

TransLink  
A Unique Organization

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Transportation is a key issue in any urban region. In the Greater Vancouver Region, with its narrow livable area divided by rivers and inlets, providing a good transportation system is more than normally challenging. We are in many ways a transshipment centre, with a major port, airport, and railways. If we do not maintain an adequate supporting transportation system, we will suffer economically. If we continue to depend on single occupant vehicles to the extent that we do, we will not maintain an adequate transportation system and will suffer serious congestion, a degraded environment, and reduced livability.

These responsibilities are now in large part the territory of a new and unique transportation agency, created by the Greater Vancouver Regional District and the provincial government after a great deal of intense horse trading and negotiation. I would like to tell you about TransLink, what it does, how it does it, and the scale of the problem. Then I'll describe an example of an important current project which involves extensive minor property acquisitions – which may even lead to your interest, expropriation. Finally, we'll go back to the big picture and talk about potential future projects.

TransLink is unique in a number of ways:

In its mandate to:

- support the Greater Vancouver Regional District's Livable Region Strategy,
- support economic development in the region,
- support the air quality objectives of the region,
- move people and goods.

In the breadth of its activities

- Bus (through subsidiary and by contract),
- Rail (West Coast Express and SkyTrain),
- Ferry (SeaBus and Albion Ferry),
- Bridges (Knight, Pattullo, Westham Island),
- Major Road Network (planning and funding – roads owned by municipalities),
- Transportation Demand Management,
- AirCare.

In its funding arrangements

- significant "provincial" revenue sources
- gas tax,
- sales tax on parking,
- Hydro surcharge,
- vehicle surcharge (after Oct 2001),
- non-residential property tax,
- general property tax (but the Board has said that transportation should pay for transportation).

In its governance and operating style

- joint provincial-regional board (three provincial, twelve municipal),
- accountability to GVRD re strategic transportation plan and financing,
- TransLink funded, municipally operated major road network,
- "steer don't row" – planning and financial management, with operations in

subsidiaries,  
major community consultation required.

These unique characteristics are designed to respond to a number of issues which have made it difficult if not impossible to build an effective transportation system in the region.

The first of these important issues is local control, linked to land use planning in the region. Clearly, land use and transportation planning must be linked. Ineffective land use planning can create a region which is difficult or impossible to serve effectively with transit. Low density urban sprawl is difficult to serve efficiently. However, when low density housing development is coupled with the dispersed employment patterns typical of the low density suburban warehouse, industrial, and commercial districts, effective transportation service becomes impossible. And, transportation has an impact on land use. Without significant investments in hard transportation infrastructure, it is difficult to create the critical mass for development of higher density nodes.

A second key issue is an adequate funding base. Transportation systems are expensive. Without the financial capability to commit to a significant long term investment in transportation facilities, it is not possible to implement expensive programs requiring multi-year investments. And, it is not possible to provide the certainty that planners and real estate investors require to ensure appropriate land use.

A third key issue is the complication of working across jurisdictions. Rail, bus, ferry, and road services operate interdependently. When responsibilities are fragmented, it is difficult to plan and implement capital facilities, and to ensure coordinated management of operations. Some potentially important investments, like intelligent transportation systems, can be implemented much more effectively in a coordinated and coherent manner.

A fourth key issue is affordability. Major capital investments present a significant tax burden. It is absolutely necessary to prioritize these expenditures broadly, rather than separate decision making on transportation facilities, environmental issues like sewage treatment, and health issues like water treatment.

The creation of TransLink responds to these issues, as outlined above. Our transportation plan and capital expenditure programs must be approved by the GVRD, and we provide comments on their land use planning. With the inclusion of gas taxes, parking taxes, and vehicle charges, our funding base is much broader than that provided by conventional municipal taxation. By integrating a number of existing agencies within TransLink, a level of coordination across these services is achieved immediately. Further, TransLink is in a good position to act as a broker of provincial and municipal interests in the development of facilities that serve both.

All of this is potential, not reality, at this point. TransLink is a new organization. It hasn't done a great deal toward achieving lofty regional transportation goals at this point. Basic services are, of course, being delivered – our subsidiaries are competent organizations which are running reasonably well delivering day to day transit services of various kinds, and the municipalities are doing a good job of operating the major road network.

We have made good progress in some areas. We started in January with one employee (me). Staff in BC Transit and the GVRD did quite remarkable work in supporting a complex transition. We renegotiated the agreement with AirCare to create new conditions. We worked with the municipalities to define the major road network. We rationalized our organization between us and the subsidiaries, and created budgets for April to the end of 1999 that are actually reasonable. Perhaps more important, we created a service plan for 1999 that saw improvements in the bus system and improved the links between regional town centres. We began the Area Service Plans that will this year and next review all the bus routes in the system to determine where resources should be shifted or the service should be changed. We have undertaken a review of local services in south Surrey – Community Bus 2000 – which will reexamine how we deliver service in low density suburban areas.

Perhaps most important, we have begun the preparation of our first Strategic Transportation Plan. Our legislation required that we complete the plan before the fall of 2000. However, we are spending significant amounts of money, and making capital acquisitions that will be with us for some time to come. We needed a context for those decisions and so have set an objective to conclude a strategic plan by next March. It will not be revolutionary, but rather will build on all the work done to date and will emphasize implementation. Next summer the GVRD will begin a review of the Livable Region Strategic Plan, and over the following eighteen months we will work with them to produce a new companion transportation plan. That plan will be new, and look further into the future.

But, financing is a major issue – transportation has been underfunded. Existing plans call for major investments that we haven't been making – we're behind. Let me give you a picture of the future:

In the AM rush hour, transit currently carries about 55,000 people. If we maintain the current investment trend, that will rise to 80,000 people. The plans call for investment to increase this to 130,000.

230,000 cars today will increase to 410,000 if we follow the trend, or 350,000 if we make the necessary transit investments and pursue parking charges, tolls, car pooling, and all other reasonable solutions. Even with that major effort, car traffic will increase by 60%

These figures assume major investments, almost doubling transit capacity by 2009. This is an expensive business.

Busses – \$300-750,000, depending on type – we need 600-900 depending on the plan.

SkyTrain -- \$2.5-2.8 billion for full T line from Coquitlam to New Westminster and Lougheed to Central Broadway

Major roads -- \$25 million/year operating

Road capital upgrades – significant to deal with growth in auto traffic, even with major transit investments.

Long term plan – prior to considering new revenues, we need additional \$10 million/year now, \$180 million per year in 10 years to follow a plan that is still less demanding than original targets.

Obviously, there is no free lunch! There are only so many places this funding can come from, and we will need to use them all. New revenues will have to come from:

fare increases  
taxes on parking  
automobile charges.

While this is not particularly attractive, the alternative is worse. We will not have the transit system or road network we need, congestion will worsen significantly, and the regional economy will face substantial transportation costs. And, we will not have the livable region that today is the reason most of us live here.

That's a quick look at the big picture. Now let me talk about how projects will be undertaken. TransLink is a planning and financing agency, not an operating agency. We will build or acquire necessary facilities and equipment, directly or through private-public partnership facilities, but will not operate them. So, for example, the Province is building the SkyTrain line from New Westminster to Vancouver City College. The responsibility to operate the line will move to TransLink, but as a consequence of the Province's agreement with Bombardier, we will contract with Bombardier to operate both the existing and new SkyTrain lines.

We will acquire buses for our operating subsidiary, Coast Mountain Bus Company, for our West Vancouver contractor, and for HandyDart operators. These organizations, however, will have the responsibility to operate through an operating agreement with TransLink. We will monitor their effectiveness through key performance indicators specified in the operating agreement.

In the case of road or bridge projects, we will plan but may well not construct. We may seek private contractors to finance, build, and toll a project, we may contract directly, or we may use the Province or municipalities as construction agents depending on the nature of the project.

We have the power to expropriate from private owners and municipalities. For major roads, where municipalities are owners and will likely be partners in any roadway development, expropriation could be done by us or municipalities.

One current project may be of particular interest to you. We are currently planning and will soon begin construction on the Richmond B-Line. In many ways this will be similar to the Broadway B-Line, which some of you may know and love – it is a very popular service. The Richmond B-Line will be a limited stop, express service operating from Richmond Centre along Number 3 Road to the Airport exchange and down Granville Street to downtown Vancouver. Service will be provided by articulated buses. It will operate in full time dedicated lanes along Number 3 Road and in rush hour prohibitions in Vancouver. Bus stops in Richmond will be more like stations than conventional stops. We are pursuing a new park and ride facility for the new line.

From a real estate perspective, this single project will require some twenty partial takings and over thirty construction easements, at a significant cost. Our real estate staff will be using a number of outside personnel to complete this significant list of acquisitions in time to complete

the project and have it operational next fall. It is of course entirely possible that some of these acquisitions may involve the need for expropriation.

From a real estate perspective, this project represents typical core work for TransLink – upgrading roads for bus routes, easing bottlenecks on the major road network, constructing new facilities. In all cases we will be involved in planning, and in some cases directly in land acquisition and construction. Typically, a number of real estate transactions will be required.

The future will clearly hold more bus route enhancements and upgrades to the Major Road Network, but will likely also involve larger projects. We are negotiating arrangements with the Province for the extension of SkyTrain to Coquitlam Centre, and also west of Vancouver Community College. If these negotiations are concluded successfully, the Province will construct these extensions. Existing long term plans also call for the construction of rapid transit to Richmond, and indeed the Richmond B-Line is a precursor to such a service.

In a different vein, the Province, municipalities, and TransLink are examining the proposed South Fraser Perimeter Road, and will be examining the potential for a crossing of the Fraser River east of the Port Mann. These are of course very substantial projects, with significant costs. Our Strategic Transportation Plan will address these potential projects.

From many small projects to improve the Major Road Network to larger transit improvement projects like the Richmond B-line and major infrastructure improvements, TransLink has the opportunity and obligation to make significant improvements in the regional transportation system. I am sure that the creation of TransLink will be seen as a significant step forward in the management of regional transportation – and I would suspect that the additional projects carried out under its mandate will from time to time present opportunities to many of you here in this room!

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you.