

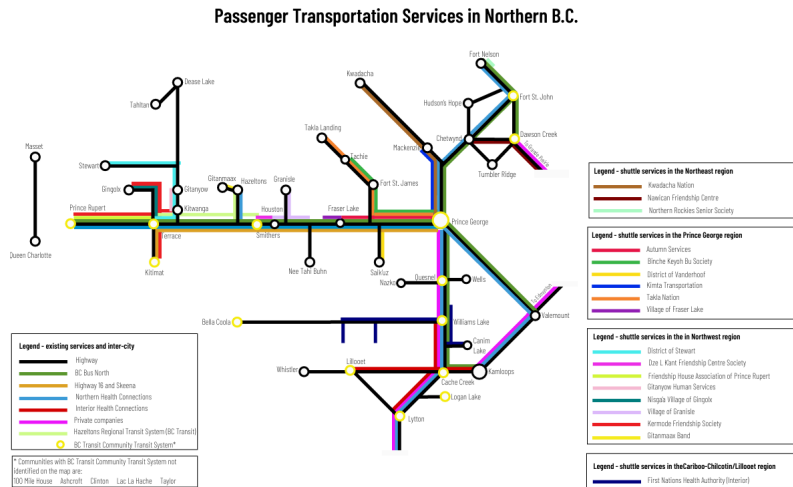
Making it easier to navigate buses in Northern BC

Public Transit Alliance of BC

May 18, 2026

Problem

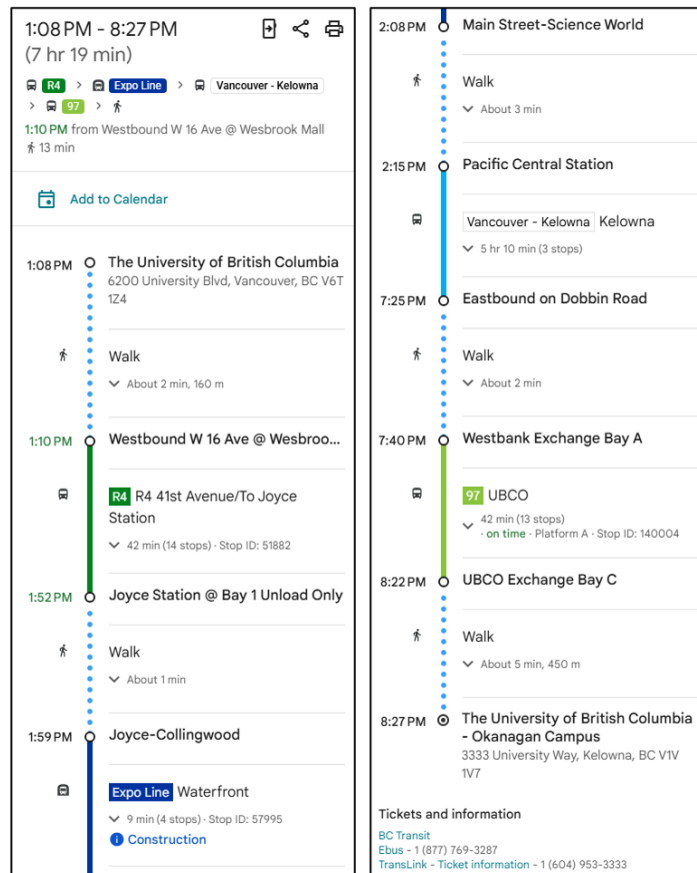
As pictured to the right, transit in the north is operated by dozens of different authorities, making it far more complex to navigate than public transit in Southern BC. Residents may be familiar with the routes that serve their community, but will struggle to string a trip together to another northern town, or to a bigger city like Kamloops. For outsiders like tourists, medical professionals, or visiting family, navigating the network is essentially impossible.



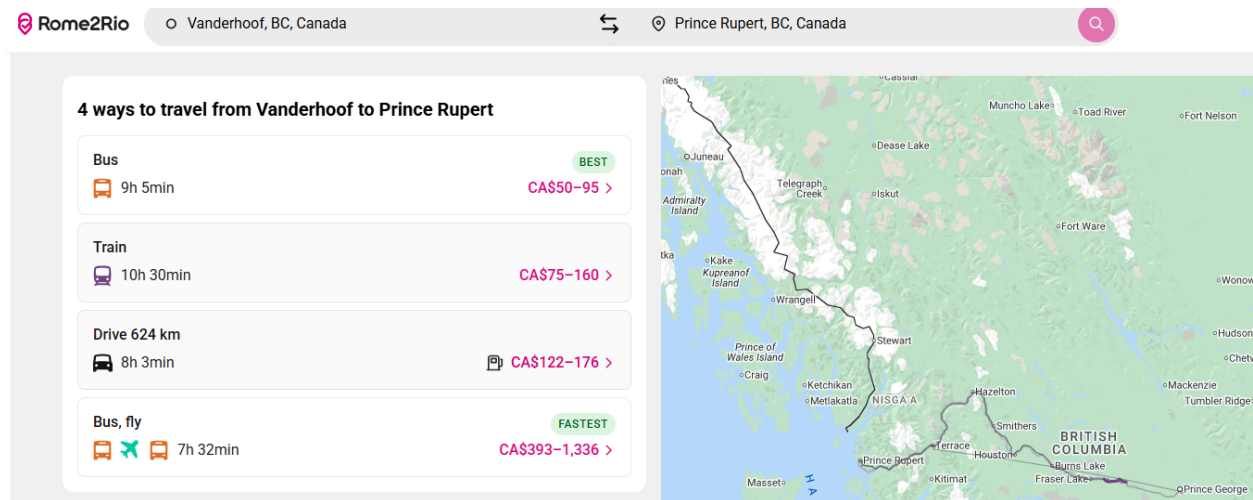
Solution

The solution is to communicate the entire network in a way that's simple enough for transit users to understand. **GTFS** is the key to unlocking that solution, but not the whole solution. The **General Transit Feed Specification** is a format that allows transit agencies to share their schedule with other websites and users. It is up to those other websites how the information is presented to the public. The most common way the information is presented is through Google Maps, Transit App, or Apple Maps, where users simply input an origin and a destination.

To the right, you can see what Google Maps generates when asked how to get from UBC in Vancouver to UBCO in Kelowna. It pulls data from the GTFS feed of three transit operators: TransLink, Ebus, and BC Transit to give you a door-to-door trip between the two campuses.



There are multiple ways your GTFS feed can be represented online. The website Rome2Rio uses the GTFS data to show you all the different ways you can get from one place to another. In the screenshot below, you can see what happens when you ask it for all the options between Vanderhoof and Prince Rupert.



Imagine if all the NDI funded services were included on these websites. You could ask for a trip from Granisle to Canim Lake and the website would show all the available options.

Publishing a GTFS feed

It isn't all that complicated these days to get a GTFS feed online but it probably doesn't make sense for each of NDI's grantees to maintain a separate feed. One option would be to work with an organization that already has a feed to simply add your data. BC Transit and BC Bus North both currently maintain feeds, and could potentially be willing partners. If not, NDI could hire a staff person or work with a contractor like [Trillium Transit](#). The key steps would include:

1. Identify a willing partner to maintain the GTFS feeds or hire someone
2. Set up a procedure for local transit providers to keep those feeds up to date
3. Let members of the community know that they can rely on services like Google Maps or Rome2Rio to plan their travel.

Questions

- How do we input schedule data if our service doesn't have a fixed schedule?
 - Many transit agencies in the world offer on-demand services, and these are reflected in GTFS using the [GTFS Flex](#) specification.
- If the bus is cancelled one day, how do we get that information online?
 - That would come down to the partner that you use to update the feed. Perhaps you could set up a procedure where you can call that partner and tell them the bus is cancelled on a certain date. If you want to go to the next level, you can use a smartphone on the bus to transmit that bus' exact location, so riders know if the bus is late.

Questions?

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