

TRANSLINK

BURNABY MOUNTAIN GONDOLA TRANSIT PROJECT

Tuesday, August 9, 2011
Cameron Recreation Complex – Spruce Room
9523 Cameron Street
Burnaby BC



Notes from a Burnaby Mountain Gondola Transit Project meeting, held Tuesday, August 9, 2011 at the Cameron Recreation Complex – Spruce Room, Burnaby, BC

FACILITATOR:

Andrew Brooke, TransLink

PRESENT:

There were 20-members of the public present. Names are not disclosed due to privacy reasons.

ALSO PRESENT:

Jeff Busby, TransLink

Kristin Lillyman, TransLink

Susan Campbell, Note Taker, Corporate Consulting

The meeting commenced at 7:00 p.m.

1. INTRODUCTION AND SESSION OBJECTIVES

Andrew Brooke, Facilitator, thanked everyone for attending and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of the project, clarify issues and understand concerns so that they can be addressed. There will be a brief presentation and then an open Question & Answer format for discussion.

Participants were advised that this public consultation was a part of the Phase Two consultation of the project and that this sub-phase included four small group meetings with residents in the overall Forest Grove area. Finally, it is important to note that no decisions have been made at this point.

2. PRESENTATION

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
- Independent feasibility study sponsored by others in 2009
- Ground based and aerial technologies
 - 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 greenhouse 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.



3. QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS

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

The Facilitator asked that those present, who have attended other meetings, as a courtesy, allow first-time participants the opportunity to speak first. Following that the meeting will be opened up to allow all participants an opportunity to ask questions or provide comments.

Q: I haven't been at other meetings and I have a number of questions. I live at Simon Fraser Village and I moved in this December and I wouldn't have bought if I had known this was happening. Why is this happening and what about the corporate interest at the top of the hill? I think that the Evergreen Line and UBC (line) are much greater needs. Why is this happening now? Can you explain to me how it would work – if the gondola meets the needs of the people up there and will provide people an opportunity to shop and then cart it up on the gondola and I am imagining six bags of groceries, and then walk one or two kilometers carrying those six bags to a house, can you explain that because I don't see it?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* It is looking at serving people traveling from SkyTrain to SFU and mostly those riders will be faculty, staff and students. I agree with you that the Evergreen Line is more important and so is UBC. However, part of my work, as a transportation planner at TransLink, is to look for the right transportation mode and present that to decision-makers. I note that this project is not in a funded plan. The Evergreen Line will cost \$1.4 billion and carry 80,000 riders. This project would cost \$120 million and carry a good share of the riders to and from SFU and we think it should be considered however that needs to be considered and balanced against other projects in the system. There is a growing residential community at SFU and UniverCity and the profits made at UniverCity help to support the academic mission at the university. They are quite enthusiastic about the project as it could help to meet their sustainability objectives. SFU is also enthusiastic about the project as a way to enhance access to campus. SFU has three campuses and many students travel between the campuses. We are working closely with SFU and UniverCity. TransLink believes that environmentally this is a good project.

Q: You didn't answer my question - why would those people use it?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Already there is a high transit use from UniverCity as a survey has shown that approximately 40% of them use transit. The articulated buses leave very full and then the buses bring people coming back down and the same would happen on the gondola. However, if you lived up there you would likely use the gondola in one direction.

Q: I would just like to clarify that 40% number – was that arrived at during the U-Pass?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The survey was undertaken by either the City (Burnaby) or SFU, I don't remember which one however it was not



TransLink. Yes, it was conducted when riders were using the U-Pass which was subsidized by the developers.

- C: No, that U-Pass was subsidized by TransLink.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The pass is ending at the end of this year and I suggest we talk about the project as we have already discussed the U-Pass at length at another meeting.
- C: *Facilitator:* We have had this discussion at another meeting and whether there was a pass or not we (TransLink) would still explore the reason to take the buses off the road. The use would be high and there are environmental concerns whether or not there is a community pass. There is a community pass there now to access the system and this is not a new idea and it is very successful both in North America and in Europe. Regardless, with the increased demand and overcrowding and use of the system we would still look at the gondola as an alternate option to buses with or without a community pass. Now I don't want to put words in your mouths but I think I am hearing that you are concerned that TransLink is looking at the gondola only because of the ridership numbers coming from the community pass...
- Q: It is not that simple – if you are going to make a claim about ridership you need to mitigate with information that ridership was encouraged by several years of subsidized passes.
- A: *Facilitator:* That is a fair point.
- Q: How many students to SFU?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* 25,000 riders get on and off a bus on average every day – half are taking the #145 bus route which is the busiest route. However, transit planning looks at same direction in the same hour and there are 1,800 riders. The gondola can move 3,000 people in an hour in the same direction and that is really important in the busy periods. During periods when the gondola is not as busy we can slow the gondola down which is what ski resorts do all the time and/or take some of the cabins on or off.
- Q: You said that the residential impacts are relatively small – well I am two blocks from that thing, how can you describe that it as having a relatively small impact?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I apologize if I wasn't clear – what I meant to say was compared to other ways to route the gondola up the mountain. We looked at other routes and they travelled over more residential areas. The alignment with the lowest residential impacts was from Lake City and it had advantages but it passed over or close to the tank farms. We were concerned over an impact of an incident from the tank farm and as well the BC Safety Authority would not allow it (gondola) to pass over the tank farm.
- Q: So this relatively small impact is relative?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* That is correct.



- Q: I would like to clarify that these routes are straight lines and are not dog legs – if there was a dog leg there would be more possibilities to minimize impacts on residential neighborhoods.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* That is correct. Gondolas work in straight lines and are like rubber bands, if we built a turn/curve we would have to build a station and bring the gondola back down and then back up and this works against our desire around improved travel times.
- Q: I suggested another route and I know you would have to put in another station however this route that I suggested would avoid residential areas and I never received a reply to my suggestion.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The alignment you suggested follows Gaglardi, north east and then turns north west. We did look at it but it didn't improve travel time and was much more expensive.
- C: I have a comment rather than a question. Obviously we feel that our community has been sacrificed for students and some feel that this is not justified and I am starting to feel that way. That gondola is not a great sight and will impact the way we all love Forest Grove. Noise – it gets nosier and nosier from SkyTrain all the time and I don't trust TransLink because noise is a huge issue. I know you want to help the students but why can't they wait a little longer to catch a bus. I don't think it is right to sacrifice such a huge community for students. I am not sure it is worth it. Also, I think that you could spend the money more wisely. I don't know the solution but it does impact our community and I am concerned that it won't work out the way you have described it.
- Q: One of the best ones () I have seen is in Santiago, Chile. I believe an underground system is best. Santiago, Chile is the best and is cost effective. It costs about 700 pesos or about \$1.50. So how can they do it and not us? You need to work on the cost effectiveness.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* What you have described is a system that travels underground and it is much more expensive. TransLink is trying to improve travel time, create an environmental improvement and achieve that at a reasonable cost. Underground is much too expensive.
- Q: You said that the gondola is more expensive - slightly more expensive than the buses. I think that you don't need to spend another \$120 million in money on buses?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* What do you think buses cost? I always find it interesting to ask how much people think that buses cost. Buses cost, on average, about \$500,000 each approximately depending upon the type of bus. We are just finalizing the business case for the project and we are looking at what we need to meet the next 25-years demand. All the costs add up and so that is money we are committed to spending regardless. Should we remove



entirely the #145 bus route and use the savings to pay for the gondola? Let me put it this way, we are using money we would pay every month and the issue presented by this project is do we use the money to buy a mortgage and buy a gondola. In purely financial terms it is more expensive for the gondola but the difference is not that great and we would ask senior government for support and there is not that great a difference.

Q: So, why not ask for more money and have a dog leg?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* That would not improve travel times and it would be more expensive.

Q: I would like to echo what others have said – the new gondola would benefit the new community up the mountain and the students and therefore I think that they should use their own backyard to build it in. I heard about less intrusive options with a higher cost model to what we have seen on the Canada Line. Why did a portion of the Canada Line along Cambie Street go underground? It was more costly and I speculate that the public consultation resulted in a chunk of the line going underground. Why can't this option be considered now?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* That is fair but we are trying to look for same or close to same costs as running a bus service. We are committed to running buses and if we replaced the buses the thing that makes the most sense is a gondola.

C: Is there an access to information office where I could get the information about a community that complained (Canada Line consultations) and can someone get back to me - an access to information office.

Q: My question is around funding – around SFU and the SFU Community Trust - have they pledged money?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* This project is not part of the budget process and every year we look at revenues and right now we are maintaining existing levels with some improvements. We are working on a supplemental plan to increase funding and expand programs. If this project went forward it would have to be included in an annual transportation plan. We think SFU and UniverCity should help build the project but we are not at a stage to finalize funding. SFU is an educational institution and there is always a competition for public funding in serving the public mission. UniverCity is a non-profit organization and exists to support the academic mission of the university however that is not to say that they shouldn't fund.



- Q: Wouldn't TransLink pay them back from savings from shutting down the bus line?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Someone needs to come up with funding and we would ask the federal and provincial governments for contributions.
- Q: Who makes a gondola?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* There are two companies based in Europe that manufacture ski lifts, etc. Doppelmayr is an Austria company and Leitner Poma, is an Italian company. How to get a competitive price when there are just two companies will be something that would have to be looked at.
- Q: How much money will you be sending outside of Canada?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Terminals, towers, permission from land owners are all in the \$120 million cost estimate for the project. The actual number for the gondola equipment is a small fraction of the overall cost. In round numbers it could be about half of that but the details will be in the business case.
- Q: So maybe \$60 million – did you know Canada makes buses?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Yes.
- Q: I just don't get the gondola – do cabins pass each other or does one go up and one goes down?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* This was illustrated on the presentation board – the gondolas are on a loop and constantly going around. There are 19-cabins circulating and at stations the cabins unhook and a pulley system pulls them through the station. Then when they leave the stations they re-grip.
- Q: When you take the cabins off do you need a space to store them?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Yes, the cabins would spend the night in a garage.
- Q: So 19 in a garage – is there room?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* There could be room where the warehouse is or the existing bus loop but this needs to be looked at in further detail.
- Q: So the numbers you mentioned previously everyone understood in a different way. The #145 bus route costs \$5.5 million a year and if replaced by a gondola would cost \$3 million a year. So there is a \$2.5 million a year savings to pay the mortgage. With respect to the 3-rope system it has two stationary cables and the gondola moves on wheels and how far away is the spaces and how does the wheels not make a sound?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I don't have the figures as this is a planning study but they would be about several hundred meters apart. We need to do the detailed design before that question can be answered fully.
- Q: But detailed design is after the project is approved, right?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Yes.
- Q: Is the business case not ready?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* No, but we will provide you with a copy when it is finalized if we have your email address.



- Q: Where are the towers going to be?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Perhaps you should tell me – there is flexibility where the towers will be located – at this point the location of the towers was illustrated on the map.
- C: Several people commented that it went over the pipelines.
- Q: Are you aware that Kinder Morgan has received approval to increase their flow and I can't see how this is justified with all the pipelines in the area?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* It is good to be aware of Kinder Morgan's plans and we would need to be closely engaged with them if the project went ahead. I would just like to review that the project needs to be in a funded plan, then it must go through an Environmental Assessment Review process, access agreements would need to be negotiated and then a detailed design and a detailed construction plan would need to be developed in which the engineers would have to discuss how to build it safely.
- Q: In the summer there are not a lot of people that are around (for these meetings)?
- A: *Facilitator:* We can continue to have these as more information becomes available and we have gone to 16 units and some have said they don't want to meet, there is no interest right now because the information is the same as was presented at the open houses and stakeholder meetings and others are really hard to get a hold of. If you are interested in meeting, please contact us. We have tried to meet with everyone.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We would be prepared to meet as part of another meeting such as an annual general meeting - we would be happy to attend and present.
- Q: I might be naïve but I think that the decision has already been made. You are talking as if the decision has already been made and we didn't rate in your phases. There is probably no one in Forest Grove that does not want it overhead.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Let me review what I just said, the project is not in a funded plan and it is not going ahead at this point. Other than running buses this is the best environmental solution and we do recognize it is a source of anxiety and concern and we want to understand that so that we can address those concerns if the project goes ahead. Every time we meet we hear other issues and we are constantly learning.
- C: *Facilitator:* We wish to work with the community and be in the room at the table with you.
- C: This isn't a consultation you aren't listening, you are informing.



- Q: The TransLink Board is the one that okays it as a project then through Burnaby City and the Environmental Assessment, etc. The go-ahead doesn't have to go through the Mayors' Council, is that correct?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* There are four steps which I have reviewed several times and there is the interaction with the landowners and broader concerns will be looked at.
- Q: If we said we do not want it - do we have any sway? It will be one elastic band going up the mountain without taking into account the community concerns.
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We think we can continue to run buses or a gondola and a gondola is the best well-aligned with our objectives.
- Q: I saw a news piece, in 2008 or maybe 2009 and it said you have signed a deal with UniverCity and why do they have such a interest, \$120 million for one project and the buses will continue to run – why is UniverCity so interested, why the corporate interest and are you getting money from SFU Community Trust?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We haven't asked them.
- C: But the high-end people aren't going to be using it for grocery shopping – the other thing that concerns me is that it has to keep running all the time and it is so much expense for mainly student ridership so no money is going to be made as they all have U-Passes. There are too many negatives.
- Q: I arrived late so I don't know what has been answered however I am looking at information that there are four possible routes and one has been selected based on criteria. Some of that criteria was based on integration with the overall system and it seemed they were all going up so why were they ranked differently because it seemed like the same criteria. If all different options then they are not really objective?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* What you saw were presentation boards for the open house and we have much more details in the business case and there is a difference in the quality of the connection. This option (preferred) splits the connections east and west so is equally advantageous and it maximizes the connection with SkyTrain.
- Q: Are the options ranked differently?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* If you want to explore this further I can provide further detail off-line.
- Q: In this age of the internet do you have anything in place where meeting information is available to the public because, I think, anything short of that is a sign of a closed operation? So this is both a question and a suggestion. People want to decide for themselves and they want to see transparency.
- A: *Facilitator:* The business case will be put on line when it is complete and all the information will be available however it is not complete at this point. All the information presented at the earlier events should be up on line and the consultation summary report will be posted in the next few days. The report was written in advance of these meetings because we had to set a deadline for



receipt of feedback however the notes from these five meetings will still be used as your input. The consultation summary report was written at the end of the open houses and stakeholder meetings and input from these weeks is still being received and will become an addendum (to the report).

Q: Are the report and minutes available?

A: *Facilitator:* The minutes will be distributed to those that attended the meeting. Minutes from these meetings will be available to those that attended.

Q: Looking at Gaglardi – what about a low-profile urban gondola going along the existing corridor because travel time seems like a really minor point.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Gondolas are not necessarily speedy as they run about 25 miles per hour and travel time savings is one of the key objectives and we have to run in a straight line.

C: *Facilitator:* We will disagree on the importance of travel time savings and for our purposes what we have deemed at this point is that the gondola is the best solution should we take the buses off.

C: Gondola experts say don't put them over residents.

4. NEXT STEPS

The next steps in the process are:

- Completion of business case;
- Determine funding sources;
- Regional conversation on transportation priorities;
- Environmental assessment; and,
- Decision on implementation.

Thank you to all for attending.

5. CLOSURE

The meeting closed at 8:40 p.m.