

## Getting your Politicians on Board: A Case Study

Quesnel, British Columbia, a small community of 10,000 residents, is big on transit. City council makes transit a priority and continually stays in touch with the changing needs of the community. The city's transportation manager is also a strong advocate for transit.

### Transit Champion

In 1999, a Quesnel city councilor was the catalyst for creating a long-term vision for public transit, one that would evolve as required by the community it served. Quesnel already had dial-a-ride service for seniors and people with disabilities, but an earlier attempt at fixed-route service had failed due to low ridership. The Mayor and council recognized that a transit system could meet the social, economic and environmental needs of the community, with due consideration for the needs of youth, senior citizens and people with a disability.

### The Vision

The City of Quesnel Official Community Plan of 1999 established local transit objectives that formed the basic requirements for a new transit system. The vision included all forms of transit - custom, paratransit, taxi services, subsidies for existing transportation networks, and suggested transportation demand management strategies for major employers in the Quesnel area.

### Action

The City asked BC Transit to conduct a transit study considering all the objectives in the plan, including the identification of growth markets. In early 2001, BC Transit and the City entered into a funding agreement



Photo by Miss Matsushita

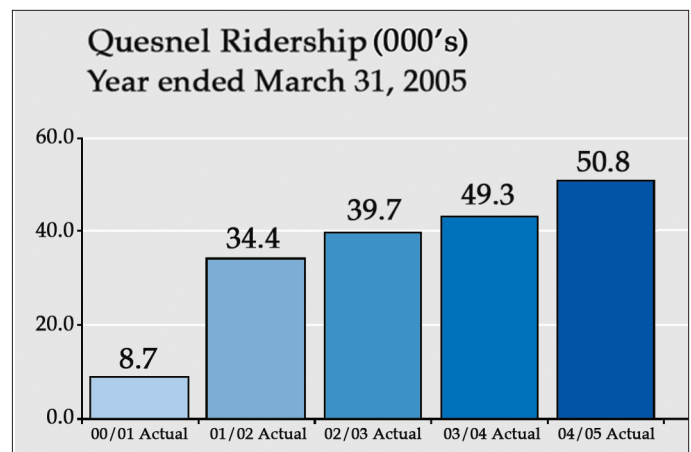
Four Polar minibuses carried 50,800 passengers last year.

to deliver integrated transit services to residential areas, commercial areas and high schools.

Since 2001, the system has gone through numerous expansions and ridership has increased from 8,000 to 50,800 for 2005. In the last three years, ridership has increased by about 20 per cent each year.

"We're always looking for opportunities to improve and we want to keep expanding," says Quesnel Mayor Nate Bello. "Transit is an investment in the long-term sustainability of our city."

In 2004, when BC Transit couldn't contribute to the cost of an expansion, city council approved funding to go ahead with a 15 per cent expansion in service.



### Contributing to Commercial and Economic Growth

From the beginning, city council has been keen on providing employment access for those just entering the job market, those without cars, and youth working at after-school or weekend jobs.

In existing and new commercial areas, the City works to ensure appropriate transit service is available for employees and shoppers. When a new shopping centre opened in South Quesnel, transit increased the number of trips to ensure that employees could get to work and shoppers could get to the stores.

### Working with the Community

The transit system works with the school district, the college, the regional district, the hospital, seniors centres, the local Community Living Association, and other associations and agencies to ensure the best possible service for Quesnel citizens.

Transit drivers visit centres and agencies in the community and attend neighbourhood meetings. They talk individually with people to explain routes and schedules. The City surveys riders, community groups and transit drivers to keep tabs on the changing needs of the community. Quesnel's mayor, Nate Bello, points out that Quesnel has a first-rate operating company, that the drivers know the people in the community and really care about them.

"This is a small town; we can give personalized service," says the transit manager, Cliff Hall. "Our customers are number one."

### Creating Partnerships

The transit system is operated under a partnership between the City of Quesnel, BC Transit and a private operating company, Five Five Transport. The Cariboo Regional District is also a partner with a role that will increase as the transit system expands into the rural areas.

In January of 2005, a bus priority light, the only one in British Columbia outside of the coastal metropolis of Vancouver, was installed at a busy intersection where the buses turn left onto the highway. This addition to the system was a partnership between the City of Quesnel, BC Transit and the Ministry of Transportation.

The Quesnel Transit System also partners with the school district to provide transportation services for students. In 2002, the McGruff Safe House Program was launched and drivers will be in the elementary schools this fall to talk about the program.

*The Quesnel Transit system operates two Polar minibuses six days a week on two main routes, and a lift-equipped van provides dial-a-ride service on weekdays for people with disabilities. Quesnel's transit cost for 2004/05 was \$318,526 with revenue at \$75,160, a 17% increase from 2003/04. Rides per hour were 7.8, up 15% from the previous year.*

### The Approach

- **Identify a champion or champions.**  
Leadership and advocacy are important.
- **Create a vision.**  
Think big. Think long term.
- **Take action.**  
Develop a plan based on the vision.
- **Work with the business sector.**  
Identify opportunities that contribute to commercial and economic growth.
- **Work with the community.**  
Make seniors, youth and people with disabilities part of the vision.
- **Look for opportunities to create partnerships.**