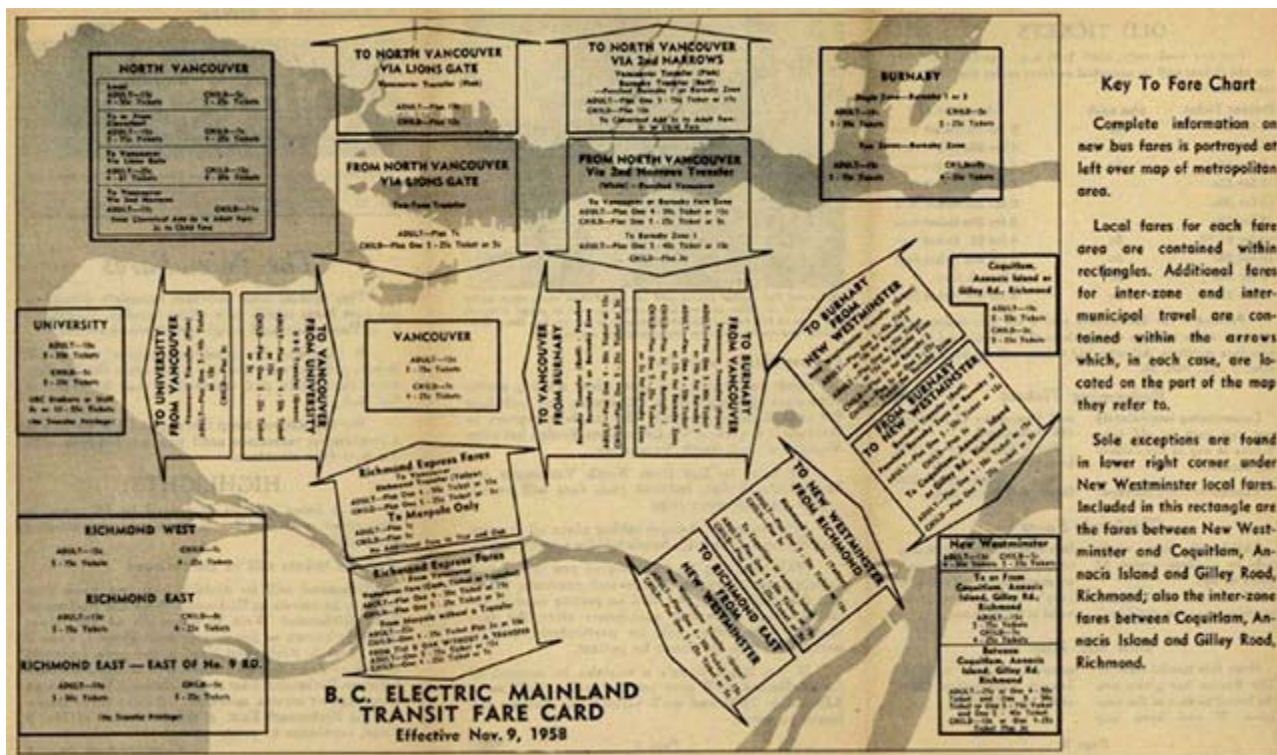


History of Fare Systems

As noted in our [125 Years of Transit](#) series, Vancouver’s first public transit vehicle was an electric streetcar that rolled down Main Street for the first time in 1890. Soon, it was transporting Vancouver’s early residents and visitors along nine kilometres of track throughout the city. A few months later, an expansion line was opened to New Westminister.

From its earliest days, public transit in Metro Vancouver has focused on crossing municipal boundaries to connect the region. After nearly 100 years of experimenting with zones and boundaries, in 1984 a three-zone fare structure similar to the one we have today was created. From one flat fare for all trips to over 100 fares to choose from, our transit system has tried it all.

1958: 100 Fare options



1958: An 11- zone system is introduced with 100 different fare options based on where your trip starts and ends

In 1958, the transit system covered a much smaller area than it does today. Transit service was available in only Vancouver, North Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, New Westminister, and a small section of Coquitlam. This area was divided into 11 fare zones that combined in different ways to offer over 100 distinct fare options.

The price of a fare in 1958 was based on both the start and end points of a trip and the amount of distance between those two points.

In general, the price increased with the number of zones crossed. The price of a fare was related to the amount of distance travelled, but other factors also came into play.

Direction mattered. The trip leaving home could cost more than the return trip because of the direction of each trip.

Zone boundaries were inconsistent. Vancouver, for example, was a single zone while Burnaby was divided into two zones. The fare price to travel within only one zone varied based on which zone it was. Transfers were based on geography, so transit riders were required to pay an additional fare if they decided to take a different route, travel extra distance, or when they wanted to return home.

Looking at the 1958 fare map today, one thing is immediately clear: it is complicated!

The fare structure in 1958 is a good example of a system that captures the user-pay principle: everyone pays according to what they use. Fare prices increased with the number of zones crossed so that fare prices were tied to distance travelled. The high degree of detail that makes this system so complicated also makes it very precise.

1965: Two Fare Options

TRANSIT FARES
(Effective January 18, 1948)

To remove any misunderstanding about transit fares in Metropolitan Vancouver, here is the complete fare structure. We suggest you keep it for reference.

SINGLE ZONE FARES

Adults 20¢ cash or 1 adult token (4 for 75¢)
Students 15¢ cash. Good at all times.
1 student token (10 for \$1.00). Valid only from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. on school days.
A valid B.C. Hydro school certificate must be presented when student fare is paid.
UBC Students 1 student token. Valid only between Blanka Street Loop and 8th Avenue and the University of B.C. on presentation of a current AMS card. No transfer beyond.
Children (under 12 years of age) 10¢ cash or 1 child token (4 for 30¢). Good at all times.
Children under five years of age, up to four in number when boarding with and at all times accompanied by an adult or student, may travel free.

AREA FARES
Good for travelling through two or more transit fare areas

Adults 35¢ cash or 1 adult token plus 15¢ cash
Students 25¢ cash. Good at all times.
1 student token plus 10¢ cash. Valid only from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. on school days.
A valid B.C. Hydro school certificate must be presented when student fare is paid.
Children 15¢ cash or 1 child token plus 5¢ cash. Good at all times.

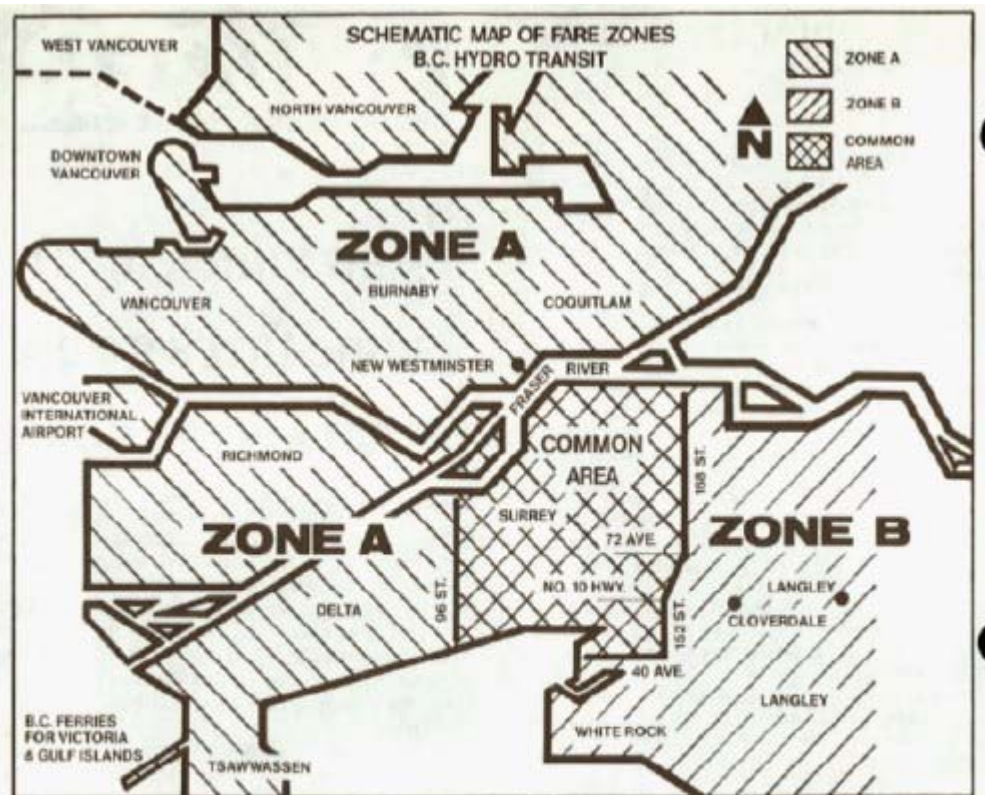
1965: A 4-zone system is introduced with only 2 fare options: valid for a single zone or the entire area

It may come as no surprise that after seven years with a fare system as highly complicated as the one from 1958, the next fair system introduced made one big change: it was simpler.

In 1965 a new and simpler fare system was introduced. The 11 zones that had existed were redrawn to four, and transit riders could purchase one of only two fares available: a Single Zone Fare, which allowed for travel within one zone, or an Area Fare, which allowed for travel that crossed any number of zone boundaries. Changes were also made to make transit more affordable for students by expanding the student discount.

This option was much more simple to use and understand than the previous system. However, these new, larger zones were a less precise measurement of distance. For example, someone who wanted to travel a short distance that crossed a zone boundary was required to purchase an Area Fare for the same price as someone else who took a long trip that covered a greater distance and crossed multiple zones.

1976: The Common Area



Zones simpler

The entire Greater Vancouver transit system will be divided into two zones under the new adjustments, a simplification over the previous eleven-zone system. Zones A and B also have a "common area" which will serve as an extension of Zone A when travelling from Zone A and an extension of Zone B when travelling from Zone B. Its purpose is to ensure that

passengers can ride at least seven miles before being required to pay the two-zone fare. Passengers riding from the common area to either Zone A or B will require a one-zone fare. White transfers will be issued for travel within Zone A, pink for Zone B and green for the entire transit system.

1976: A Common Area is introduced for short trips that cross a zone boundary

In 1976, a new fare system introduced a solution to short trips that crossed a zone boundary were charged the same fare as a long trip that travelled through multiple zones.

This new fare system divided the region into just two zones: Zone A and Zone B. Between Zones A and B was a Common Area, which was tacked on as an extension of the zone where each trip started.

For a trip to be charged a two-zone fare, it would have to start in one zone, cross through the Common Area, and end in the other zone. This was an attempt to make the zone boundaries less rigid. However, as the next example illustrates, decreasing the total number of zones can often mean that those who travel the shortest distances pay the most for what they receive.

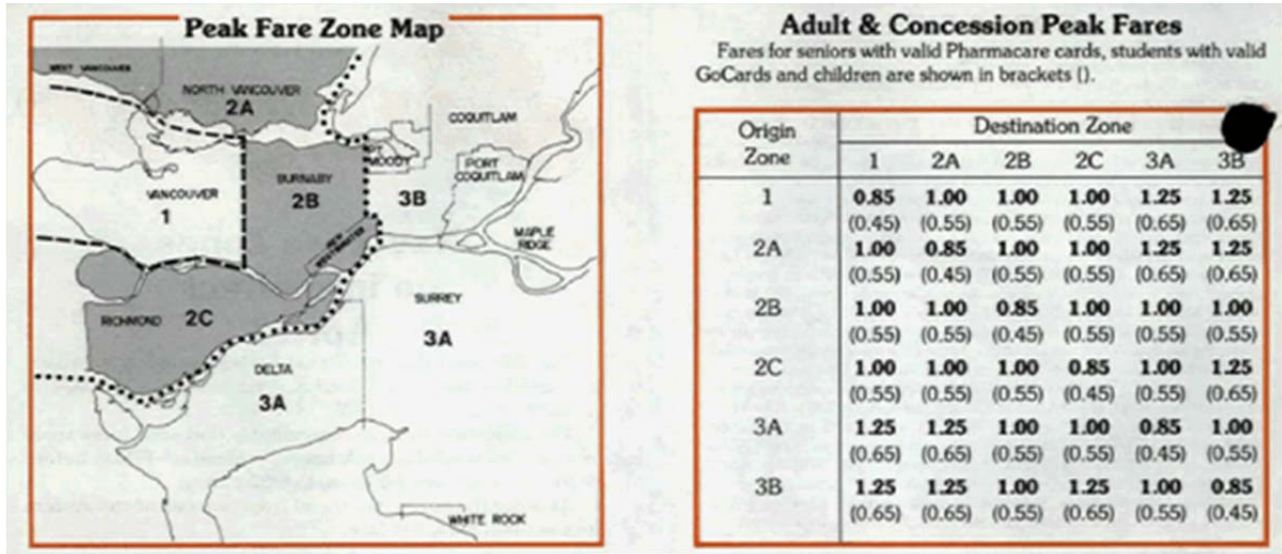
1981: One Flat Fare

In 1981, a new system was introduced that eliminated fare zones and charged just one Flat Fare for travel anywhere on the system. Discounts remained for children, students, and seniors. Ninety-minute transfers were introduced to allow for adequate time to complete a trip on the transit system that now covered more area than ever before. For frequent users of the system, such as commuters, a new monthly pass was offered. The pass was priced at the equivalent of 40 trips per month, equal to 2 trips per day, Monday to Friday.

A Flat Fare system is one of the simplest forms of transit fares. With the exception of a few types of riders who receive discounts (students, children, and seniors), everyone pays the same fare regardless of the distance or direction travelled. The monthly pass made things even simpler for frequent users by providing an option to pay just once per month. This was the simplest fare system Metro Vancouver has ever seen.

When only one fare price exists for transit, the price set is an average price. Though a longer trip is more expensive for the system to deliver than a shorter trip, all riders pay the same price. As a result, transit riders taking shorter trips end up subsidizing those longer trips taken by other riders.

1984: 3-Zones+



1984: A 3-zone system is introduced (a simplified version of which we still use today!)

In 1984, zones were reintroduced along municipal boundaries. This was intended to be more fair than the Flat-Fare system of 1981 and tied prices more closely to distance travelled.

These zones were in effect only during Peak Hours, those times of the day when transit is the busiest. To increase efficiency, an off-peak discount was introduced in the early morning, middle of the day, and late evenings, to encourage flexible transit riders to take trips at less busy times of the day when each additional passenger costs the system less.

Today: 3-Zones



Our current system we're all familiar with.

Today's fare system is a simplified version of the 3-zone fare structure introduced in 1984. Zones 2A, 2B, and 2C were combined into Zone 2, a change that also took place by combining Zones 3A and 3B into Zone 3. This made the system less complicated, easier to understand and helps transit riders predict their fare price in advance. The mid-day discount was also eliminated in 1997. With the exception of these two changes, the system remains largely the same. Based on our discussions of trade-offs gleaned from historical examples, where do you think this system excels and where could it improve?

The transit system in Metro Vancouver in 1984 was essentially a network of buses and the SeaBus. Skytrain was two years away from completion and the West Coast Express and Canada Line were still far-off dreams. The system has grown, but the 3-zone fare structure has remained the same. Does this structure work for travelling on our system today? Or is it time for something new?