



## Human error blamed for second SkyTrain shutdown in a week

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BY VANCOUVER SUN JULY 23, 2014

SkyTrain passengers who escaped from their stranded Expo and Millennium line trains Monday were at little risk of electrocution despite repeated warnings by TransLink that they could die or be injured walking on the 600-volt guideway.

Doug Kelsey, TransLink's chief operating officer, said the power on the tracks was shut down as soon as the system was halted at 12:30 p.m. Monday, even though TransLink and the Transit police had warned the tracks were charged.

But Kelsey stressed that passengers should still not attempt to leave the trains during a shutdown because they don't have a complete understanding of the "complexities of the system" and could be at risk.

Scores of passengers forced open the SkyTrain doors and walked along the guideway to safety following the massive shutdown, which also disrupted TransLink's ability to communicate with its passengers over the system's public address network.

It was the second time in a week that passengers were seen fleeing along the SkyTrain tracks, following an earlier shutdown of the system caused by a computer glitch last Thursday. The Canada Line was unaffected.

"They should stay with their train just like in an airplane until they are directed otherwise," Kelsey said. "You're dealing with terrain the public is not trained in. You're dealing with a live rail environment."

TransLink's policy is to get SkyTrain staffers to the cars as soon as possible to bring the passengers back to the station, either by escorting them along tracks or manually driving the trains to the station, Kelsey said. But he acknowledges that some passengers could "stay there a very long time" depending on whether the staffers were available to respond to the emergency or were busy elsewhere.

And while the new SkyTrain cars have air-conditioning, he noted the older ones only have fans and could be quite hot depending on the number of people and the weather outside.

TransLink spokeswoman Jiana Ling said passengers involved in last Thursday's shutdown were trapped for an hour and a half, but it appears those involved in Monday's incident were more impatient, with many forcing the doors open after just half an hour. One of the doors was pulled off with a crowbar, Kelsey said, which prolonged the delay by two hours because trains won't operate if a door won't close.

Tannis Steele, 18, who was stranded Monday on an air-conditioned train near Main Street-Science World Station, said her fellow passengers broke out after half an hour because they were bored.

"I kind of followed the crowd and went with everybody," she said. "It was kind of freaky because it was really high up. You don't want to jump or look down."

TransLink blamed human error for the five-hour shutdown Monday, saying an experienced electrician was installing a new circuit breaker for the Evergreen Line at a power distribution panel when he accidentally tripped the main breaker that feeds into SkyTrain's main operations centre. The electrician has been suspended pending the outcome of the investigation.

But the union representing the electrician said the suspension is "not only inappropriate but raises serious concerns about health and safety and how SkyTrain employees are given directions."

Louise Oetting, national representative for the Canadian Union of Public Employees 7000, said the employer had suspended the individual involved but not the supervisor who had directed him to work on the panel.

"The panel is of poor design. This problem, regarding the hazards and potential for failure, is well known by the employer and was raised on several occasions by our members," Oetting said in a statement. "This panel should not be worked on during SkyTrain operating hours. But they ignored this information.

"Now we have a situation where an individual has been suspended after being directed to work in an unsafe manner - and this public blame and suspension has occurred without a proper investigation having been completed."

Oetting said that the union is conducting its own investigation into Monday's shutdown.

Meanwhile, Vancouver Coun. Geoff Meggs is calling for an independent investigation into the situation. He noted that accidents involving other transportation systems, such as Via Rail or light aircraft, would be subject to an investigation but "here we just get an apology or maybe a refund." The move is supported by Mayor Gregor Robertson who plans to raise the notion at the mayors' council next week.

"It's too serious a matter to hope it gets solved bureaucratically when you see moms carrying their kids down a guideway," Meggs said. "(The public) has a right to know what happened.

We can't afford to have shutdowns of this magnitude."

But Kelsey said there is no need for an independent review because they know it was caused by human error. He added that this is the first time in 28 years that this occurred and insisted the system has a 95-per-cent time performance rate.

As "a small show of recognition," he added, TransLink is offering passengers free transit on the B.C. Day holiday on Aug. 4. Some passengers tweeted their dissatisfaction with this break, saying TransLink should be offering the freebie during a busy weekday, but Kelsey said the intent is to allow passengers to travel on the system with their friends and family who were indirectly affected by the shutdown. "We know we imposed people beyond themselves," he said.

[ksinoski@vancouver.sun.com](mailto:ksinoski@vancouver.sun.com)

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