

Getting Around British Columbia by Bike and Transit

Methods and Limitations

BC Cycle Tourism Society
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Preliminary — working data, subject to revision

Researched and drafted with AI assistance (Claude models, Anthropic)

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The companion documentation for five open datasets: British Columbia transit routes, their stops, the carriers and their bicycle policies, every journey between two communities, and what a cyclist can actually reach.

Version	Date	Notes
1.0	July 2026	First published version
1.1	July 2026	Prose corrections: per-operator verification dates, five-file wording, median population (BC-386)
1.2	July 2026	Recomputed after 43 routes were added and service frequency entered the ranking; ride-share and rental car legs now carry distances, leaving SkyTrain as the only gap

1.3	August 2026	Counts refreshed against the August 2026 build of the datasets
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1. What these five files are

Somebody planning to travel British Columbia by bicycle without a car has to answer three questions, and until now had to answer all three by telephone. What services run between these towns? Will any of them take my bicycle? And given those two answers, where can I actually get to?

These datasets answer those three questions in that order, across five files: one per kind of thing, so nothing has to be unpicked from a sheet it was riding along in. They exist because we could not find the answers anywhere, not because we set out to build a transit database.

File	One row is	Rows	Answers
bc_transit_routes	a service	332	what runs between British Columbia communities, how often, and whether we route journeys across it
bc_transit_stops	a stop on a service	1,019	where each service stops, in order, and where that place is
bc_transit_carriers	an operator	68	whether it takes a bicycle, under what conditions, on whose word, and how old that answer is
bc_transit_journeys	a journey	77,076	every itinerary between every pair of communities, in the order we rank them, so our ranking can be checked rather than taken on trust
bc_transit_connections	an ordered pair of communities	13,106	whether a cyclist can get from one to the other, how many times they would board, and what runs

The five join on plain text: a route's **operator** is a carrier's **operator**, and a stop's **route_id** is a route's **route_id**. No identifier scheme to learn.

One caution that applies to all five, and it is the reason this document exists: A blank cell means we have not recorded that thing. It never means zero, and it never means the answer is no.

2. Where the data comes from

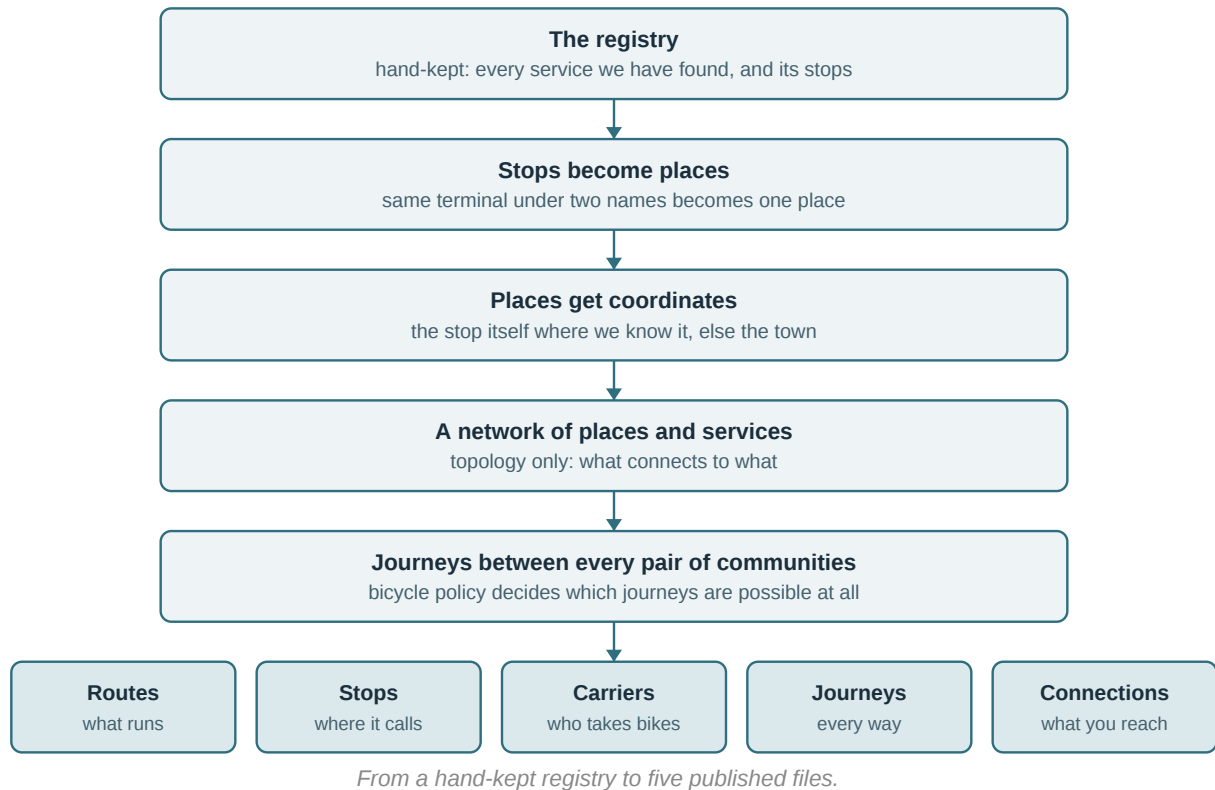
There is no feed. British Columbia has no province-wide register of intercity passenger services, and the operators that would populate one range from Crown corporations to a single boat serving one inlet. The registry behind these files was assembled by hand, service by service, from operator websites, regional transit schedules, tourism listings, ferry timetables, and telephone calls.

That has one consequence worth stating before anything else: **this is a collection, not a census**. We can tell you what is in it. We cannot tell you what is missing from it, because nothing exists to check it against. Section 8 returns to this.

As published, the registry holds 332 services across 11 kinds of transport, with 1,019 stops between them. The kinds are: intercity coach, local and regional bus, coastal ferry, inland ferry, water taxi, SkyTrain, intercity train, local train, flight, organised ride-share, and one-way car rental.

The two that are not scheduled services

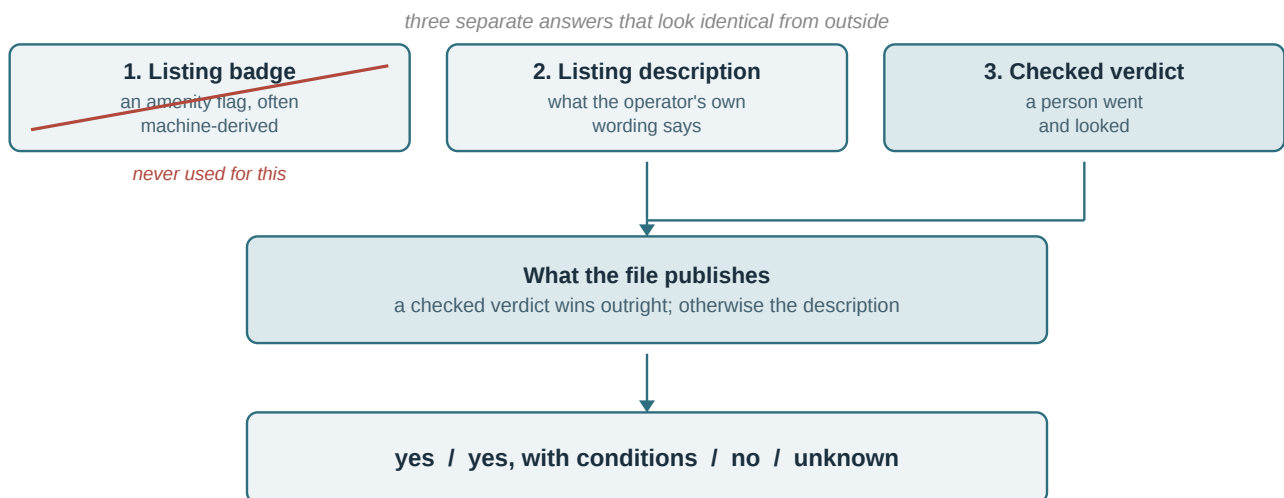
Flights and one-way car rentals sit in the files but are held apart from every measure of how connected a place is. A flight is one boarding to anywhere, and a rental car is you driving yourself. Counting either would make the province look far better served than it is. They are included because a cyclist genuinely uses them to close a gap, and excluded from the connectivity columns for the same reason a taxi is not public transport.



3. How we decide whether a carrier takes bicycles

This is the part of the work that does not exist elsewhere, and the part most likely to be wrong in a way that matters. A wrong route is an inconvenience. A wrong bicycle policy leaves somebody at a depot watching their bus leave.

Three separate things in our own systems will each answer the question “does this carrier take bicycles?”, and they look identical from the outside. Only two of them are allowed anywhere near these files.



The first plane is a yes/no amenity flag on the operator's listing. Much of it was produced by software reading text rather than by a person reading a policy, and none of it was confirmed with an operator. It is not used in these files, it is not used on our website, and we would ask that nobody else use it either.

The second plane is the operator's own published wording, read and distilled into short factual statements. The third is a curated answer written by a person who went and checked. Where the third exists it wins outright, and where it says a carrier does not take bicycles the file publishes that and suppresses the operator's own wording.

Where we have checked an operator specifically and found that it does not carry bicycles, that verdict is what the row publishes, and any policy text derived from the operator's own listing is suppressed. Those two do disagree for at least one carrier, whose published material still describes reserving a bicycle space. The checked answer is the one we stand behind.

What the four verdicts mean

bikes_carried	Carriers	Means
yes	4	bicycles ride, with no fee, no packing requirement and no restriction we know of
yes, with conditions	33	bicycles ride, but something is asked of you: a fee, bagging or boxing, a reservation, or a limit such as no electric bicycles
no	3	we checked this carrier specifically and bicycles are not carried
unknown	28	we hold no bicycle policy for this operator at all. This is not a refusal, and it is not a guess in either direction

How good is each answer

policy_source	Carriers	What it means	last_verified
operator-checked	33	a person checked this carrier against the operator's own material	13 July 2026 or later
listing-description	7	read from the operator's published description, not separately checked	blank
not-on-file	28	we hold nothing; we could not find a published bicycle policy	blank

The 28 carriers with nothing on file are not an oversight in our research. They are the finding. For a substantial share of British Columbia's passenger services, no bicycle policy is published anywhere a traveller can find it, which is precisely why a rider has to telephone.

Note carefully what **last_verified** is and is not. It is the date a person checked the operator's own published material, not the date somebody spoke to that particular carrier. Most of the 33 checked carriers carry the 13 July 2026 date because they were checked together in one pass; carriers checked individually since then, including those verified as not taking bicycles, carry the date of their own later check. A blank in that column means nobody has checked.

Bicycle policies change, and this is the one place in our research where stale data has a physical cost. A route measurement that goes out of date is a mild embarrassment. A bicycle policy that goes out of date leaves somebody standing at a depot with a loaded bicycle and no way onto the bus. Check the last_verified column in the carriers file before you rely on a row, and confirm with the operator before you travel.

4. What is in the model, and what is set aside

Of the 332 services, 273 are part of the network we route journeys across. The other 59 are published anyway, each with the reason, because what was set aside is part of an honest picture of the province.

Set aside because	Services	Reasoning
we could not confirm the operator carries bikes	31	mostly small aircraft operators. Absence of a confirmation, not a refusal
charter only	20	you cannot buy a seat; the whole boat or vehicle is hired
on demand only	3	runs when arranged, so there is no service to route across
no longer operating	3	kept for the record
reviewed and set aside	2	a judgement call, made once and recorded

Two different questions, two different columns

A service can be in the network and still not count when we ask how well a town is served. That sounds like a contradiction and is not.

When a carrier is verified as not taking bicycles, its 6 services stay in the network on purpose. Removing them would make journeys that use them silently vanish, and a traveller would never learn that a bus runs the route they want but will not take their bicycle. Far better to show the journey and mark it impossible. So **in_connection_model** says the service is in the network, and **counts_for_connectivity** says it counts toward how well a place is served. 194 services do both.

5. How a stop becomes a place on a map

Two operators serving the same terminal rarely call it the same thing. A connection only becomes findable when both names resolve to one place, so every stop is resolved to a shared place, and the 1,019 stops become 438 places. Where a merge is not obvious from the names it is written down in a file of 36 deliberate decisions rather than guessed at, so any of them can be argued with.

Merging is not always right. Two terminals a kilometre apart in the same town are two places, and the journey between them is a real walk or ride that the traveller has to make. Those stay separate and the walk is shown.

Where the coordinates come from, and how good they are

965 of the 1,019 stops have coordinates. Of those, 245 are placed at the middle of their community rather than at the stop itself, because we know which town a service calls at but not where in the town it stops. The **location_precision** column says which is which, and the distinction matters if you intend to measure anything: a centroid can sit several kilometres from the actual platform, and in a coastal community it can sit on the wrong side of the water. The remaining 54 stops have no coordinates at all, and all of them belong to services set aside from the model.

6. How the connections are computed

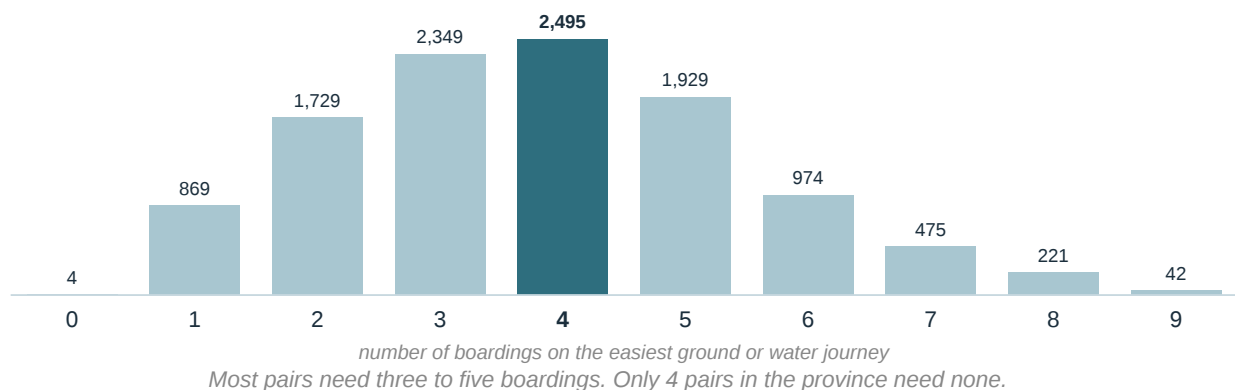
This is topology, not a timetable. We record which services exist, where they stop, and in what order. We do not record when they depart. Because there are no departure times here, this is not General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) data and cannot be loaded by GTFS tools. Where one of our columns means the same thing as a GTFS field, we have borrowed the GTFS name so it reads familiarly.

This is the single most important limitation of the connections file and it is worth restating plainly. We know that a bus runs between two towns. We do not know what time it leaves. Nothing here can tell you whether a journey is possible in one day, whether two services connect, or how long anything takes. A journey of three boardings may be comfortable or may be impossible, and this dataset cannot tell the difference.

What counts as a boarding

A boarding is getting onto a scheduled service. Walking or riding between two nearby stops is not a boarding, which is why some rows show **0**: the two communities are close enough to simply ride between, and no transit is needed at all. 4 pairs are like this, all on southern Vancouver Island.

The median pair needs 4 boardings (that is the median across community pairs; across all 77,076 individual journeys it is 5). That number is worth sitting with. It means the typical journey between two British Columbia communities by bicycle and scheduled transport involves four separate companies, four separate bicycle policies, and four separate opportunities to be turned away.



Two journeys per row, and the full ranking beside them

Our trip planner ranks journeys. It weighs an extra boarding against a longer ride, prefers travelling with fewer separate companies, and penalises awkward schedules. That ranking is the product of a good deal of tuning against real pairs, and it is the thing a rider actually wants: not every way of getting there, but which way to take.

So each row of the connections file describes two journeys, and says which is which. The first is chosen by a neutral rule anyone can reproduce and argue with: **the fewest boardings, ties broken by the shorter distance**. The second, in the **recommended_** columns, is the journey we would actually suggest. Keeping them apart means a researcher can use the neutral one without inheriting our judgement, and a traveller can use ours without reconstructing it.

The two agree more often than not. On 9,235 pairs our suggestion has the same number of boardings as the neutral rule; on 1,852 it does not, which is generally where we have traded a boarding for a service that runs more often or a company that handles bicycles better.

Neither summary is the whole picture, so the whole picture is published too. The journeys file holds all 77,076 itineraries across every pair, each with its rank, so our ordering can be inspected, reproduced, or replaced with your own. 8,269 of those journeys cannot be made with a bicycle and are kept anyway: a bus that runs your route and refuses your bicycle is something you want to see, not something that should quietly vanish.

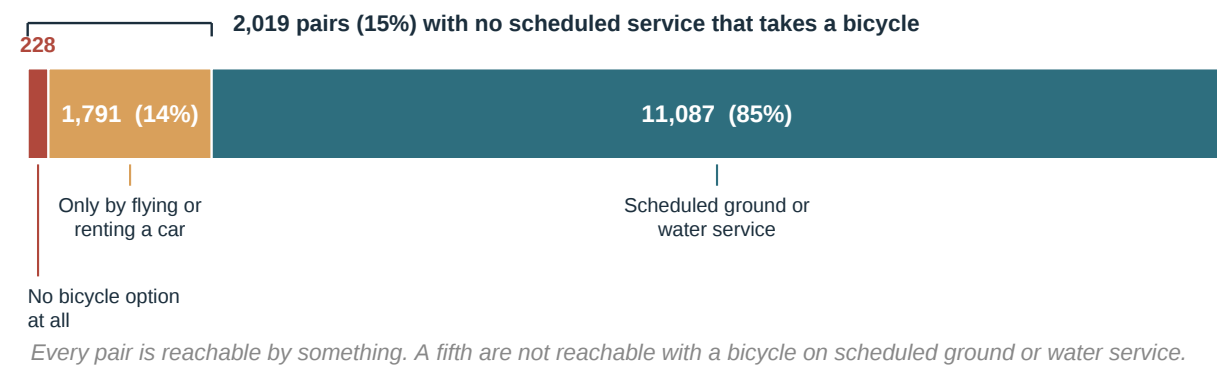
Two reachability columns, not one

bike_reachable asks whether any journey at all gets a bicycle between two communities, counting flights and one-way car rentals. **bike_reachable_without_flying** asks whether scheduled ground or water service can do it. The second is the honest measure of how connected a place is, and the gap between the two columns is the most useful thing in the file.

Rows are directional, so both A to B and B to A appear. This is not duplication. A service can run one way and not the other, seasonally or permanently, and collapsing the pair would hide exactly that.

7. What the data shows

Across 13,106 ordered pairs of 115 communities, every pair is reachable by something. The story is not that British Columbia is disconnected. It is that a bicycle changes the answer.



	Pairs	Share
No bicycle-carrying option by any means	228	2%
Possible only by flying or renting a car one way	1,791	14%
No scheduled ground or water service that takes a bicycle	2,019	15%
Reachable on scheduled ground or water service	11,087	85%

So a fifth of the province's community pairs cannot be travelled between with a bicycle on scheduled ground or water service. For those journeys a cyclist must fly, rent a car, or not go.

The connections that do exist mostly come with a catch

Of the 11,087 pairs that can be done, only 3,513 have an option that runs daily, year round, without needing to be arranged in advance. The other 7,574, roughly two thirds, are limited, seasonal, or on demand.

This is arguably the more consequential finding. Cycle tourism is planned around fixed dates. A connection that exists three days a week in July is not the same product as a connection that exists every day, and a map that shows only whether a line exists will overstate what the province offers.

8. Limitations

Every one of these is a reason to be careful with a specific claim. None of them is softened, and the first is the one we would most like to fix.

About coverage

- **We cannot tell you what we are missing.** The registry was built by hand and there is no authoritative list to check it against. A small operator serving one valley may simply not be here. Treat every count in these files as a floor, never a total, and treat “no service found” as “we found no service” rather than “no service exists”.
- **115 communities is not British Columbia.** The connections file covers the communities our trip planner covers. Many places with genuine cycle tourism potential are absent, and their absence says nothing about them.
- **Coverage is uneven by region and by mode.** Coastal ferries and intercity coaches are well represented because they publish well. Small water taxis and community shuttles are represented in proportion to how findable they were, which is not the same as how important they are.

About the bicycle policies

- **28 of 68 carriers have no bicycle policy on file.** For those the file says **unknown**, which is a real answer and not a hidden no, but it is not a useful one to a traveller.
- **last_verified is a checking date, not a contact date.** It records when a person checked the operator's published material, not when anybody spoke to that operator. A blank means nobody has checked.
- **Policies change without telling us, and this is the failure that hurts.** A carrier can change its rules, its fee, or its season overnight. Everything in the carriers file is a snapshot of what was true when it was checked.
- **A checked verdict is one person's reading.** The 33 operator-checked rows were checked against published material by a person, not confirmed in writing by the operator. That is better than software reading text and worse than a signed statement.
- **Conditions are summarised, not reproduced.** “Bagged or boxed” and “no electric bicycles” are our compressions of longer policies. Where a detail would determine whether your particular bicycle travels, read the operator's own terms.

About the journeys

- **No timetables, therefore no durations and no guaranteed connections.** See section 6. This dataset cannot tell you whether a journey is possible in a day.
- **journey_km is blank on half the rows, and that is deliberate.** Every one of the 38,548 SkyTrain journeys in this file carries no distance. Ride-share and one-way rental car legs used to be missing distances too; as of July 2026 every one of them is measured, so SkyTrain is the only remaining gap. Summing what we hold produced a Vancouver-to-Tofino journey of 65 kilometres in testing. A total is published only where every boarding is measured. The same gap understates distances on our own website.
- **crow_km is a straight line,** not a travel distance, and across water or mountains it can be less than half of it.

- **A journey existing in the network is not a journey somebody has made.** These are computed from what connects to what. Nobody has ridden all 13,106 of them.
- **Our ranking is a judgement, and it is published as one.** The **recommended_** columns and the rank column carry our preferences about boardings, transfers and schedules. They are tuned, not arbitrary, but they are ours. Anyone who disagrees has every journey and can order them differently; anyone wanting no judgement at all should use the neutral fewest-boardings columns instead.
- **Fares are absent.** Cost often decides whether a journey happens, and we hold none of it.

About the places

- **245 of 1,019 stop coordinates are town centres**, not stop locations. Do not compute distances from them without reading `location_precision` first.
- **Place merges are judgement calls.** Deciding that two differently named terminals are one place, or that two nearby ones are not, changes which journeys exist. Those decisions are recorded and can be argued with.

About reproducibility

- **The files regenerate identically from the same inputs, and the inputs are not versioned.** Two builds of the same data produce byte-identical files. But the registry is edited continuously, and we do not yet stamp which state of it produced a given release. Cite the publication date on the cover.

9. Using this work

We do not run any of these services. Operators change their routes, their seasons and their bicycle rules without telling us. Corrections are welcome and we would rather hear about a wrong row than not.

Corrections are genuinely welcome, and corrections from operators most of all. If your row is wrong, or blank and should not be, tell us and we will fix it and date it: heather@bccycletourism.ca.

The code that produces these files is ours and is not yet packaged for release. If you want to build on a piece of it, tell us what you need and we will gladly send the relevant piece.

Travellers wanting the usable version of all this, rather than the spreadsheet, should use the trip planner at bccycletourism.ca instead of this document.

The research here uses AI assistance (Claude models, Anthropic) for data collection, analysis, and writing. Feel free to ask for more details if you are interested.