

THANKS FOR BEING PART OF

access ♦ **transit**

Your comments matter to us.

Contact us by phone:

604-453-4641

or e-mail at:

access_transit@translink.bc.ca



access ♦ **transit**

**you spoke,
we listened**



you spoke, we listened

In early 2005, TransLink started the Access Transit Project, one of the most extensive reviews of transit accessibility undertaken in North America. The Project reviewed every aspect of the entire transit system that affects people's travel choices, including physical barriers, information, training, service supply and the structure of HandyDART.

In order to create a plan for accessible transit, TransLink went to the experts – transit users. People with physical, cognitive or other difficulties, plus agency and community representatives, worked with TransLink staff to pinpoint key issues and develop a framework for making the transit system more accessible.

The review found that there is much to build on; transit services in Greater Vancouver are among the most accessible in Canada. In the 1980s, this region was the first in the country to adopt a policy of working towards full accessibility to all transit. With the arrival of the new, low-floor trolley fleet that policy goal is nearing achievement and the conventional transit system will be virtually 100% wheelchair accessible by 2008.

Users have participated in a number of ways. A workshop on June 15, 2005 set out the vision for accessible transit, and a second workshop on Nov. 28, 2005 reviewed TransLink's progress and gathered feedback on studies underway.

The Access Transit Project identified three areas that need attention. These areas – customer support, transit services, and custom transit – were rigorously studied. The results of those studies and recommendations for action are contained in this document. They were also presented May 9, 2007 to a meeting of many of the same experts who led this process from the start.

vision



vision statement

“A seamless and inclusive public transit system that welcomes members of the region’s diverse communities with a fully integrated range of bus, rail, ferry and custom transit services that is inviting, responsive, safe, comfortable and affordable; and that meets the needs of our customers to access transit vehicles, information, customer service, training and other programs.”

the access transit strategy

The intention of the Access Transit Strategy is to achieve the Access Transit vision. The goal is to give people the broadest range of travel choices by making every part of the transit system as accessible as possible. To achieve this, the following objectives will be pursued:

- ◆ **1. Create an Access Transit Office and Users’ Advisory Committee**
- ◆ **2. Provide better customer support**
- ◆ **3. Improve access to a full range of transit services**
- ◆ **4. Increase availability and effectiveness of custom transit**

♦ create an access transit office and users' advisory committee

Making the transit system work for all users will require a change in how TransLink approaches issues of accessibility. In order to ensure that accessible transit is integrated into all transit plans, projects and programs, an Access Transit Office will be established within TransLink, and a Users' Advisory Committee struck to provide direct accountability.

♦ 1. The Access Transit Office would ensure the recommendations of the Access Transit Project are implemented. The Office would:

- Provide a single contact point for HandyDART users, managing eligibility, registration, bookings and information
- Monitor system performance
- Review unresolved complaints
- Identify issues
- Provide travel training for the entire transit system

- Ensure that all other recommendations identified in the Access Transit Strategy are implemented
- Standardize and integrate service across the region by creating uniform policies and procedures to cover eligibility, trip priority, service standards, operating hours, driver training, integration with conventional transit, and fare and zone structure
- Design and implement a balanced scorecard and reporting system to monitor performance. Performance measures should include user satisfaction, service characteristics, fleet and facility management and business performance
- Work with the Users' Advisory Committee to ensure that TransLink's future plans take customer needs into account

♦ 2. The Users' Advisory Committee will ensure implementation of the Access Transit Plan and provide ongoing advice on all plans, programs and other initiatives that TransLink funds. A mechanism will be developed to ensure the concerns of this group are addressed.



♦ provide better
customer **support**

Improving access to transit goes beyond reducing physical barriers. Customers also need clear information that is easy to find, signage they can easily understand, plus support from front-line staff in order to use transit successfully.

what we **looked** at:

In reviewing customer support, the Access Transit Project looked at:

- TransLink's website
- Directional signage
- Customer outreach
- Training for transit users and front-line staff

what we learned:

The TransLink website needs upgrading so that people with physical and cognitive disabilities can access information more easily. For example:

- The website isn't friendly to adaptive software, particularly for people with visual impairments, and does not meet international web accessibility guidelines
- The range of information on the homepage makes it hard to find the information people are looking for
- Finding transit information requires multiple steps, frustrating some users
- The trip-planning function is difficult for some users to find, and it doesn't recognize enough local landmarks

Transit staff require training so they can provide a better experience for people with disabilities and help them use the transit system more fully. For example, users said:

- Some drivers do not know how to adequately use the lift equipment
- Some front-line transit staff display limited understanding of and sensitivity to people with disabilities
- Schedules, passenger loads and driving conditions make it extremely difficult for drivers to provide the customer service that is needed

Support is required to meet the unique needs of some existing and potential transit users. For example:

- User training opportunities are not well advertised
- Information provided to the accessibility community is delivered inconsistently and rarely provided proactively
- Materials, especially timetables, are often too few in numbers
- Brochures do not always use simple language, using too many industry terms
- Some people need faster access to an operator when calling for assistance

Signage and information needs improvement, especially at stations, bus exchanges and on transit vehicles. For example:

- Many people have difficulty reading system-wide route maps
- There is limited signage leading toward major transit facilities
- There is limited signage indicating important area landmarks when leaving transit facilities
- Signage for Expo and Millennium Lines are confusing and difficult to see
- Signs at stations and exchanges are not designed for people with visual impairments



recommendations:

TransLink has taken a comprehensive approach to customers' needs for information and support, by looking at what is currently in place locally and elsewhere, reviewing issues and concerns, and developing solutions.

1. Foster an inclusive, welcoming environment for all transit users. This will include developing a new customer service strategy.
2. Make the TransLink website more user-friendly and accessible. Make it easier to find basic information, plan a transit trip and provide feedback. Ensure the website is compatible with technologies designed to assist people with disabilities.
3. Simplify and standardize transit signage so it is easier to understand by increasing the use of international icons and reducing the use of text.
4. Provide customers with better information and support through training and education programs so they can better access the full range of transit services. TransLink should look into new technologies to improve the delivery of information to people with disabilities.
5. Staff training in assisting people with disabilities must be standardized and consistent throughout the transit system.
6. Reach out to community groups, seniors and people with disabilities proactively to better inform them of available services.
7. Encourage feedback on service quality and other issues by offering a variety of ways for customers to provide input, including a formal process for hearing complaints.





♦ improve access to a full range of transit services

Increasing access to the entire transit fleet is the best form of inclusion. Greater Vancouver is well on its way to achieving 100% system-wide physical accessibility. As a part of Access Transit, TransLink reviewed the entire transit fleet of vehicles and facilities.

what we looked at:

The fleet assessment looked at exterior appearance, destination signs, gaps and ramps, vehicle steps, lifts, handrails and stanchions, layout, materials, methods for securing wheelchairs, safety and maintenance.

The TransLink vehicle fleet comprises: buses, Community Shuttles, SkyTrain, SeaBus, West Coast Express, and HandyDART vehicles. TransLink facilities reviewed included: both SeaBus terminals, two West Coast Express stations, nine SkyTrain stations, five B-Line stations, street access to facilities, path of travel, and ease of transfer within the facility.

Every aspect of these facilities was assessed, including doors, entrances, signage, floor space, protruding objects, phones, ticket vending machines, elevators, stairs and floor surfaces.

The assessment included a review of best practices from acknowledged leaders in transit from around the world. The assessment also looked at accessibility guidelines and codes from British Columbia, Europe, the United States and Australia. Based on this analysis, Universal Accessibility Guidelines (UAGs) were developed for transit vehicles and facilities to set a new standard for TransLink to aspire to in all future investments in fleet and facilities.

The Universal Accessibility Guidelines apply to features such as ramp characteristics, path-of-travel needs, curb cuts, elevator needs, and visual and auditory aids. As part of the UAGs, simple checklists were created to allow anyone to assess a transit vehicle or structure.

what we learned:

TransLink's vehicle fleet was found to be among the most accessible in the world, but there were some areas flagged for improvement. These include location and provision of customer information; path-of-travel such as aisles, doorways, and stairs; and interior amenities such as vertical poles, bell pulls, and space for wheelchairs.

Transit facilities present greater barriers to accessibility. A number of issues were identified at the SkyTrain stations along the Expo Line involving ticket vending machines, handrails, staircases, signage and elevator capacity. Several SkyTrain stations, including Metrotown, Main Street - Science World, and Scott Road require major upgrading to resolve substantial accessibility problems.

The Millennium Line stations, are newer and need fewer improvements. Both new and old SkyTrain stations present some barriers to easy transfers between travel modes and access to the stations. The review found that West Coast Express stations were fully accessible. At the SeaBus terminals there are minor issues including the transition between the SeaBus quay and the vessel, and the slope of the ramp down to the berth.

As the first point of entry to the transit system, bus stop accessibility is vital. The old accessible bus stop plan applied to wheelchairs only and not to any other accessibility issues. New design guidelines for universally accessible bus stops have been developed and will be tested in a pilot project in 2007/2008. With 8,000 bus stops in the TransLink service area, key transfer points will be the first priority when upgrading them.

recommendations:

To improve public access to the entire transit fleet of vehicles and facilities, TransLink should:

1. In consultation with the Users' Advisory Committee, develop a list of priorities for improvements and retrofits to existing infrastructure. These improvements would be reflected in the next 10-Year Transportation Plan.
2. Formally adopt the Universal Accessibility Guidelines and work towards the implementation of those guidelines on all new transit vehicles, new and existing bus stops, stations, rail lines, and transit terminals.
3. Maximize accessibility by acquiring transit fleet that is primarily comprised of low-floor vehicles, including all buses, Community Shuttles and custom transit vehicles.
4. Introduce a higher standard for wheelchair lifts when buying new Community Shuttles and HandyDART vehicles, monitor lift failures on existing vehicles and improve maintenance of all accessibility equipment.
5. In partnership with its operating subsidiaries, implement policies to clearly state which mobility aids can be accommodated on the transit system. The policy will include dimensions and boarding procedures.





◆ increase the availability
of **custom transit**
(HandyDART)

TransLink's custom transit service, branded as HandyDART, serves customers who are unable to use conventional transit. The Access Transit review found that TransLink's custom transit service needs improvement to meet current and future demand, which is expected to increase by two to three times over the next 25 years.

what we looked at:

Through Access Transit, TransLink reviewed HandyDART service quality, operations, and delivery structure.



what we learned:

Service Quality

- Users are generally satisfied with the quality of the service, although they have concerns with the capacity of service because it is clearly not meeting current demands
- Drivers are helpful and customers really value familiarity with drivers and other staff
- Operating hours, service levels, waiting time, and boarding procedures are inconsistent across the eight service areas
- The process for trip booking and registration can be frustrating and difficult. In particular, trips that cross service area boundaries are extremely challenging or impossible to book, and when available, often involving difficult and time-consuming transfers
- There are concerns with complaint processes and the lack of a neutral party to consider some complaints

Service Operations

- Greater Vancouver's HandyDART system has more separate service areas and operating contracts than any other metropolitan area. The eight service areas function largely as separate transit systems, resulting in duplication of effort. For example there are eight sets of staff performing application processing, customer follow-up, database management and other administrative functions
- There is little integration between HandyDART and the rest of the transit system, both at the policy and operational levels. These systems largely operate as two completely separate entities
- Up to 70% of HandyDART service is used for medical and social service trips leaving very little service available for users to engage in social, recreational or other activities
- Some HandyDART contractors also run social service programs and these programs may, to some degree, affect their booking priorities
- There are no operating centres for vehicle maintenance and storage

(continued)

what we learned (continued):

Service Delivery Structure

- HandyDART staff are very committed to the service, but there are no clear guidelines describing the various roles and responsibilities of TransLink or its contractors
- TransLink has no direct interaction with users which limits its understanding of the shape and form of demand, operational concerns, inter-agency issues, or emerging needs in the communities it serves
- There is no coherent and comprehensive performance measurement or scorecard to assess performance attributes such as logistics, customer service and satisfaction, and business efficiency. There are no means of relating performance to service objectives
- HandyDART has been operating beyond its capacity for some time so it is difficult to assess how much true demand there really is as many users have simply given up trying to get service
- Without better information, it is difficult for TransLink to develop policy directions, make program development decisions, introduce technology and innovations or even define the purpose of the service in the region
- Eligibility processes and criteria are antiquated and need to be updated
- There are no mechanisms to offer potential registrants access to the full range of accessible services and training programs are inadequate.





recommendations:

Many changes are needed in the operation and management of HandyDART in order to improve service quantity, timeliness and overall quality; to provide a seamless regional custom transit service; and to better integrate custom transit with the overall transit system. The following recommendations involve substantial changes that will have to be phased in over the next three years, and reviewed in 2010.

1. Create an Access Transit Office within TransLink to make using custom transit simpler. This office would provide a single contact point for users and manage eligibility, registration, bookings and information for HandyDART.

2. Increase the number of trips and service hours to provide longer, more consistent hours of service and more non-medical trips. In 2008, HandyDART service will have 30 more vehicles offering 60,000 more hours of service and 130,000 more trips.

3. TransLink should work with the provincial government to find ways to better manage demand for medical and social service trips so there is more service available for other kinds of custom transit trips.

4. Reduce the number of service areas from eight to three. The recommended service areas are:

- South of the Fraser
- Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge
- North Shore, Richmond and Burrard Peninsula (west of Pitt River).

5. Give existing service providers and their employees the opportunity to form new entities to deliver services within the new service areas starting January 2009. To facilitate this transition, existing contracts should be extended to December 2008.

6. Make service easier to use by creating a more responsive and flexible booking system. This system should offer shorter advance booking times, extended call-in service hours, online booking and trip management support, and better in-vehicle communications with drivers and passengers.

7. TransLink should establish permanent storage and maintenance facilities for custom transit vehicles by 2010 and actively seek and test better vehicles to improve the comfort of passengers.