

**For immediate release
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SLRD OFFICIALS ADVOCATE FOR REGION AT UBCM CONFERENCE

Priorities this year are regional transit, northern highway improvements, increased capital and operational funding for parks and recreation areas, and broadband connectivity

Pemberton, B.C. – Squamish-Lillooet Regional District Board members and senior staff have been meeting with provincial cabinet ministers on a number of issues in advance of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) annual convention.

These issues are: regional transit, highway maintenance/ speed limits in rural and residential areas, capital and operational funding for provincial parks and backcountry recreation areas, and broadband connectivity in rural areas.

“These topics have been identified by our Board as being key in our region, and top of mind for our residents,” said SLRD Board Chair, Tony Rainbow.

The Sea-to-Sky regional transit committee (consisting of the SLRD, Squamish Nation, District of Squamish, Resort Municipality of Whistler, Village of Pemberton and the Lil’wat Nation) was formed as an important step toward the proposed creation of a regional transit commission to govern and operate the regional transit service. The transit committee had previously proposed a funding model based on the existing provincial/municipal cost-sharing formula for public transit, ridership fares, property tax and a motor fuel tax of up to 5 cents per litre. Although similar funding models are in use in the Capital Regional District and the Lower Mainland, this funding model for the Sea-to-Sky has been turned down by the Province. However, the transit committee remains committed to pursuing a regional transit service that is not funded solely by property tax, with the motor fuel tax, or an alternative funding mechanism, being a key funding component. Additional considerations driving a regional transit service are the Province’s CleanBC Plan, a significant increase in visitors to the Sea-to-Sky year over year, and traffic volume on Highway 99.

““We have been working on regional transit for years, not just at the SLRD Board table, but with First Nations and three of our member municipalities,” Rainbow said. “Now more than ever, we need regional transit.”

In addition to regional transit, the SLRD will also ask the Province for improvements to Road 40 and the Highline Road, and to reduce speed limits on rural residential roads.

The issue of increased capital and operational funding for provincial parks and backcountry areas, commensurate with increasing visitor numbers, is another priority of the SLRD.

“For years, the Province has successfully promoted parks and backcountry areas in the SLRD as tourist destinations and there has been significant growth in visitation. COVID-19 has also resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of British Columbians recreating in rural parts of the province. Increased investments in campgrounds, amenities, parking, signage and basic necessities are desperately needed. Increased provincial funding is required to properly manage the results of this,” Rainbow added.

Broadband connectivity is an issue that affects the most remote and rural areas of the province, and Rainbow said the COVID-19 pandemic has shed an even bigger light on this.

“In 2020, reliable internet service should be available to all British Columbians, but it isn’t,” he said. “We’d like to see this be more equitable, as it is a matter of community safety, education, health and economic development.”

The SLRD will request that the Province develop a strategy and provide funding to reduce the gap between high speed broadband service levels in urban and rural areas.

The UBCM annual convention will be delivered virtually, on September 22, 23 and 24, 2020.

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About the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District

Located in southwestern BC, the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District (SLRD) is a local government federation consisting of four member municipalities (the District of Lillooet, the District of Squamish, the Village of Pemberton and the Resort Municipality of Whistler) and four unincorporated, rural electoral areas (A, B, C, and D). Headquartered in Pemberton, which is the approximate geographic centre of the region, the SLRD delivers a wide range of local, regional and sub-regional services to approximately 42,665 residents (2016 Census).

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