

Malahat commuter service starts Oct. 20

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Long-awaited commuter bus service over the Malahat will officially begin Oct. 20.

Following a series of open houses, public input and approval of the Cowichan Valley Regional District, B.C. Transit's Malahat Connector will offer weekday commuter bus service between Victoria and Duncan, Cobble Hill, Mill Bay and Shawnigan Lake.

Eight 40-seat coaches with bike racks will be dedicated to the route, which will leave the Cowichan Valley in the morning and return in the afternoon and early evening.

Operating costs for the buses are estimated at \$775,000 a year, with the province committed to paying \$362,000 annually based on a funding formula already in place with B.C. Transit.

Fares, set at \$6 for those travelling the 60 minutes in Zone 1 (Victoria to Shawnigan Lake, Cobble Hill and Mill Bay) and \$8 for the 80-minute Zone 2 trip between Duncan and Victoria, will offset some of those costs.

Monthly passes will be \$200 for Zone 1 and \$225 for Zone 2.

The open houses in September resulted in some minor changes from B.C. Transit's original proposal, including the No. 99 Shawnigan Lake route no longer looping around the lake.

That bus will now start at Cobble Hill, travel south to Thain Road and Shawnigan Lake Village, go west to Shawnigan Beach Estates and south along the west side of Shawnigan Lake.

The No. 66 Duncan's route will start out east of downtown Duncan (Donnay and McKenzie intersection) and travel along Maple Bay Road to the Village Green Mall. From there the trip would follow its original routing to Victoria.

A stop has been added at Whittaker Road near the Malahat Fire Department to service Spectacle Lake residents and will be serviced in the morning by the No. 66 and on the evening return trip by the No. 99.

The departure times from Victoria have also been pushed back by 10 minutes and the buses will now leave at 4:15 p.m., 4:45 p.m. and 5:15 p.m. from stops near the legislature.

To get this service up and running, the province committed to purchase eight buses, with high-backed chairs, reading lights and light-luggage racks, at a cost of \$4.3 million.