

TransLink driving away ridership: former CEO

Doug Allen says passengers should be the priority, not roads and bridges

The attempt to reconcile these conflicting mandates has resulted in an enterprise with vague goals about producing regional transportation plans. DOUG ALLEN FORMER INTERIM CEO OF TRANSLINK

TransLink does not focus enough on boosting public transit ridership across Metro Vancouver because it is too distracted by road and bridge projects.

That's the crux of a confidential report written by former interim CEO Doug Allen when he left the transportation authority after a six-month stint last August.

The report, released under Freedom of Information, covers everything from TransLink's tarnished reputation to its "confusing" governance structure and the controversial Compass card.

"TransLink is not focused on increasing ridership," Allen writes. "In recent years, ridership has been declining and this is a critical issue for a transit system that is planning expansion for a growing population."

Allen said TransLink's decision to focus on road and bridge improvements has created a "conflicting mandate." Allen noted that as vehicle travel becomes more efficient, transit becomes less appealing. The Golden Ears Bridge, parking fees at park-and-ride lots and other decisions have deterred transit users, he said. Even the Compass card was touted as a way to reduce fare evasion rather than boost ridership.

"The attempt to reconcile these conflicting mandates has resulted in an enterprise with vague goals about producing regional transportation plans," Allen said. "Because growing ridership is not currently identified as the organizational priority there are no projects, initiatives or strategies designed to increase ridership. Many decisions are actually counterproductive to this goal."

TransLink has acknowledged it has seen a decline in ridership over the past two years, partly because of a 2013 fare increase. A move last fall to make all bus fares one zone as part of the Compass card rollout did result in a 1.1 per cent boost in bus ridership, TransLink said, but it is forecasting a \$1.1-million decline in revenue next year as the Compass card takes full effect and the number of cash fares "dramatically drops."

TransLink plans to review its fare structure for the first time in 30 years, which could potentially see its three-zone system replaced with a flat fare across the region or a distance-based fee to boost ridership.

The move was recommended in a core services review by Allen, which also suggests that TransLink use mobility pricing, such as tolling all bridges, to get people out of their cars. It also suggests drawing up a business case to transfer its roads and bridges to another agency.

Regional mayors have touted mobility pricing as a way to fund transportation across the region, but Greg Moore, Port Coquitlam's mayor and chairman of Metro Vancouver, said he doesn't agree TransLink should hive off its roads and bridges. This would whittle down the long-range vision of getting more people walking, cycling or taking transit to work, he said.

"I feel a lot of effort goes into moving goods and people through the system," Moore said. "When you look at other organizations around the world, TransLink is the envy, in the sense that one authority is looking after transit and transportation. In most cases, there are multiple groups looking after roads and bridges."

Allen maintains the TransLink system is "safe, reliable, efficient and affordable" but insists roads and bridges shouldn't be included in core operations. He also maintains TransLink could improve its customer service, noting the public has been left with an impression of "detached indifference to their experience, opinions or requests. "Customers need attention and TransLink as a service organization must respond," Allen writes.

He noted TransLink doesn't sell its good points. During the recent plebiscite, for example, the mayors' council told TransLink to remain quiet and out of the public eye, which was "the worst possible approach," Allen said, as it resulted in more negativity around the agency and a "bunker mentality" among employees.

TransLink is in the midst of developing a "customer service guarantee," Allen noted, but it must also look at realigning its structure, which consists of multiple boards for buses, SkyTrain and the Transit police who all report to the main TransLink board. This makes the system confusing, especially as it is overseen by TransLink, Metro Vancouver and the provincial government. He suggests the TransLink board should be responsible for running the transit agency and making decisions around fares and operations, and be appointed in a similar fashion to those at YVR and BC Ferries.

The province should also show more support for TransLink, he said.

TransLink board chair Don Rose said in an emailed statement that TransLink appreciated Allen's "observations and advice."

16 Comment(s)

[Rancher](#)

19 January 2016

05:55

Force drivers to what? If you work 9 to 4 the system almost works, provided you live and work within walking distance of a skytrain station. Otherwise after interminable waits and transfers you finally get to where you want to go, only to discover you can't get home that late because the system shuts down.

No matter how effective Moonbeam's constructive traffic congestion, the automobile remains the only alternative for the vast majority of commuters.



[The Green Bastard](#)

19 January 2016

06:17

i could not sleep either pammy, but what does 'force people **our** of the cars' mean? did you mean 'force people so spend **hours** in the cars? sorry could not resist....good mornin!



[Ricketty Rabbit](#)

19 January 2016

07:08

There's a certain kind of logic in the CEO's statement.

"Let's spend billions on public transit, then ensure few who can afford it will use this system by spending billions on roads and bridges to make driving easier".

That's about the gist of it, and that's what is being done.

The error goes back 45 years when Vancouver said "NO" to freeways. A week in SF last fall visiting my sister convinced me that it's far easier to get around SF than it is around Vancouver. Why? SF has freeways. We railed against freeways in the 60s and 70s because nobody wanted to live next to one. "They cut up the city and put barriers where none previously existed". Well, guess what. Cambie, Oak, Granville, Main, Broadway, Grandview, 41st, Marine to name a few, cut up Vancouver, and nobody in their right mind wants to live next to them. They're highways, basically, but with bus traffic, stop lights and parking on the sides!!! Interminably slow freeways! And SF puts commercial and industrial land under and beside the freeways. Presto! No problem with housing next to freeways, and no problem with rezoning industrial land for housing!

Second huge mistake - Bombardier rapid transit, with its toy trains and very limited capacity, yet costing billions and already near capacity on several lines.

Third mistake - 80% of the high-rise apartments in Vancouver and many of the low rises are build right beside these noisy, polluted "highways", making them unhealthy and unpleasant to live in unless you're from a polluted, noisy country like China.

Total screwup. Translink can't fix it. There are too many decisions that ought to be related being made by people who don't talk to each other. The only people who can hold them accountable are voters, and most of them give a damn about only one thing - themselves. It's a recipe for disaster.

[WaskesiuT](#)

19 January 2016

07:22

Right on, RR.



[Happy Dragon](#)

19 January 2016

07:42

Exacrly TT

[Willy P Johnson](#)

19 January 2016

08:36

Excellent HD.

[George T Cunningham Library - CTZ](#)

19 January 2016

09:06

Telling comment: "As vehicle travel becomes more efficient, transit becomes less viable" Mayor Moonbeam anyone?

[George T Cunningham Library - CTZ](#)

19 January 2016

09:11

Totally agree with Point 2, re: Bombardier. That one decision alone set us up for crappy train service in perpetuity. I'd still like to know who got "paid off" for that one. Was it useful?



[Art Iskandid](#)

19 January 2016

10:22

In a few years, self-driving vehicles will be in general use, and suburban transit travellers will be driven to the bus/Skytrain and their self-drive cars will go back home, (or if they are taxis, go to pick up someone else).

As for the Compass card, my "**instant solution**" would be to make the tap-in necessary on all Transit vehicles, but the tap-out would be **eliminated**. Tapping in would create a charge for a specific **time**. Say 30 minutes, or some other number of minutes. If you don't tap in again, you pay only for the single fare. If you board another Transit vehicle, you tap in - and you pay - if the initial time has run out. Otherwise, you don't pay another fare.



[VanIsle](#)

19 January 2016

10:48

Other systems, London, for example, have seemed to manage their Compass equivalent systems to allow for distance sensitive pricing. You tap in and tap out and your fare depends on the distance you have travelled on the system. If the Compass system has not been designed to do the same, whoever designed it should be fired.



[Ricketty Rabbit](#)

19 January 2016

12:05

I thought the compass card "tap out" system won't work on buses, but does on Skytrain. Am I mistaken? (I don't use them often, and don't yet have a card.)

I'm not aware of tap-out systems on buses anywhere I've been, though there may well be good working examples. Does anyone know for sure that some cities tap out on buses?

The systems with which I'm familiar use distance pricing on buses simply by through a zone system like what Metro Vancouver had before the compass cards, and used tap-in, tap-out on subways.

Art's comment about self-driving cars is the leap to the future that could save us billions. I think it will be a long time coming - not because it won't work, but because people won't give up "control" of their cars easily. And it may be very difficult to have a really effective "self-driving" road and highway system when vehicles can't communicate with each other.



[GMan](#)

19 January 2016

12:59

I was in London a year and a half ago and there was no tap out on buses.

Both London and Paris had tap out on the trains and we got caught by it a couple of times when we went out of the standard fare zone. We tried tapping out and the fare gate wouldn't open. We had to plead ignorance with a station attendant to let us out.



[RHW](#)

19 January 2016

13:06

Former interim president says it all.



[Stryder](#)

19 January 2016

13:21

No to freeways through the city. That was one of the wisest decisions made. I think Seattle is a mess with it's freeways.

Make transit more efficient and less expensive and get people out of their cars. If you build it(transit), they will come.



[old geezer](#)

19 January 2016

14:12

If you build roads and bridges, they will drive.



[VanIsle](#)

19 January 2016

15:48

There is no tap out on buses in London (or Metro Vancouver). My earlier comment was referring to their underground and train networks.