

TRANSLINK

BURNABY MOUNTAIN GONDOLA TRANSIT PROJECT

Thursday, July 28, 2011
Simon Fraser Village Strata
Forest Grove Drive
Burnaby BC



Notes from a Burnaby Mountain Gondola Transit Project meeting, held Thursday, July 28, 2011 at the Simon Fraser Village Strata, Simon Fraser Village Club House, Forest Grove, Burnaby, BC

FACILITATOR:

Scott McFarland, TransLink

PRESENT:

Approximately 50-persons were in attendance. 40-person signed the TransLink attendance sheet. Names are not disclosed due to privacy reasons.

ALSO PRESENT:

Jeff Busby, TransLink

Ian Fisher, TransLink

Kristin Lillyman, TransLink

Susan Campbell, Note Taker, Corporate Consulting

The meeting commenced at 6:30 p.m.

1. OPEN HOUSE FORMAT

The record notes that the format for the open house was that Mr. Jeff Busby and Mr. Ian Fisher gathered residents into two groups and responded to questions. A recording secretary was present and residents were encouraged to provide their concerns which would be captured in the record and if an email address is provided the questions will be responded to by TransLink staff.

2. QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS

(The following abbreviations will be used and mean: Q=Question, A=Answer, C=Comment.)

Q: Conservation areas – for reasons I am against the project because it would disrupt the whole conservation area. I saw bears here just the other day and this is one of the last areas of green space. camillanordin@yahoo.ca

Q: My major concern is safety because it goes right over the day care where my son goes and also the noise. It goes right over the complex on Cinnamon Drive. Also property values, we are not going to be too happy if it lowers the property values of our homes – that is a major concern especially for resale value and overall privacy of our community with gondolas going right over and knowing that there are people looking right down on our properties. On Flowering Place, a lot of the homes have skylights and face the direction of the proposed gondola and most of the homes along that branch of Flowering Place are like that. We are opposed to the project. aronzip@shaw.ca



Q: Unalterably opposed to this project and I am going to fight you every step of the way. The gondola is obviously for the benefit of the developers up at the top of the hill and there is no benefit to me in fact it has a negative impact on my way of life. When I bought my townhouse 11-years ago I specifically asked the City of Burnaby if there would be any development on the Burnaby Mountain conservation area. I was assured that there would not be. Therefore there is no way that this gondola should be going in. Why are being engaged now after the decision has been made? luis.bernhardt@shaw.ca

***6:45 p.m.**

At this point, Mr. Jeff Busby, TransLink provided the following presentation:

What will I cover?

- Why are we studying a gondola?
- Planning process
- Project status and next steps
- Comments to date

Why are studying a gondola?

- Significant transit destination – 25,000 daily trips, most connect to SkyTrain
- Buses every 1 minute:20 seconds today; 50-seconds as mountain grows or mode share increases
- Weather and reliability
- **Plans call for:**
 - Increased transit ridership
 - Reduced environmental impact
 - Cost effective investments

Planning Process

- Previous feasibility study sponsored by others in 2009
- TransLink sponsored an independent planning study and business case
- Ground based and aerial technologies were reviewed
 - Sought to improve travel time, reliability, environmental impacts at reasonable cost
- Aerial alignment options
 - Minimize residential and conservation impacts
 - Maximize connectivity to SkyTrain and SFU
 - Minimize length (travel time and cost)
 - 15 minutes to 6.5 minutes; Every 3-10 minutes to every 40s; similar hours SkyTrain
- High ratio of benefits to costs

Project Status and Next Steps

- Operating Savings up to \$3m annually compared to buses
- Project not included in our 2012 plans (base or supplement)



- Seeking senior government or partner funding
- Implementation requires
 - Funding in annual plan
 - Environmental assessment
 - Access agreements (Burnaby and others)
 - Design and construction plan with public input

Comments to Date

- Comments either strongly supportive or strongly opposed; very few moderate responses
- Environmental, travel time and reliability benefits
- Resident concerns
 - Privacy
 - Safety
 - Noise
 - Neighbourhood character
- Impacts to conservation areas (trees and wildlife)
- The cost of the project
- Relationship to Evergreen Line
- Priority

TransLink is interested in a gondola because of its potential to offer better reliability, faster travel times, higher transit capacity with fewer diesel buses, reduced noise and emissions for green house gases (GHG) and other pollutants and reduced operating times. TransLink recognizes that concerns exist specific to the residents of Forest Grove and wants to do the best to understand address them.

2.1 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE FLOOR:

Q: What about someone with special needs, can you slow it (gondola cabin) down?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* You can - the gondolas release from the rope in the terminal and are pulled around by wheels at the terminal stations and it is a level floor and attendants can slow the cabins down to get people on and off.

Q: I am on the strata council and we get a lot of questions and one thing that many people are concerned about is the land value piece – was there any research done in Portland regarding land values? Land values before and after?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We recognize that as home owners this is very important however it is very difficult as transportation planners to assess the up and down of the real estate market but we can learn from other places. We worked with the City of Portland on our analysis and they had trouble identifying the impacts. I will admit that some property values will go up and some will go down but it is very difficult to assess property value impacts. In



2005, in Portland, when the gondola was built property values were going up and now, as you know with the state of the US economy, they are going down.

Q: First of all, you have Gaglardi Way and that would be a great place to build this and secondly the criminal element increases with projects like this. We know about people with drugs and about people not paying fares, so why not Gaglardi Way?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Gondolas are cables and those cables are stretched like a rubber band and they go in a straight line and if Gaglardi you would take a straight line and then you would have to curve it and bring it closer to the line through a station in order to change direction. This would make it slower, more expensive and could have more potential other impacts. Curves (on the line) would make it come closer to the residents' homes. When we looked at the routes there were pros and cons and this alignment seemed to work the best and have the lowest impact on residential neighbourhoods - this alignment was the lowest impact and may avoid any impact to the conservation area. We are trying to balance competing objectives, ensure there is sufficient capacity and that it is attractive to use and have the least environmental impacts in a cost-effective way. With respect to your comment about the criminal element there would be two stations one at Production Way and one at SFU so criminals, if there are any, would be just as close as they are today. TransLink is also taking a number of measures to include safety and security features including fare gates.

Q: The Portland gondola goes over single family homes and I was just down there and it hasn't been running. I don't think it runs on weekends.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Portland uses a different technology and it is connecting a hospital to a tram and it is the same technology as used at Grouse - one cabin goes up and one cabin goes down. We anticipate that the hours of operation would match the SkyTrain hours from 6:00 a.m. to 12-midnight. There are many examples of gondolas running all year round but they do have to be maintained and those maintenance periods will be known well in advance similar to the scheduled maintenance periods of SkyTrain. During those maintenance periods buses would provide service, if necessary.

Q: What about Lake City - why not run it out of there?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The route selection was the most challenging part of the study and the problem with the Lake City route is that it passes over tank farms and that is a safety concern. If there was an incident at the tank farm then TransLink would be very concerned and we would not build it because of risk to future customers in the gondola and the tank farm owners would not allow it and there is no ability to compel them. As well the BC Safety Authority would not allow it.



- Q: Gondolas leave every 40 seconds, so that is really a mass transit line and this would change the neighbourhood. Noise, you failed to mention the three ropes which are two stationary cables with one cable that pulls it (gondola) along and the gondola rides on wheels that will squeak. How will you prevent squeaking? You talked about making windows so that people can't look down and yet at an earlier meeting you talked about the benefits including being able to look around so that defeats the purpose which you just talked about now. Can you elaborate on that technology?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Squeaking – all transit systems have to be maintained. I would just like to back up and say that for the project to move forward it must be in a funded and approved plan and it is not. It must be in an environmental assessment process and it is not. TransLink would have to negotiate access agreements with land owners and the City of Burnaby. Lastly we would have to do design and construction plans in cooperation with the community. The Environmental Assessment process is required to look at projects to identify impacts and minimize those impacts so if noise is an issue then we will be required to do that mitigation under the terms of the contract and because we want to be good neighbors. With respect to the issue of views – in Portland the glass has been moved much higher and therefore the views are higher and horizontal and not down and we could do that here.
- Q: You say that the Lake City way is not feasible yet I see green space on my map (gesturing to an I-phone) – what about going through the golf course? Go around Burnaby Mountain?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* There would be a route straight up from Lake City and then it would turn. This is something we could look at however we have heard mixed comments about the desirability of having a station in Forest Grove. One of the challenges is cost effectiveness and the longer the route and the more stations the slower and more expensive the project.
- Q: Last night you said that SFU undergrads were moving more and more out to Surrey so that really means there are less undergrads at SFU, right?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We work with the planners at SFU and they are asking similar questions. What they say is over time the Burnaby central campus will be devoted more to graduate students and they go to school all year long. So today there are peaks in demand and in the future the buses might be jammed all the time.
- Q: You are dealing with a relatively small market and it is a lot of money to spend when there are so many other things to spend it on. What about UBC? This is an issue of UniverCity as a tourist attraction to sell more housing.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Compared to the other projects that TransLink is working on yes it is small and compared to the number of people that will ride the Evergreen Line. The Evergreen Line is \$1.4 billion and that is more than 10 times the cost of the gondola project. TransLink's first priority is the



Evergreen Line. The Mayors' Council is having discussion and if all goes well and funding were approved it could open in 2016. UniverCity is excited and wants to help build the gondola because it enhances their sustainability reputation and so this is a case of two organizations that think the project is in their joint interests. TransLink wants to move more people with lower cost to the environment and UniverCity has their own reasons and we are working together on this project.

C: Well, the bus and SkyTrain are not in my backyard and I will have 50 decibels more than what I have now. I get up at 5:00 a.m. and what if I can't sleep – I go to bed at 8:00 p.m. I keep hearing about the benefit to the students but they come and go every four years and this is my life's savings and if it goes down that is unfair - what about unemployed bus drivers?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The buses on Gagliardi running every 3 minutes will be eliminated so there is a potential on where you live that the noise level will go down. With respect to the bus drivers there are two conditions - reduce bus service and save money or grow the service and redeploy the bus drivers and we would hope to build gondola in a time of service expansion and that no bus drivers would have to be laid off. At TransLink 50 bus drivers retire every six months and we could slow the rehire rate so no one loses their jobs. With the proposed two cents increase in the gas tax that would not just be used to fund the Evergreen Line in reality it would be used to grow the whole system and make improvements, it is not just for the Evergreen Line. With respect to property values, I explained that earlier but you should know that we take that issue very seriously.

Q: \$120 million - how long is that estimate valid?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I know that transportation planners do not have a great track record for staying on budget however that \$70 million figure was not produced by TransLink; it was from an independent study commissioned by SFU Community Trust. We did our own study and we have produced a number which is defensible and includes design, consultation, Environmental Assessment, construction and contingency. If the project is deferred over a long time there may be inflation.

Q: Will there be lights or beacons on the towers?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We don't know the answer to this, we asked the BC Safety Authority and he didn't know either. Whistler has a system that detects aircraft and communicates via radio signal to the aircraft that a gondola is in the area.

Q: Do we have a commitment from UniverCity that they will adapt down to public transit?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We don't have a specific breakdown but UniverCity is trying to be a model sustainable community and trying to take transit and there are several households that live without a car. The project is about



meeting demand in a really busy condition and projections show that ridership will be 80% faculty, students and staff.

C: They also had a highly subsidized pass and what I heard is that people will not pay the full amount. I have seen most of them drive and I know that because I work there and I see them driving.

Q: Who is paying for this? I pay \$110 for a two-zone bus pass and the people up there taking the transit are paying less?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We don't believe this project will generate a lot of extra fare revenue. Most of the money would come from the bus service and we are committed to running buses. Over the life of the project it is a little like right now we are paying rent and if we build the gondola it would be about taking out a loan. Slightly more expensive to run the gondola but not so much that we couldn't ask senior government to make up the balance and that is a very different situation from the Evergreen Line.

Q: I have lived here for 10-years and I hear the buses and I don't think TransLink makes good use of its buses. I see those accordion buses run with 3 people in it and I think that is a waste of money. How do you get the figure of 25,000 people using the bus per day?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We are always looking for ways to improve productivity – we got the 25,000 figure from the automatic passenger counters. They count the riders and that is where we got the figures.

Q: Did you say you going to eliminate the #135 bus?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* No.

Q: So that 25,000 figure is thrown at us and I think that is a lie. My question is about the possible location of towers and authorizations?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* With respect to the numbers – we are finalizing the business case and if you sign up we will send you notice when the business case is available. There are 25,000 riders going to SFU and the #145 is the busiest route and it is mostly express - that route would be eliminated if this project was built. With respect to the tower locations, five are needed. The tower locations were reviewed on the map. There are many strategies to build towers and the trees would not have to be removed between the towers. The approach is to build enough redundancy into the system that you have standbys in place to bring people to the top. With respect to the authorizations question - we would need an access agreement with the City of Burnaby and that might involve rezoning or other land use processes and agreements regarding the land that is owned by the City that the gondola would be going over. This strata is not having a gondola going over it.



- Q: Wheels - what are they coated with? I haven't heard any gondolas that are silent because they do make noise and are not silent.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We are not sure but the noise issue is something we take very seriously and there are tools available to assess noise levels but it is not as loud as a roaring bus.
- Q: I am still not convinced that a simple dog leg on Gaglardi wouldn't work?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We have already talked about the different trade-offs and these were reviewed again.
- Q: I think we have spent an hour and a half going through the project and you are not going to convince anyone in the room. I read the 2009 study and I attended the open house and my perception was that this was a done deal. Even the questionnaire assumed it and I am now hearing something different tonight. I am a little confused, if this is not a done deal why do you hope to start building in 2013? Now, I am hearing it is not a done deal. If this is not a done deal where do you go from here? This is the most efficient route for TransLink but to our detriment - what process is there and when do you hope to start building?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I take responsibility for and apologize for the questionnaire if it was not clear. We may be close to having the funds and I would not bring anxiety to this community if I didn't think it was a good idea and that is why it is important to make the people of the community aware. Next year, if we found the money, we would put the project in a funded plan and in 2013 if it was funded it could start and then it would take about 2 years and then there is the construction for the project and it could open in 2016 or later. However, as you are aware with other projects of TransLink, it may never be built or it could be on the books for a long time.
- Q: As a homeowner what option do we have? What do I do to voice displeasure?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* You may express your concerns tonight and we want to hear your specific concerns and then we need to think of ways to address your concerns. I realize this project doesn't benefit your community directly and we want to minimize the impact and come up with ways to minimize it.
- Q: The amount of people out is really, really important. I heard at the Cameron School Open House a comment about privacy that someone at TransLink, who is here tonight, said that those places are small and have small backyards.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I apologize.
- Q: How did we get to this stage before getting information and questionnaires etc. out in the community?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I apologize if you think we mislead you about the status of project because that was not our intent. I have attended many meetings and this is very early on but we wanted to make you aware and we did try and make you aware and if we can do a better job then let us know.



We weren't prepared for the number of people that attended the open house and that is why we are back here tonight.

Q: My question is around technical challenges and where do they get solved and will they be presented to us at a point where we say no or go?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We need to be responsible and we have only done the level of design that we have shared with you and we know we need to do a detailed design. Once there is a commitment for the project then we will start the design work and I want to do that work in consultation with the community.

Q: If you can't reach the right noise level can we say no?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We could be strategic and do focused study on noise levels and there are other techniques and work that can encourage the understanding however this needs to be balanced between a project that is uncertain and how much work we do.

Q: I work in engineering and at one point we look at the technical challenges and say can it be solved or should the project be shelved.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We believe the benefits are there and that the project is worthwhile.

Q: You are talking about addressing concerns and subdividing concerns but what you need to understand is that the route is a non-starter. Go find another route. How much is UniverCity putting into it? The route is not going through or else it will be over my dead body.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We have discussed the trade-offs. UniverCity paid for their 2009 study and did not contribute to this study however the federal and provincial government did contribute to this study. UniverCity has offered in-kind services such as meeting space, etc. and this is not collusion – this is about two entities having different reasons to promote one interest.

Q: Have you asked the 25,000 riders if they want to take a gondola on a daily basis? I go to SFU three times a week and I don't think they will give up their cars. I have a problem with your business case.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* For people with a fear of heights there will continue to be ways to get up the mountain on transit. Computer modeling looks at frequency and time and when we ran the model it showed the vast majority will use the gondola. The model is derived from survey data and there is a whole science around forecasting demand.

Q: Why is it so important to save 6 minutes for students when they could have the same time as the other one?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* This is about high demand and capacity and we want more people to use transit with good customer service, minimize impacts to the environment and do it cost-effectively.



- Q: Windows – what are the height of the windows going to be? My townhouse has 11 skylights. Do you really think there will be a little band of windows?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* That would have to be designed and in the design phase we will know more. If it is more effective to raise the walls, or renovate the skylights we will look at but we won't start that until the project starts.
- Q: I think you need to do more detailed engineering to make that turn – Gaglardi? I think that it should be reassessed.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* That is fair but the preferred route has travel time savings and is cost-efficient.
- Q: What do you need to hear to stop this project? What do you think?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I do not, I am not in your position and I have a job – infrastructure planning and we work on projects all over the region and generally, people agree that it is important. I take this work very seriously and work hard to achieve our other goals.
- C: When the Whistler gondola peak-to-peak is down it throws everything out of whack and the same with SkyTrain and the buses and I can't believe it (gondola) will be fixed in a few hours?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* There is always the potential for the gondola to be disrupted and if that occurred TransLink would run buses to meet demand.
- C: The people that work on the other side of campus won't have their travel time lowered so your emphasis on shortening time is not right. That is my main concern.
- Q: How do the gondola cars move up and down?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The mechanism for hauling the cabins up and down was reviewed.
- Q: What happens when one is derailed?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* There is so much redundancy that the systems are intensively reliable.
- Q: What about the route to Burquitlam Station, isn't that a feasible route?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* It is but it is less desirable than this one because this route (preferred alignment) is equally advantageous for people traveling east and west.
- Q: How is TransLink structured?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The governance structure was explained. Staff report to the TransLink Board and the Board must get the permission of the Council of Mayors if they wish to raise taxes. We have worked with Burnaby City staff and we have made information available to Council but they have not yet taken a position.



- Q: Does the Mayors Council approve the project or is it the TransLink Board?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We show the Mayors' Council detailed plans to raise taxes and that requires their approval.
- Q: This is not less money than the buses but it is more environmentally feasible and you are talking to the Mayors' Council and putting it through the TransLink Board, is that right?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The gondola is more expensive than running the buses and if the project went forward it would have to compete with other projects but in terms of implementing the project we would work with other partners to identify funding for this project and attempt to do so without raising taxes.
- Q: You have no control over what happens in the car (gondola cabin) and you know that there are always things going on and what is the process for this?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* In this system you would see the attendant at the top and on the bottom so you could screen people or group people together and there would be more monitoring than what SkyTrain has today.
- C: Between 9:00 p.m. or 10:00 p.m. to midnight when it ends probably there wouldn't be much use. I am six houses away and I am going to be hearing this and this is unfortunate. TransLink has chosen a very special area and we can't survive up here without a car. We are very careful how we live and we take care of one another and to put it here is quite different for us. To have this go over my head, I am not very happy about this.
- Q: What about snow or ice on the cables?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We will have to get more information on this.
- Q: I was surprised to hear that wind is a problem and now we have a wind issue that will cause a problem. I am wondering how that will work out with the wind and what will happen when you find out you will have to be down on a regular basis.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Wind will not be an issue and the manufacturers say that the cabins can operate safely in 100 kilometer an hour winds. Although you have to be careful about manufacturers claims wind is not anticipated to be a problem.
- Q: How deep will you have to dig down for the towers because the oil line is so close by?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* In the design phase we would design it to ensure that it wouldn't impact the pipeline. This area is very stable seismically.

3. CLOSURE

The meeting closed at 8:30 p.m.