

## Transformation right on track?

by [Mike Damour - Cowichan News Leader Pictorial](#) March 20, 2010

Commuters who work in Victoria could see rail service from the Cowichan Valley to the capital by 2011, said the man at the engineer's control of the Island Corridor Foundation.

"We're talking about good, reliable, efficient rail service that a person could climb on a train at 7 a.m. in Cowichan and be in Victoria in time for work and now in the afternoon that train is there to take them home again," said Graham Bruce, executive director of the foundation.

"I don't know if commuter rail is the right term, let's say it will be an improved inter-city service," he said.

But the commuter service is only the beginning for Bruce and others who advocate a beefed up E&N rail service and the ICF has taken its show to the road to convince others rail is the way of the future.

Its doing it through a series of workshops, dubbed *Get On The Train*, which gives a message about the renewal of passenger, tourist and freight rail services on Vancouver Island.

"The sessions are to bring the parties — which includes five regional districts, 14 municipalities and 15 First Nations — along that corridor together," said Bruce, a former cabinet member with the Liberal and the Social Credit parties.

"We have this asset that goes from Victoria to Courtenay and out to Port Alberni that links two-thirds of this (island) community."

The first session took place in Duncan a couple of months ago when more than 70 people turned out for the event, called *Extraordinary Change, Extraordinary Opportunity*.

The workshop was designed as an opportunity to showcase opportunities for communities to direct future development that can respond to the demands of



Graham Bruce, executive director of the Island Corridor Foundation, stands on the E&N line on Boys Road. The former provincial cabinet minister says commuter rail service between the Cowichan Valley and the capital could happen by 2011. Mike D'Amour

expensive energy and a carbon constrained future.

Bruce said 75 to 80 per cent of the island population island is within three or four miles of that rail system.

"You've heard there's Victoria Island and Vancouver Island — the rail corridor can finally be the thing that links that all together."

The thing is, it's not all going to happen overnight, said Bruce.

"I came aboard in June and I thought it was unlikely anybody would put \$100 million (for needed rail repairs) into a line that doesn't have traffic," he said.

"We need to take an incremental approach and make some things happen along the line by taking smaller bites to accomplish that."

Bruce said the smart move now would be to have the train operation run out of Nanaimo rather than Victoria, and then in the long term have trains going in both directions then connecting.

"I don't see any real problems why this can't occur," he said.

"In the short term, something we're working on and we've met with VIA, is to have a hub out of Nanaimo and have an early morning run to Victoria and then the Victoria run all the way up to Courtenay.

"A second train will be happen behind that and it'll run through to Victoria and will have a primary market of taking people from here to the Esquimalt base."

Esquimalt makes sense, Bruce said, because there are 800 employees at that base who live north of the Malahat.

"Our station right at the Admirals Road crossing is right at the base gate," he said.

"From that, I'm convinced we'll grow."

Indeed, Bruce sees a day when the trains make excursion trips.

"Maybe doing wine tour trips or once a week dinner theatre trips to Chemainus Theatre and, a little further out, maybe a ski train to Mt. Washington.

"We're hopeful we'll get new cars from VIA and hopeful they'll have racks for bikes," he said, pointing to the potential of train/bike tours utilizing the Trans-Canada Trail.

Still, to get everything going will take some cash.

"The first incremental change will take about \$15 million to give us both life on the line and to improve the track," said Bruce.

"There's so much common sense to this, let's just make it happen."