figure 1: Plan Area

2 Plan Development

2.1 Timeline

Development of the Transit Future Service Plan began in spring 2018 and included phases to understand the present context, obtain feedback from both key stakeholders and the public, and develop a framework for short to medium-term development. Figure 1 illustrates the key steps in developing this Transit Future Service Plan.

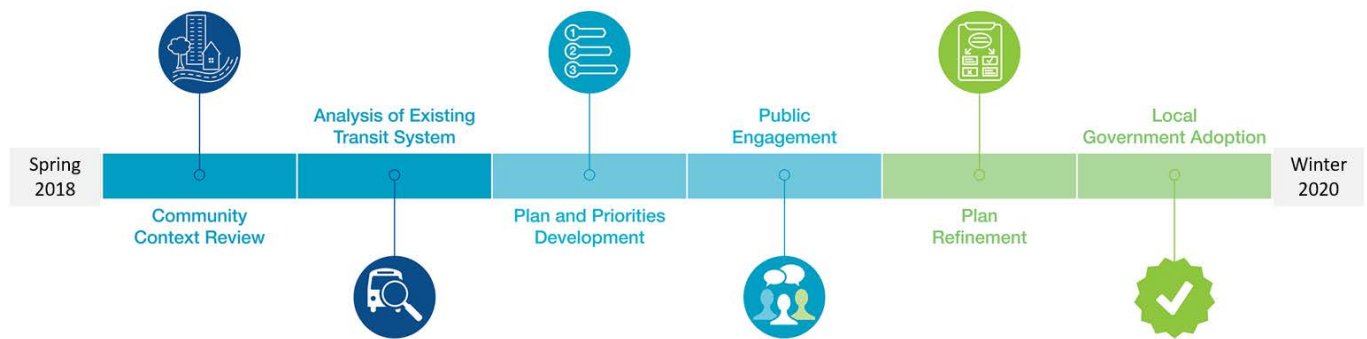


Figure 2: Timeline for the development of this Transit Future Service Plan

2.2 Population and Demographics

BC Transit has worked with staff at the Regional District of East Kootenay to develop this plan. It builds upon the Elk Valley Long-Range Plan (2011), considers land use patterns and demographic trends and incorporates public input.

The following efforts were carried out to inform the development of this plan:

- **Community Context Review:** Local planning documents and recent census data provided a high-level context of the areas changing demographic and land uses, including the Official Community Plans for the [District of Elkford](#), the [District of Sparwood](#) and the [City of Fernie](#).
- **Review of the Existing Transit System:** An evaluation of the existing transit system was carried out to identify the strengths and opportunities of current bus routes in the context of changing land use patterns and ridership demand.
- **Project Working Group:** The content, data collection and recommendations of this Transit Future Service Plan were developed in collaboration with a working group made up of staff from BC Transit, Regional District of East Kootenay and TOK Transit - the contracted operating company.

3 Community Context

The following context was developed through public engagement, stakeholder input, a survey of relevant data and reports, and close examination of the existing transit system and current plans in the Elk Valley. The following considerations provide critical opportunities and challenges to developing the Elk Valley Transit System.

3.1 Population and Demographics

The total population of Elk Valley increased by over 7 per cent between 2011 and 2016 to over 13,000. Elk Valley has a median age of 39, with only 13 per cent of its residents over the age of 65, which is lower than the Regional District average.

The Elk Valley Transit System provides service to the following municipalities:

- The **City of Fernie** is a resort municipality, and the regional centre of the Elk Valley, with a population of 5,249.
- The **District of Elkford** is the northernmost part of the Elk Valley with a population of 2,499.
- The **District of Sparwood** is the second largest community in the Valley, with a population of 3,784.

3.2 Employment and Education

Teck Resources is the major employer in the Elk Valley, operating several coalmines. Teck Resources operates shuttles to bring employees to the coalmines. The tourism industry is also prominent in the area, specifically in Fernie.

The College of the Rockies has a campus located in Fernie. The College of the Rockies continues to have increasing enrolment of international students, which is a market that can rely heavily on transit.

In addition to public schools in each community, the Fernie Academy is a private school that has students attending from across the valley for speciality programs.

3.3 Land Use and Planning

City of Fernie Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 2231, 2014

The City of Fernie's OCP provides a vision for its community based on the priorities of ensuring economic viability, enriching community life and protecting the environment. The following transit supportive policies are provided in Fernie's OCP:

- Request that BC Transit improve and expand existing bus service within Fernie and to neighbouring employment and residential centres (Policy 2-B.1)

- Work with BC Transit to ensure that bus schedules facilitate access between Fernie and neighbouring communities, including Cranbrook, for residents working in those communities and employees living in them (Policy 2-B.2)
- Ensure that major new public institutions and businesses are located in transit accessible locations that are also served by active transportation infrastructure (e.g., bike lanes, walking trails) (Policy 2-B.3)
- Reduce parking requirements according to the *Parking Management Plan 2012* recommendations to encourage better use of land resources and support a shift to more public transit and active transportation alternatives (Policy 2-B.4)
- Request that BC Transit pre-plan bus routes and develop road standards that will accommodate future bus route requirements for large scale developments (Policy 2-B.5)
- Work with BC Transit, RDEK, District of Sparwood, District of Elkford, and BC Parks to enhance bus service to recreation facilities and parks beyond City of Fernie boundaries (Policy 2-B.6)
- Review and revise the *Subdivision Servicing Bylaw* to ensure that potential transit network extensions, including new bus stops and bus pull-ins, are considered as a condition of development (Policy 2-B.7)

District of Elkford Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 710, 2010

The District of Elkford's OCP provides a vision for a community committed to sustainability and has priorities integrated with goals of climate change adaptation and mitigation. The following OCP policies support the development of transit and pedestrian-friendly development:

- Maintain the integrity of the District Growth Boundary in order to direct new development into the District Core and existing neighbourhoods. This can allow for development of clustered areas that are better served by alternative transportation modes (Objective 7.2.1 Policy 1)
- Facilitate transportation planning for the accessibility, safety and mobility of all residents (Objective 7.2.1 Policy 3)

District of Sparwood Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 1165, 2015

The District of Sparwood's OCP provides a vision for a community with diverse housing options, a diverse economy and a vibrant downtown. The following transit supportive policies are provided in Sparwood's OCP:

- Work with BC Transit, RDEK and other local governments in the area to meet the public transit needs of Elk Valley residents (Policy 9.7.1)
- Work with BC Transit to support and improve public transit (Policy 11.10.3)

3.4 Transportation

3.4.1 Health Connections

The Elk Valley is served by a twice-weekly Health Connections service, operated by the same company as the transit system. This service is funded entirely by Interior Health, and provides service between Elkford and Cranbrook. Priority on this transit service is given to those traveling to medical appointments.

3.4.2 Taxi Service

Kootenay Taxi is the only taxi company that provides service in the Elk Valley, is based in Fernie, and provides service within Fernie and Sparwood.

3.5 Transit Context

3.5.1 Conventional Transit

The Elk Valley Transit System was introduced as a basic transit service in 2008 to provide access to services for all the region's residents. The system currently consists of 3,020 annual service hours, three light duty buses and a single route that operates between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on weekdays. One vehicle operates the entire system, beginning the service day in Elkford. There are numerous variations to the route that are reflected in the schedule; these allow the driver to provide service within Sparwood as well as between the three principal communities of Elkford, Sparwood and Fernie. A map of the route and the schedule are included on the following pages.

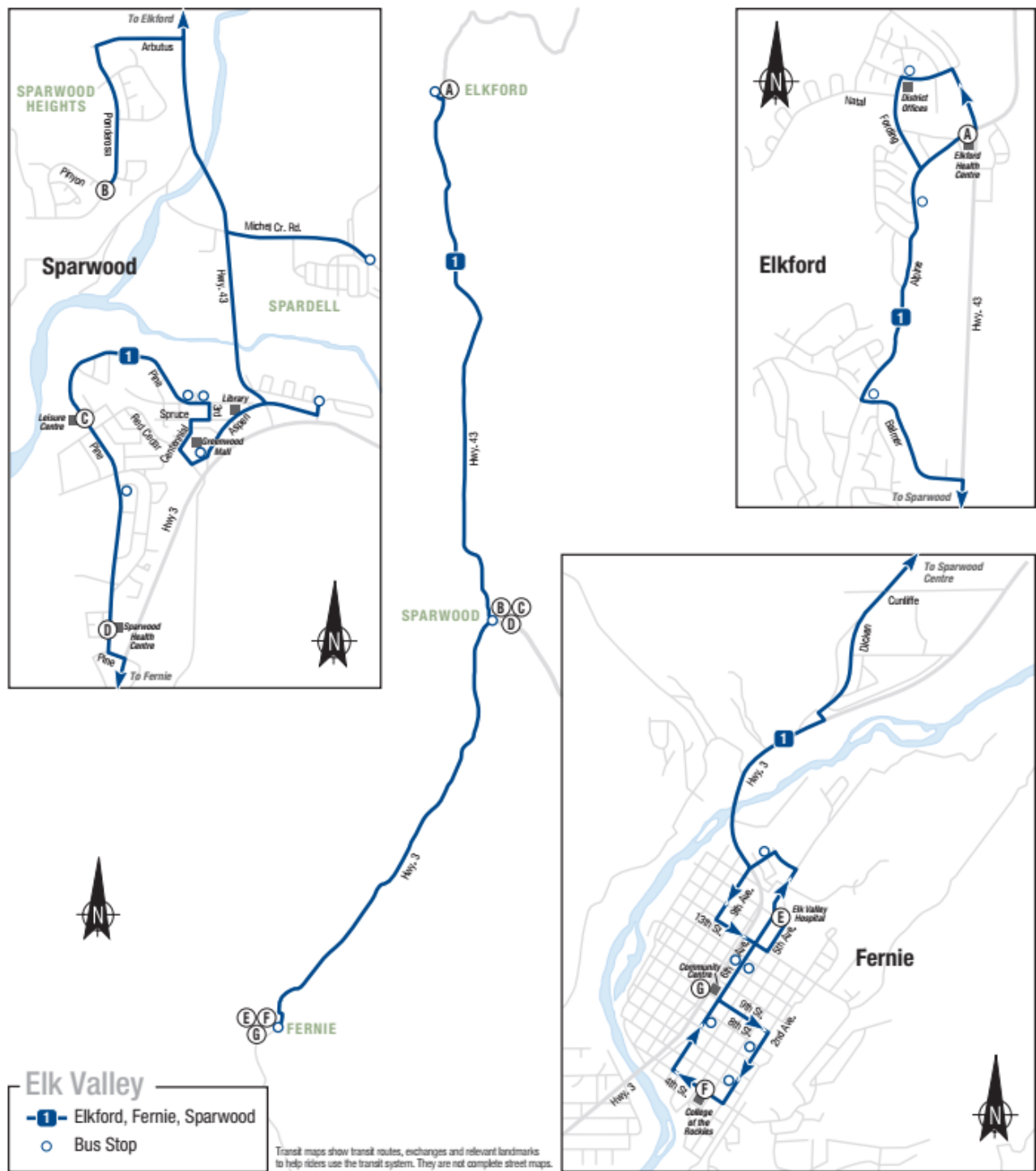


Figure 3: Elk Valley Transit System

1 Elkford, Fernie, Sparwood

Monday to Friday

(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(E)	(D)	(C)	(B)	(A)
Lv. Elkford Health Centre	Sparwood Heights	Sparwood Leisure Centre	Sparwood Health Centre	Elk Valley Hospital	College of the Rockies	Fernie Community Centre	Elk Valley Hospital	Sparwood Health Centre	Sparwood Leisure Centre	Sparwood Heights	Ar. Elkford Health Centre
7:00	7:40	7:55	8:00	8:30	8:40	8:45	8:50	9:15	9:20	9:35	–
–	–	–	11:00	–	–	–	–	–	11:05	11:20	12:00
12:00	12:40	12:55	1:00	1:30	1:40	1:45	1:50	2:15	2:20	2:35	–
–	–	–	4:20	–	–	–	–	–	4:25	4:40	–
–	4:40	–	–	5:10	5:20	5:25	5:30	5:55	6:00	6:15	6:55

Figure 4: Elk Valley Transit System schedule

3.5.2 Ridership

Transit ridership has trended upward overall since 2009, peaking at 10,000 annual rides in 2017-18. This increase in ridership correlates to a period of population growth in the Elk Valley.

The financial investment has remained essentially constant over this time frame; the modest variation in service hours shown on the chart results from year to year differences in overtime wages and calendar schedules

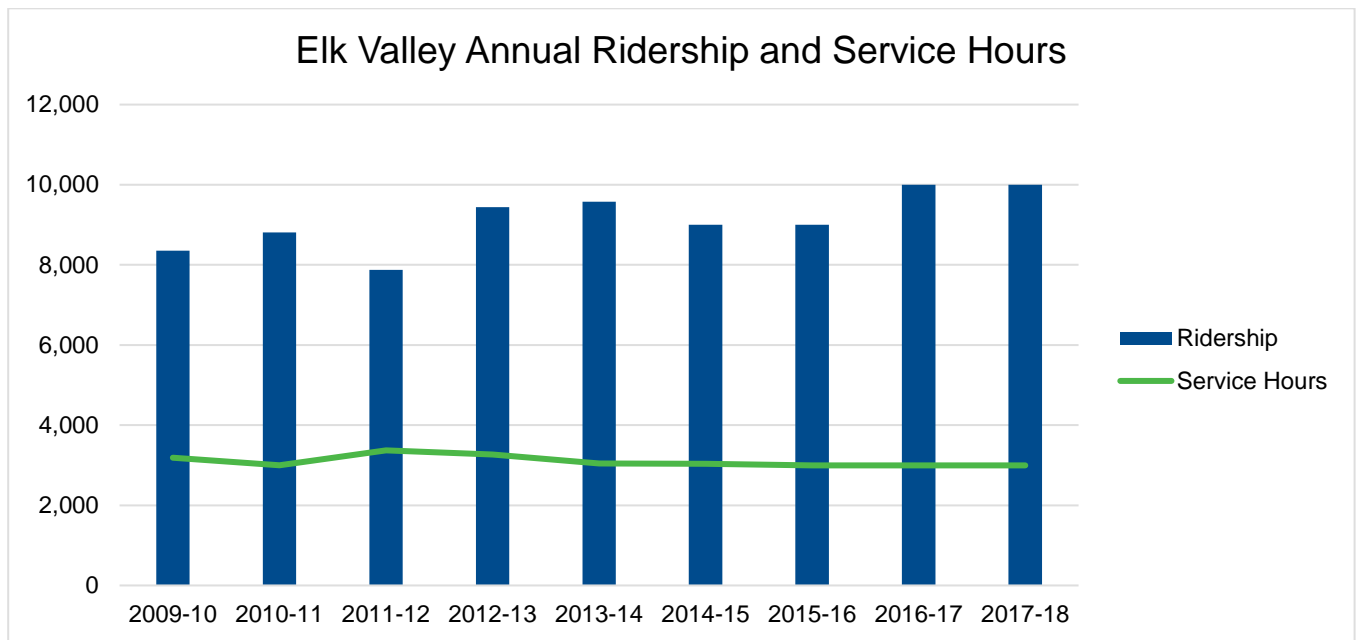


Figure 5: Elk Valley Annual Ridership and Service Hours

4 Proposed Transit Changes

This section discusses several possible scenarios for the future service design of transit in the Elk Valley. At this stage, these recommendations are high-level proposals that may entail further planning and analysis to determine specifics of routing, scheduling or stop placement. Resource requirements have been estimated for each option.

Proposed changes were developed in collaboration with the Regional District of East Kootenay and TOK Transit, and are based on results from engagement, detailed in section 4.2.

4.1 Service Design Options

4.1.1 Option 1: Increased service between Elkford and Cranbrook

Health Connections currently operates between Elkford and Cranbrook on Wednesdays and Fridays only. Additional service would be provided by BC Transit and the Regional District of East Kootenay to have service between Elkford and Cranbrook on all weekdays that does not require booking in advance¹.

**Current Health Connections Transit Service
between Elkford and Cranbrook**

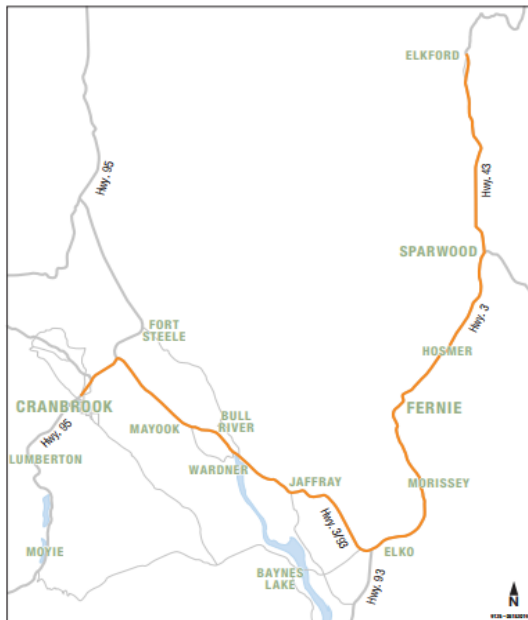


Figure 6: Elkford to Cranbrook Health Connections Service

¹ Note: expansion to this service would be cost-shared by the Regional District of East Kootenay and BC Transit, and would not be funded by Interior Health as a Health Connections service

Benefits:

- Would provide more opportunities to travel to Cranbrook

Considerations:

- Would not meet the needs of those commuting to and from work in Cranbrook

Resources Required:

- 1,300 annual service hours
- 1 expansion bus

4.1.2 Option 2: Elkford - Cranbrook Commuter Service

In addition to the two weekly Health Connections trips between Elkford and Cranbrook, this option would provide commuter service to and from Cranbrook from Monday – Friday. There would be a morning trip operating from Elkford to Cranbrook, and an afternoon trip operating from Cranbrook to Elkford.

Benefits:

- Would provide opportunities for commuters to take transit to work in Cranbrook

Considerations:

- Would only provide one trip in each direction, which may not meet all shift times

Resources Required:

- 1,300 annual service hours
- 1 expansion bus

4.1.3 Option 3: Introduce weekend service

Introduce service on Saturdays and Sundays on route 1 Elkford, Fernie, Sparwood.

Benefits:

- Would provide opportunities to take transit to work, recreational activities, etc. on weekends

Considerations:

- Would not provide additional weekday service

Resources Required:

- 1,300 annual service hours

4.1.4 Option 4: Increased service between Fernie and Sparwood

One additional round-trip between Fernie and Sparwood on weekdays.

Benefits:

- Would provide additional connections between Fernie and Sparwood

Considerations

- Would not provide any additional service to or from Elkford

Resources Required:

- 800 annual service hours
- 1 expansion bus

4.1.5 Option 5: Fernie Local Service Improvements

Extend Route 1 service in Fernie to the Mountain View area. This would provide service to Rocky Mountain Village.

Benefits:

- Would provide service to an area currently not serviced by transit

Considerations:

- Would not provide additional service to residents of Elkford or Sparwood.

Resources Required:

- 200 annual hours

Proposed Service to Mountain View Area

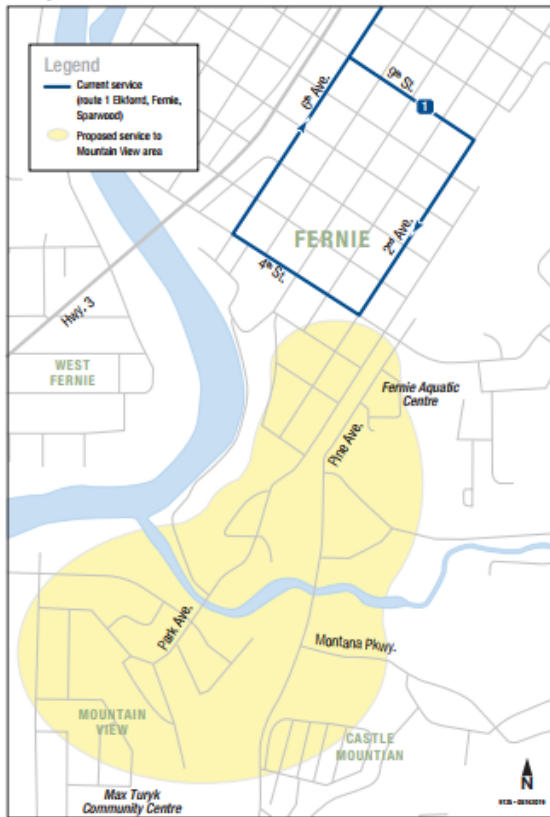


Figure 7: Proposed service to Mountain View Area

Proposed Service Improvement	Est. Service Hours	Expansion Buses
Option 1: Increased service between Elkford and Cranbrook	1,300	1
Option 2: Elkford – Cranbrook commuter service	1,300	1
Option 3: Introduce weekend service	1,300	1
Option 4: Increased service between Fernie and Sparwood	800	1
Option 5: Fernie local service improvements	200	0

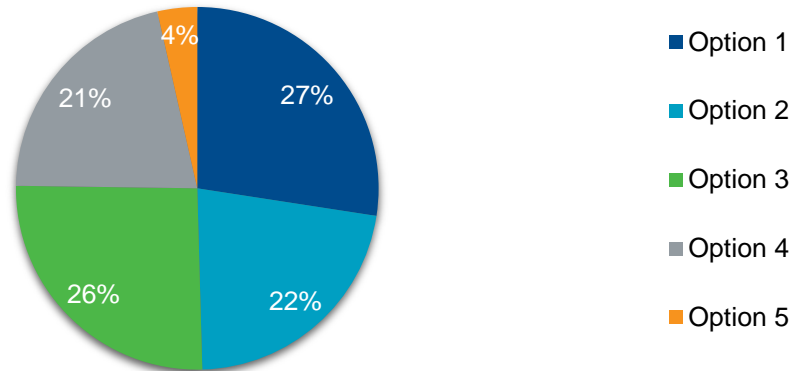
Table 1: Summary of Proposed Transit Changes and Resources Required

4.2 Public Engagement Results

Public engagement took place in form of an online survey summer of 2019 and presented the above options for future transit service improvements. A total of 148 respondents participated in the online survey. Results of the survey are detailed below.

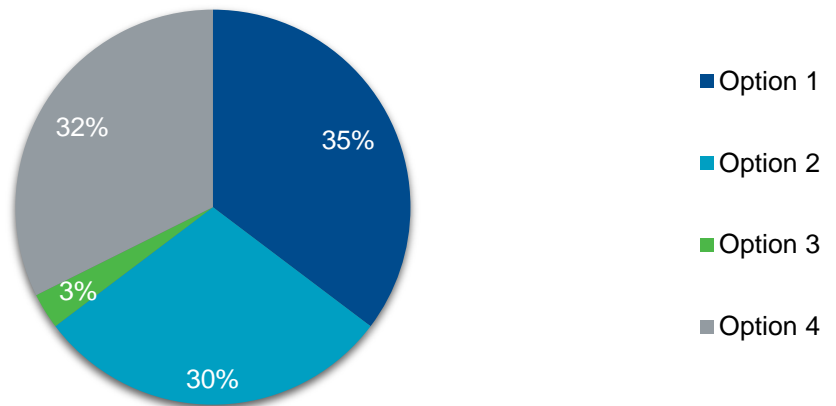
All respondents

Which service improvement option would be most beneficial to you?



Transit riders

Which service improvement option would be most beneficial to you?



4.3 Implementation Priorities

The following section details an implementation strategy over time for short to medium-term transit service improvements. The implementation plan prioritizes improvements in accordance with local government, stakeholder and public feedback.

4.3.1 Transit Service Priorities

Table 2: Implementation Priorities for Proposed Transit Changes

Implementation Priority	Service Hours Required	Buses Required
1: Increase service between Elkford and Cranbrook	1,300	1
2: Implement a commuter service between Elkford and Cranbrook	1,300	1
3: Increase service between Fernie and Sparwood	800	1
4: Introduce weekend service	1,300	1
5: Fernie local service improvements	200	0

4.3.2 Infrastructure Priorities

There are a limited number of bus stops in the Elk Valley Transit System. In the future, additional bus stop amenities such as shelters and benches should be considered for each community in the transit system.

4.4 Future Considerations

The following section details future considerations for the Elk Valley Transit System. These considerations were highlighted through the engagement process and through the Regional District of East Kootenay during the plan refinement phase.

4.4.1 Fernie Academy

A group of online survey respondents indicated an interest in an earlier afternoon trip time departing Fernie for students attending the Fernie Academy. This service would require an additional trip or major adjustment to the times of the current afternoon trips.

4.4.1 Sparwood/Elkford Commuter

A group of teachers who work in Elkford and Sparwood expressed a desire for commuter service from Fernie to Elkford. To service this market, additional trips would be required.

5 Recommendations

This plan outlines several service options for future transit service improvements. Service improvements will be integrated into the three year Transit Improvement Process (TIPs), which is updated on an annual basis. Prior to implementation of service changes, BC Transit staff will work with staff at the Regional District of East Kootenay to ensure service improvements appropriately reflect local needs. Additional targeted engagement may be conducted.

It is recommended that the Regional District of East Kootenay:

- Receive this report for information; and
- Prioritize increased service between Elkford and Cranbrook for any future expansion initiatives.