

Human error blamed for second SkyTrain shutdown



By Surrey Leader

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TransLink says an error by an electrician working on the Evergreen Line triggered Monday's five-hour shutdown of the SkyTrain system and passengers will be offered a free day of transit use on B.C. Day.

The technician was installing a new circuit breaker at a power distribution panel for the new SkyTrain line to Coquitlam when he accidentally tripped the main breaker feeding critical systems at SkyTrain's operations centre, TransLink chief operating officer Doug Kelsey said.

"Two major disruptions in one week is unprecedented, and the two incidents are completely unrelated," Kelsey said.

"Our trains are reliable 95 per cent of the time, but we know that is little consolation for customers who are delayed for hours when we do have a significant breakdown."

The electrician has been suspended and TransLink continues to review what went wrong. Some area mayors are also pressing for an independent review.

Asked how a free transit day on Aug. 4 will help passengers who buy a monthly pass, Kelsey said the aim is to let regular riders bring family and friends on a holiday outing via transit for free.

"We really apologize for what happened," he said. "We want to share our customer appreciation with more than just the riders."

because others were indirectly affected."

[Monday's shutdown](#) was the second in less than a week that led SkyTrain passengers to pry open train doors and walk away along the tracks.

The complete halt of trains on the Expo and Millennium Lines started around 12:30 Monday and the shutdown lasted nearly five hours until service was restarted on both lines. Canada Line service was unaffected.

It followed [last Thursday's](#) rush hour service shutdown after a computer malfunction that also stranded thousands of passengers for hours.

Despite pleas from TransLink to stay in SkyTrain cars due to electrocution and safety risks, numerous riders once again made their own exit, sometimes stopping to take photos and share them on social media.

Transit Police spokesperson Anne Drennan said "dozens" of riders left trains and walked along guideways unescorted Monday – many more than last Thursday – while others were escorted out by attendants.

She said the presence of passengers on guideways again caused the shutdown to last longer than if passengers had followed instructions, stayed on board and enabled the trains to resume movement sooner.

Drennan admitted there's little that can be done to block illegal exits – she said issuing tickets would "add insult to injury" – so the focus will be educating people about the danger.

"The electrical charge on the line can be there for quite some time after a shutdown such as this and people do risk being electrocuted if they touch the wrong part of the track," she said.

"We completely understand the high level of frustration and the fear and panic people are experiencing but we ask people to recognize the danger and be as patient as they can be."

Prying doors open in several trains meant they wouldn't close later and then attendants couldn't manually drive them back to stations, Drennan added.

"Staff and equipment had to go out and repair the doors to the point they could actually close and the trains could be moved. That created further delays."

Officials estimate service would have been restored 90 minutes to two hours sooner had doors not been forced.

TransLink advised SkyTrain commuters early in the afternoon shutdown to make other transportation arrangements during rush hour.

But the challenges were compounded because the electrical failure that halted trains also prevented audio communication with passengers in SkyTrain cars and platforms.

"I think that frightened a lot of people," said Drennan, who advised passengers in future shutdowns without announcements to seek updates via smartphone and then relay them to other passengers in the same train.

Unlike Monday, last Thursday's system delay was blamed on a computer glitch.

Surrey Mayor Dianne Watts wants to know whether TransLink will pursue a backup control system for SkyTrain.

"The last couple of shutdowns have really impacted the residents South of the Fraser," Watts said. "When you are dealing with that number of people on the system who cannot get to their work or cannot get to their children, it's very problematic."

But Kelsey said it would be "exceptionally expensive" – at least \$30 million – and difficult to justify installing a backup control system that might only rarely be used.