

**TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR  
AND COUNCILLORS*

**SUBJECT: TRANSLINK'S ACCESS TRANSIT PLAN**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. THAT a copy of this report be sent to TransLink with the request that the concerns raised in Section 5.0 of the report be considered in TransLink's Access Transit Plan.
2. THAT a copy of this report be forwarded to the Social Issues Committee.

**REPORT**

The Transportation Committee, at its meeting held on 2006 March 08, received and adopted the attached report providing information on TransLink's process to develop a strategic plan for accessible transit in Greater Vancouver.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor N. Volkow  
Chair

Councillor S. Dhaliwal  
Vice Chair

Councillor L. Rankin  
Member

Copied to:	City Manager Director Engineering Director Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services Director Planning & Building
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**TO:** CHAIR AND MEMBERS  
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

**DATE:** 2006 March 1

**FROM:** DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

**SUBJECT:** TRANSLINK'S ACCESS TRANSIT PLAN

**PURPOSE:** To provide information on TransLink's process to develop a strategic plan for accessible transit in Greater Vancouver.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to TransLink with the request that the concerns raised in section 5.0 of the report be considered in TransLink's Access Transit Plan.
2. **THAT** a copy of this report be forwarded to the Social Issues Committee.

**REPORT****1.0 BACKGROUND**

Under the new business portion of its meeting on 2005 October 12, the Transportation Committee was informed that TransLink is developing a strategic plan called "Access Transit" that will ensure that the transit system is accessible to as many people as possible. Arising from the discussion, the Committee adopted a motion that staff prepare a report addressing issues that should be considered by TransLink with the development of the Access Transit plan. The Transportation Committee also requested that the matter be referred to the Social Issues Committee for information. This report responds to the Transportation Committee's requests.

**2.0 ACCESSIBLE TRANSIT**

Accessible transit is critical to the quality of life of people with disabilities. Accessible transit allows people with disabilities to participate fully in all aspects of community life (e.g., work, school, appointments, social events and time with family and friends). A system that is fully accessible provides people with disabilities the ability to move freely and affordably, regardless of the day of the week or time of day.

To: *Transportation Committee*  
From: *Director Planning and Building*  
Re: *Translink's Access Transit Plan*  
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Transit services in Greater Vancouver are among the most accessible in Canada. The region was the first in the country to adopt a policy of full accessibility to all transit in the 1980s. Since that time a number of initiatives have been adopted to improve accessibility. Today, most of the conventional transit system (buses, community shuttles, SeaBus, West Coast Express, B-Line and SkyTrain) is accessible, although not all of the access points are (e.g., a number of bus stops and SkyTrain station entrances are not accessible). Once the existing trolley fleet is replaced by low-floor accessible trolley buses in 2008, the conventional transit system fleet should be fully accessible. It should be noted that TransLink has advised that the new LRT Evergreen Line (between Burnaby and Coquitlam Centre) will be using low floor accessible cars.

In addition to the accessibility features of the conventional system, TransLink also provides HandyDART services. HandyDART is a shared-ride custom transit service that provides transportation to passengers with physical or cognitive disabilities who are unable to use public transit without assistance. Passengers are picked up outside the door of their residence and dropped at the outside door of their destination. HandyDART provides subscription trips (trips taken on a regular basis) and casual trips taken on a one-time basis. Due to the limited number of rides available, trips for work, medical services and post-secondary education are given priority. HandyDART service in Greater Vancouver is contracted out by TransLink to seven operators over eight zones. TransLink owns the HandyDART vehicles.

### **3.0 TRANSLINK'S ACCESS TRANSIT PLAN**

While many initiatives have been adopted since the 1980s, TransLink does not have a comprehensive plan to oversee current and future accessibility needs of the transit system. In 2004 December, TransLink staff were directed to prepare an Access Transit Strategic Plan for review and approval of the TransLink Board. The purpose of the plan is to achieve a transit system that is as accessible as possible to the greatest number of people, regardless of the physical, cognitive or other personal barriers that users may have, or where they live in the region. The plan will consider:

- a growing demand for accessible transit due to societal factors such as an aging population and a more active disabled community;
- demographic shifts within the region which will result in many older residents living in areas that have not had large numbers of seniors in the past;
- the role and function of the conventional system in relation to HandyDART (e.g., should the conventional system become the prime means of transport for people with disabilities with HandyDART services reserved exclusively for those who are unable to use the conventional system?);
- training requirements for users and staff to ensure optimal use of accessibility investments in the conventional system;
- roles and responsibilities of other agencies in providing transportation to social and medical services (e.g., there is a growing demand for HandyDART services by

kidney dialysis and chemotherapy patients – should provincial or health authority budgets cover transportation costs for these patients?);

- the accessibility of the conventional system in terms of vehicle design, and service characteristics such as capacity, routing and frequency;
- the accessibility of the HandyDART system in terms of vehicle design and service characteristics including eligibility rules, priorities and current terms of usage;
- service delivery models for HandyDART that take into account the needs of users, providers and agencies;
- interactions between the customer and the transit network including ability to access transit information, driver and user education and way-finding; and
- fare and funding implications of any of the recommendations resulting from the review process.

#### 4.0 CONSULTATION PROCESS

To develop the strategic plan, TransLink has held two workshops to date to gather input from key stakeholders, including people with disabilities, representatives of non-profit organizations working with people with disabilities, staff from municipal access advisory committees, HandyDART operators, and Provincial Ministries of Health and Community Services. The purpose of the first workshop, held on 2005 June 15, was to create a vision of how to make the transit system accessible for the greatest number of people possible and to identify issues to be addressed in the process. The purpose of the second workshop, held on 2005 November 28, was to update stakeholders on the work that has been done to date and to gauge whether the work was meeting the expectations of stakeholders. Participants of the second workshop were in general agreement that the issues raised in the first workshop were being addressed by TransLink but provided additional feedback regarding many of the issues.

A third workshop will be held in mid 2006 to present a draft of the Access Transit Plan. In addition to the stakeholder workshops, TransLink has also gathered input on the Access Transit plan through an online survey on its website, meetings with individual stakeholder groups and discussions with employees.

#### 4.1 Issues Raised Through the Consultation Process

Concerns raised in the first and second stakeholder workshops relate to both the conventional and custom transit (HandyDART) systems. Some of the main concerns raised are discussed below:

##### *Conventional Transit:*

- a need for users to be involved in ongoing problem identification and decision-making regarding accessibility of the transit system;

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- a need for improved delivery of transit information including less reliance on text and the adoption of simple language, standardized signage and universal symbols to improve the transit system's interface with customers;
- a need for more sensitivity training for frontline staff, in particular, around interactions with people with less obvious disabilities (e.g., cognitive impairments); in addition, some bus drivers need training on how to use the tie downs on buses to secure people in wheelchairs and scooters;
- a need for improved integration amongst different modes of transit (buses, community shuttles, HandyDART, SkyTrain). For example, connections between various transit modes must be within short distances;
- a need to ensure all bus stops are accessible (e.g., obstacles such as newspaper boxes should not be within loading areas)

#### ***Custom Transit:***

Stakeholders raised the following concerns about the HandyDART system:

- difficulty in making inter-municipal trips – as noted above, there are seven HandyDART contractors operating over eight zones. Hours of operation, booking restrictions and other policies vary amongst the operators. As a result, it is difficult for people with disabilities to cross municipal boundaries using HandyDART;
- limited hours of operation;
- problems with the reservation and dispatch system that result in late pick-ups, cancelled subscription trips and rides delivered by taxis<sup>1</sup> when HandyDART vehicles are not available;
- lengthy booking times - trips on HandyDART must be booked three days in advance. Spontaneous trips using HandyDART are not possible;
- a need for improved accessibility (low-floor vehicles) and uniform interior configurations for HandyDART vehicles; and
- a shortage of available vehicles - HandyDART service is being used more frequently to transport people to medical services such as kidney dialysis and chemotherapy treatments resulting in fewer vehicles available for subscription and casual trips.

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<sup>1</sup> When a HandyDART vehicle is not available for a regularly scheduled trip, the HandyDART operator will send a taxi to pick up the client. The quality and reliability of taxi service varies considerably. A report of accessible taxi service has been requested by Council and will be forthcoming in the spring of 2006.

Through the stakeholder workshops, a number of solutions to the concerns raised above have been identified. In particular, many stakeholders have called for HandyDART services to be consolidated under one integrated operating system with a view to creating uniform policies, standards of service, hours of operation and other operating standards.

## **5.0 TRANSIT ISSUES FOR BURNABY RESIDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

The Burnaby Access Advisory Committee (BAAC) was established in 1988 to provide advice and direction to the Planning Department on accessibility issues. The Committee is comprised of Burnaby residents who have disabilities and city staff who coordinate meetings and facilitate the work program of the Committee. City staff and some citizen members of the Committee have participated in the two stakeholders workshops noted above.

Members of BAAC concur with the concerns raised in the stakeholders' workshops, particularly those related to the HandyDART system. Committee members have also identified a number of specific concerns related to the conventional transit system, as described below:

- a need for better way-finding at the Broadway Station where the Millennium and Expo SkyTrain Lines meet (currently, it is not clear that people need to transfer at this station, depending on where they are going);
- a need to manage the flow of pedestrian traffic at the Broadway Station to improve accessibility for people with mobility aids;
- a need for "real time" notification of any elevators that are not working at SkyTrain stations. Notifications could also include an estimate of when the elevators will be working again. Flashing message boards at stations and the on-board P.A. system could be used to convey this information;
- a need for specific physical improvements to the system including:
  - lowering the height of cylinders containing schedule information at bus stops so that people in wheelchairs can see the information;
  - increasing the size of the typeface used to present schedule information at bus stops;
  - lowering the height of some ticket machines at SkyTrain stations so people in wheelchairs can use them;
  - barrier-free access from the Metrotown SkyTrain Station to the Metropolis Mall (stairs prevent wheelchair users from using the overpass to enter the mall); and
  - level access from platforms onto SkyTrain cars on the Millennium Line (when the line was first opened, there was a height difference of about one and half inches between the platforms and SkyTrain cars making it difficult for some wheelchair users to board the cars independently).

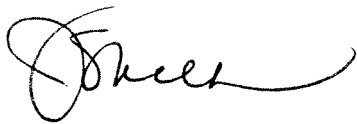
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## 6.0 NEXT STEPS

TransLink has undertaken the task of producing an Access Transit Plan that will ensure the transit system is as accessible as possible to the greatest number of people. At this stage, TransLink is working with its consultants to produce a draft Plan based on the input it has received through two stakeholders workshops and an online survey. Once the draft is produced, a third workshop with key stakeholders will be held. It is anticipated that staff and BAAC members will participate in the third workshop. Based on the discussions that take place, staff will provide analysis of the plan and how well it addresses the accessibility concerns raised in this report.

In the interim, it is recommended that this report be sent to TransLink with the request that the additional concerns raised in section 5.0 be considered in its Access Transit Plan.

It is also recommended that a copy of this report be forward to the Social Issues Committee.



J.S. Belhouse, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

MM:sla:sa

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Director Engineering  
Director Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services

*R. Long Range Clerical DOCS Margie reports Access Transit report.doc*

