

Low-Carbon Travelling Throughout British Columbia

Written by Heather Mitchell and Jennifer Baddeley, July 20 2018

Travelling throughout Canada without a vehicle has become easier, as it has within British Columbia specifically as well, but challenges to be overcome persist.

While many companies offer transportation for people and goods, scheduling issues still plague many who use these systems of travel. Examples of such companies in British Columbia include B.C. Bus North (the new bus line that is currently replacing the now receding Greyhound Bus line), Via Rail, the North Island Bus Express (Tofino Bus), and B.C. Ferries.

Upon arrival at one's destination, the need to move around the area afterwards still exists. While scheduling between companies is an issue, the focus of this paper will be on examining the ease with which one can transport a bicycle with each of these companies. The need to be able to move efficiently after arriving at the preferred destination is critical. This is especially the case in more northern and/or rural areas where distances between locations are greater than in urban areas, and alternate forms of public transportation are scarce.

Bicycling enable active transportation at both the beginning and end destinations, but only if the ability to transport a bicycle between destinations is provided.

The following information about different car-free travelling methods illustrates how traveling with a bike box or bag impacts travel, the many camping opportunities in northern B.C., and what a trip throughout the province could look like using only your bike and transportation modes outside of private motor vehicle

Car-free travel options in B.C. Bus North

In 2018, the Greyhound Bus line that typically shuttled people and items throughout most of Canada and B.C. ceased operations.



In its place, the B.C. government installed B.C. Bus North to continue allowing people to travel throughout the northern half of the province without the need or use of a car. To bring a bike on here though, the website states that it needs to be either bagged or boxed.¹ As bagging and boxing bikes are not efficient means to transporting bikes for many people especially for those in smaller communities with no bike shop, the B.C. Cycling Coalition reached out to B.C. Bus North to propose a test pilot in which two B.C. Cycling Coalition employees would bring their bikes onto the bus without those restrictive means of transportation. Below is an account of the trip.

¹ <https://bcbus.ca/passenger-information/>

Via Rail

Via Rail has many routes across Canada, three of these routes are located in British Columbia. Via allows people to travel from Jasper to Prince Rupert, Vancouver to Jasper, and Vancouver to Seattle. This service Via Rail provides allows people to travel throughout the province and the rest of Canada without using a vehicle, but once you get to your destination you still have to figure out to how move around. Biking is one of these options.



To bring your bicycle on Via Rail there's some information you should know in advance. First, there is a \$25 handling fee for storing your bike, per direction.² This fee increases to \$50 for electric and tandem bikes due to the increase in weight.³ Second, only one bike is allowed per person. And third, many of the trains have baggage cars with bike racks that fit 12 bikes, but not all of the services do.⁴ For instance, typically during the peak season between Jasper and Prince Rupert, there is no baggage car with a bike rack. Though, after calling the general line for Via Rail, there are some cases where baggage cars are available on these routes, so make sure to call ahead and check. In the case where there are no baggage cars, bikes need to be dismantled and placed in a bike box or bag. If the trip has a transfer, which the route from Jasper to Prince Rupert does⁵, then the bike needs to be stored in a bike box purchased from participating Via Rail stations. Bike boxes are \$18 - \$20 and bike bags are \$5.⁶ There will be no tools available to dismantle your bike, so call ahead to clarify the availability of a bike box and make sure to bring your own tool kit. This information has been found scattered throughout the Via Rail website and was often searched for in their search engine.

North Island Express Bus

The North Island Express Bus shuttles people from Vancouver throughout most of the island. This provides a great opportunity for cyclists to visit and tour Vancouver Island, but before you bring your bike with you on this bus service, there are a few things you should know. First, the bus does not go on to the ferry and the fee for your bus does not include the extra walk-on or bike fee that B.C. Ferries charges. Second, your bike must be dismantled and boxed



² <https://www.viarail.ca/en/bike>

³ <https://www.viarail.ca/en/bike>

⁴ <https://www.viarail.ca/en/travel-info/baggage/non-standard-items>

⁵ <https://www.viarail.ca/en/explore-our-destinations/trains/regional-trains/jasper-prince-rupert>

⁶ <https://www.viarail.ca/en/travel-info/baggage/pack-your-bags-with-care>

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for it to be emitted onto the bus. And third, there is an extra fee for storing the bicycle on the bus, but the website does not say how much that fee is. This information is only found after you have applied where you would like to be picked up and dropped off on the site, there are no information pages dedicated to the services provided by the company.

B.C. Ferries

The B.C. Ferries provides services throughout most of the province, allowing people to access Vancouver Island and many of the islands around it, along with Haida Gwaii. This service provides ample opportunity for cyclists to reach different parts of the province easily and even effectively encourages cycle tourism.



When bringing your bike on board, you are directed to walk it on and then store it on the car deck in an isolated section. B.C. Ferries strongly encourages passengers to secure their bikes and other belongings while on board.⁷ Fees for the bikes are anywhere between \$2 and \$5 and are not included in the passenger fees; unless one is using the prepaid *Experience Card*, in which case the bicycle fee is waived. Unlike the other services listed previously, no bike bags or boxes are required and the fees for this service are accessible to most.

What it means to travel with a bike bag or box

Many shuttle companies require travellers who are also transporting their bikes with them to store their bikes in boxes or bags. While bike boxes and bags do add more protection for the bicycle, it is also a hindrance for the bike owner to obtain, use and carry with them before and after their trip with the company they have travelled with.



Obtaining either a bag or box can be especially difficult in rural areas or small communities where bicycling may not be as popular. When using one of these methods, Cycling Weekly states that the steps taken to place your bike in a bag or box requires you to: remove both wheels from the bike, turn the handlebars to one side, either remove the seat post or drop it into the frame, and then remove the rear derailleur.⁸ Some of these adjustments require the use of tools, depending on the bike, and most companies providing transportation do not provide tools to allow the adjustment for the bicycle to fit in the mandatory bag or box. This forces cyclists to not only carry the required tools with them, but also a bike bag or box while cycling to the pick-up, and from the drop-off, locations.

⁷ https://www.bcferries.com/travel_planning/Cycling_with_BC_Ferries.html

⁸ <https://www.cyclingweekly.com/group-tests/best-bike-bags-and-boxes-a-buyers-guide-323679>
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While transporting one of these bags or boxes on a bike is difficult and burdensome, cyclists are then also required to arrive at their pick-up location earlier so that they can dismantle their bikes, and then are forced to reassemble their bicycles upon arrival before they can continue on their journey.

Bikes on the bus

When BC announced that the former Greyhound passenger bus would no longer service northern BC,⁹ the province recognized that the residents of northern BC would need to be provided an alternative service.



Many people in the north rely on passenger busses simply as a cost effective service as their only means of transportation. This trip was used for work purposes, health care appointments, and visiting friends and family, along with some tourism opportunities. BC Transit has since implemented BC Bus North,¹⁰ which has transit routes between Prince George and Smithers, Smithers and Prince Rupert, Prince George and Valemount, Fort Nelson and Dawson Creek, Prince George and Mackenzie, and Mackenzie to Fort St. John. In rolling out this new service, BC Bus North has been listening to the travel needs of their customers to improve mobility concerns in the north.

Naturally, the British Columbia Cycling Coalition was excited to inquire if this new provincial bus service accommodated passengers traveling with bicycles. After speaking with the BC Bus North's Strategic Outreach & Business Engagement Director, Linda Harmon; we were informed that passengers carrying bicycles would require a bicycle box or bicycle bag similar to the North Island Express, and Via Rail Service.



After consideration, BC Bus North realized that a bike box or bike bag may not be a resource readily available in many northern communities. They decided to resort to a more creative bicycle under-storage option; canvas drop sheets. Excited about this solution, Jenn and Heather (two employees of BC Cycling Coalition, from the Prince George office) decided to test out how their bikes handled in storage, wrapped in canvas drop sheets. The results were remarkably effective. Getting the bikes to the bus stop location was hassle free, without having to carry a large box, bike and travel bags. Jenn and Heather simply bicycled to the bus pickup location on 7th and Dominion, Prince George. Upon arrival the cyclists received a friendly welcome by the driver of BC Bus North. The bicycles were wrapped in two sufficiently large drop canvas clothes then stacked on top of one another in reverse orientations. Bicycle panniers and backpacks

⁹<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-searching-for-replacement-after-greyhound-announces-exit-1.4741635>

¹⁰ <https://bcbus.ca/book-a-trip/>
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went into the same under storage compartment, supporting the bicycles in their stacked position. If successful, BC Bus North will be the first transit provider to offer canvas tarp bicycle storage solutions to their passengers.

Recommendations

1. Pilot the Use of Canvas Tarps for Bicycle Transport

Immediately pilot the use of canvas tarp bicycle storage solutions in BC Bus North. Request feedback from passengers and drivers adjusting policies and procedures as required.

2. Install Cargo Bay Bike Racks in New Buses

While the canvas tarp solution was efficient for this trip and hopefully future trips to come, the BC Cycling Coalition also recommends that new buses should be installed with proper bike racks in the storage departments so that bike boxes and bags become a thing of the past. We are aware of an option from Sportworks¹¹ and would recommend investing this and options from other suppliers. This service could inspire other provincial transit providers to reconsider the needs of passengers traveling with bicycles. The ability to travel with a bicycle encourages car-free transportation and tourism in BC, and offers greater connectivity beyond bus stop locations where car ownership and rental, or connecting public transit services may not be available.

BC Bus Experience

Inside of the bus, the two BC Cycling Coalition researchers, Jenn and Heather, reported that their journey was comfortable, smooth and quiet. The scenic passage offered great mountain range views. The new busses were very clean, had comfortable and spacious seats and complimentary water. Unfortunately the BC Bus North has not received a high passenger uptake just yet, and there were only a total of 3 passengers on a 44 seat bus. The third passenger was a young male in his mid twenties traveling from Vancouver to Moberly Lake for a new work position. His car had been damaged the day prior due to a wildlife encounter, sending him to the hospital for minor injuries. Without any mode of private transportation, this young man was grateful to have the service of BC Bus North to attend his first day of work. The best part of traveling by bus and bike in BC is you get to meet some pretty amazing people and encounter experiences that you might not think to participate in when traveling by car.

Once arriving at our destination Azouzetta Lake Lodge and Campground,¹² the bicycles had not shifted an inch during the 4 hour drive (Appendix, Image 1). The non-slip surface of the storage compartments provided fantastic grip on the canvas sheets, securing the bicycles through the steep highway sections within the mountainous Pine Pass Valley. The bikes were unloaded in ready-to-ride fashion, free of scratches or the requirement to re-assemble parts. Drop sheets went back under the bus and the BC Bus North carried on its route.

¹¹ <https://www.sportworks.com/product/luggage-bay-rack>

¹² <https://stay.powderking.com/camping/>

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It is not sure when BC Bus North will officially offer this fantastic cycling and bussing experience to all of its passengers, but when they do we are sure it will receive a positive feedback.

Camping in BC

[Azouzetta Lake Lodge and Campground](#) was the true highlight of this trip. The multitude of travel destinations in Northern BC by bus and bike just goes to show how accessible and abundant nature and recreational services are to northern residents. By noon, Jenn and Heather had successfully travelled to their campsite, set up tents, ate a picnic pasta bolognese, cooled down with a swim in the glacier fed clear waters, and then warmed up on the sunny boat dock. Unable to escape entirely, the Azouzetta Lake Cafe 97 wifi provided 2 hours of attention to work. The requirement to work while camping was sweetly ended by homemade donuts and freshly brewed coffee. Once we had all of our working duties complete, we rewarded ourselves with a bicycle ride along the former CN Rail service road. The evening unwound next to the campfire with a stark sky above and of course the trip would not be complete without roasted marshmallows.



Sustainable travel within BC is feasible and quite extensive when combining the various travel services within the province. Image 2 of the Appendix provides an example of travel across the province from Vancouver, to Jasper, to Prince George to Prince Rupert to Vancouver Island and back to Vancouver again. If you want to access some northern communities or more rural locations off of the major transport routes you may have to pack your bike to reach these destinations or take a car rental service.

Appendix

Image 1. Camp trip Itinerary: Prince George to Azouzetta Lake Campground, Pine Pass

07/23	BC BUS NORTH		PRINCE GEORGE TO AZOUZETTA LAKE LODGE AND CABINS
MON	Depart		<i>Notes</i>
	8:00	7TH AT DOMINION	<i>3h 40m</i>
	Arrive		
	11:40	AZOUZETTA LAKE LODGE AND CABINS	
07/23	OVERNIGHT AT CAMPGROUND		AZOUZETTA LAKE LODGE AND CABINS - PINE PASS
MON	Check-in	Nights	
	12:00	1	
07/25	BC BUS NORTH		AZOUZETTA LAKE LODGE AND CABINS TO PRINCE GEORGE
WED	Depart		<i>Notes</i>
	11:30	LAKE LODGE	<i>5h</i>
	Arrive		
	16:30	PRINCE GEORGE	
07/25	OVERNIGHT IN PRINCE GEORGE		PRINCE GEORGE
WED	Check-in	Nights	
	17:00	1	

Image 2, Two week low-carbon trip through British Columbia

2 WEEK LOW-CARBON TRAVEL BC

TRANSPORTATION	Dates	Destinations
VIA RAIL	7/20	VANCOUVER
VIA RAIL	7/22	JASPER
BC BUS NORTH	7/23	PRINCE GEORGE
BC BUS NORTH	7/25	AZOUZETTA LAKE
VIA RAIL	7/26	PRINCE GEORGE
BC FERRIES	7/30	PRINCE RUPERT
NORTH ISLAND EXPRESS	8/02	PORT HARDY VANCOUVER

07/20

VIA RAIL

VANCOUVER TO JASPER

FRI

Depart

Notes

20:30 VANCOUVER PACIFIC RAIL STATION *1d 22h 38m*

Arrive

16:00 JASPER

07/21

OVERNIGHT IN JASPER

JASPER

SAT

Check-in

Nights

16:30 1

07/22

VIA RAIL

JASPER TO PRINCE GEORGE

SUN

Depart

Notes

12:45 JASPER RAIL STATION *7h 40m*

Arrive

19:08 PRINCE GEORGE

07/21	OVERNIGHT IN PRINCE GEORGE		PRINCE GEORGE
SAT	Check-in	Nights	
	19:30	1	
07/23	BC BUS NORTH	PRINCE GEORGE TO AZOUZETTA LAKE LODGE AND CABINS	
MON	Depart	<i>Notes</i>	
	8:00	7TH AT DOMINION	3h 40m
	Arrive		
	11:40	AZOUZETTA LAKE LODGE AND CABINS	
07/23	OVERNIGHT AT CAMPGROUND		AZOUZETTA LAKE LODGE AND CABINS - PINE PASS
MON	Check-in	Nights	
	12:00	1	
07/25	BC BUS NORTH	AZOUZETTA LAKE LODGE AND CABINS TO PRINCE GEORGE	
WED	Depart	<i>Notes</i>	
	12:30	LAKE LODGE	4h
	Arrive		
	16:30	PRINCE GEORGE	
07/25	OVERNIGHT IN PRINCE GEORGE		PRINCE GEORGE
WED	Check-in	Nights	
	17:00	1	

07/26 **VIA RAIL** PRINCE GEORGE TO PRINCE RUPERT

THU Depart *Notes*
8:00 PRINCE GEORGE *12h 25m*
 Arrive
20:25 PRINCE RUPERT

07/26 OVERNIGHT IN PRINCE RUPERT PRINCE RUPERT

THU Check-in Nights
21:00 3

07/30 **BC FERRIES** PRINCE RUPERT TO PORT HARDY

MON Depart *Notes*
7:30 PRINCE RUPERT *16h*
 Arrive
23:30 PORT HARDY

07/30 OVERNIGHT IN PORT HARDY PORT HARDY

MON Check-in Nights

08/02 **NORTH ISLAND EXPRESS** PORT HARDY TO VANCOUVER

THU Depart *Notes*
10:45 PORT HARDY *9h 55m*
 Arrive
20:40 VANCOUVER