You can’t talk about social and economic success without looking at what public transportation is doing when it comes to reducing its carbon footprint. Currently transportation is said to produce 24 per cent of Canada’s total emissions. And while public transportation produces significantly less greenhouse gas emissions per passenger kilometre than private vehicles, the sector is looking to further reduce its impact.

“The industry is changing because we know we can’t build ourselves out of congestion anymore and there needs to be an alternative solution,” says Pinkerton.

Customers today are not choosing transit solely based on finances, but because they see it as a green solution. It takes people off the roads, and that’s why we are moving to a zero-emission fleet,” says Pinkerton.

In July, BC Transit announced the launch of the low carbon fleet program that aligns with the Province of BC’s CleanBC plan, aids provincial targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and supports local government climate action goals. Its target is to create a fully electric provincial fleet in all vehicle classifications by 2040.

“The exciting part about a public agency, given our size and our ability to work with others like BC-Hydro and the provincial and federal governments, is that we can accelerate a program more quickly than an individual car owner deciding to go electric,” says Pinkerton.

This summer TransLink introduced its battery-electric bus pilot—a $10-million project that will test how well buses powered by fast-charging batteries work. TransLink started rolling out the electric buses for a two-and-a-half year trial on Route 100, travelling along Marine Drive through Vancouver, Burnaby and New Westminster. High-powered charging stations, capable of recharging the bus batteries within four to seven minutes, are being installed at each end of the route.

“The big picture for us at BC Transit is that electric buses will not only be reducing emissions out of the tailpipe, but they will be quieter, which is essential for community roads and on-demand services,” says Pinkerton.

On-demand services, you say? Yes, don’t be surprised if in the next few years you can book a door-to-door public transportation service on your phone...from anywhere. Rather than being concerned about the increasing popularity of ride shares, public transportation is embracing it and the opportunities it presents.

“It’s exciting to see the choices that people are going to have. Fast, frequent bus and rapid transit, ride sharing and car-sharing, e-bikes and e-scooters—there will be more choices than ever before. We see TransLink as being central to ensuring that those choices help reduce congestion, create more opportunity and make our communities more sustainable,” says Vanagas.

However, as Pinkerton says, it’s not just about reducing emissions and creating more efficient service, but about the emotional connection.
O&A

with Erin Pinkerton

We understand you are BC born and raised?
I was born and raised right here in Victoria. Can you sum up what BC Transit does?
From small towns to large urban centres, BC Transit transports more than 57 million customers in communities across the province every year.
How did you enter into the transportation sector?
Like most young people who are going into commerce, I thought I would be making millions on a stock market or a private company. Then, when I got my first job at BC Ferries in 2001, I quickly realized that finding a job where you have a purpose and a passion is where I wanted to be for the rest of my career. I joined BC Transit in 2008 as the director, corporate & strategic planning, was promoted in 2014 to vice president, business development & chief transformation officer (CTO) and became president and CEO in 2018.
Can you tell us why you chose an MBA and MBA degrees and how they have helped you in your career?
I got my MBA at Gustavson and later continued with an MBA from Lansbridge University. You can take all the courses and learn A, B, C, D and E, but when you roll them all together, it doesn’t matter if you are working in a public, private or not-for-profit, it all comes back to who is your customer. All the courses you take at Gustavson—accounting, finance, et cetera—are focused on the customer, which is essential in business.
What would your advice be to grads wanting to enter the transportation sector?
The transportation industry is a part of so much. At the core, we are running a business. But you’re also focused on customers and at the same time involved in municipal, provincial and federal funding and advocacy. You get to be part of a big solution and big picture that covers a wide range of experiences.
What are the unique challenges transportation faces in BC?
Our clock reset every right. Every day is a new opportunity. What are you excited about moving ahead?
To continue to provide a public service that is relied on to improve people’s lives, whether that’s ferry, rail or bus.
What’s your favourite route?
Route 6 that goes along Quadra Street. It goes through so many different villages and neighbourhoods. There are tons of stops, it has a high ridership, and you get to see the residential growth of the area.
And finally, where can we find you in your spare time?
Trail running or hiking, or puzzling. I still enjoy watching my sons playing for the University of Victoria crosswords.

O&A

with Steve Vanagas

We understand you are BC born and raised?
I was born and raised in North Vancouver. I’m married with three boys—the oldest has just finished the BCom program at UVic.
Can you sum up what TransLink does?
We finance, build, manage and operate an integrated regional transportation system that moves up to 500,000 people every single day, and connects 23 communities by bus, SkyTrain rapid transit, commuter rail (West Coast Express), passenger ferry (Seabus), on-demand service for people with disabilities, as well as pedestrian and cycling paths, major roads and five bridges.
Can you tell us where you chose an MBA and MBA degrees and how they have helped you in your career?
I joined TransLink in 2018 after 10 years as Chief Communications Officer for BC Hydro. TransLink was coming off the most painful period in its history. It had a new CEO, a passionate board that was dedicated to reviving the organization, and a renewed commitment from all levels of government to improve transportation in Metro Vancouver. I was offered an opportunity to create a new strategy, rebuild the team and create a brand I couldn’t turn down.
Can you tell us why you chose an MBA and how it has helped in your career?
I saw an MBA as something I needed to do to take the next step in my career. Up to that point I had worked in journalism and politics, and I had taken on leadership and management roles, but without any formal training. If I wanted to take on larger roles, I had to dedicate myself to deliberately learning the art and science of leadership and management.
What would your advice be to grads wanting to enter the transportation sector?
There is a big focus on planning and operations in the transportation sector. So if there are fields that interest you as a graduate, transportation offers some great opportunities to develop a career. I would add another piece of advice: learn strong communication skills. If you want to progress in any career, it’s essential to learn how to communicate and work with your colleagues, your teams and your customers.
What are the unique challenges transportation faces here in BC?
Like most other sectors, we are facing the challenge of new technology, new entrants in the market and the need to be more sustainable in everything we do. Making transit fast and frequent and convenient makes people more likely to choose transit. But how do you pay for it all? Transportation infrastructure has a big price tag and paying for it is one of the toughest challenges facing public policymakers today.
What are you excited about?
We are in the midst of a massive public engagement call about TransLink 2050, which is seeking public input on what the next 30 years of transportation should look like in Metro Vancouver. So we’re focusing right now on what the public wants and what they want the future to look like.
What’s your favourite route?
I’m a frequent Seabus rider. It’s an incredibly convenient way to get between the North Shore and downtown Vancouver. And it’s a beautiful ride.
And finally, where can we find you in your spare time?
I spent the last decade coaching soccer so I still enjoy watching my sons playing for the North Vancouver Football Club. Otherwise, you will find me at a gym or obsessively trying to complete New York Times’ crosswords.