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BC Transit increases bus service to university

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BC Transit expanded its service to UVic starting Sept. 2, with the addition of new buses and more pickups as a result of new government funding.

The seven per cent service increase will happen in two phases, both benefiting the Gordon Head area. Service to the university will increase by 40 per cent with emphasis on morning and afternoon rush hours.

The timing of the company's largest ever expansion is due, said BC Transit spokesperson Joanna Morton.

"We've seen it time and time again; every September it's just chaos ... everybody is back to school, back to work and trying to figure out what their schedule is," Morton said. "We usually expand every September, and we change our service times and hours."

The first phase of the increase will place more buses throughout the city, allowing a greater volume of riders between downtown and the university. Additionally, four new community routes will be added in phase two, which includes a smaller community bus for the Gordon Head area.

Transit officials hope to alleviate crowding on university routes through 16 new double-decker buses.

"Students are our greatest demographic and we really want to target them, giving greener options and green choice," Morton said.

The \$800,000 buses are slowly trickling onto city streets as they arrive from Britain — each taking 18 to 24 months to make — since there are currently no North American manufacturers. Until they arrive, some afternoon stops may be cancelled if enough buses are not available.

"We have transit planners within the company that actually do [route] survey work and actually assess the service that we have provided," Morton said. "You can plan all you want, but in reality it sometimes doesn't match up."

Each day, 17,000 people board buses to or from UVic, a number that persuaded officials to add 556 new trips this September. This means UVic students make up 18.5 per cent of all bus riders within the city.

Despite the upgrades, fares will not increase. A \$15.6 million injection from federal and provincial governments will alleviate the costs associated with the service increase. Riders will also notice aesthetic changes this fall. Victoria Regional Transit, the local partner of BC Transit, will scrap its 27-year-old blue and red stripes for a new scheme of blue and green. The colours are part of a re-branding campaign that includes a new logo for the company.