

Bus depot debate revived

District of North Vancouver searching for new site in bid to halt Burnaby relocation

Ben Bengtson / North Shore News

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The Third Street depot is slated to close in the fall of 2016. File photo North Shore News

The District of North Vancouver is searching for the right space for a new bus depot.

North Vancouver currently uses an aging transit centre located on East Third Street, but TransLink is planning to relocate it to Burnaby's transit centre in the fall of next year.

A unanimous vote at Monday's council meeting has given city staff direction to begin looking for suitable land to house the new bus depot on the North Shore.

According to a district report, over 60 per cent of the staff who work at the current bus depot are North Shore residents. Transitioning the bus centre to Burnaby could affect their work commutes.

Coun. Roger Bassam, who put forward the motion, said there are some clear benefits to the workforce by having a bus depot on the North Shore. But he said the most important thing for the community would be to have "the actual physical buses themselves."

"As we have seen all too often, it is quite common for one of our bridges to be snarled with traffic and some sort of incident," he said.

According to district councillors, because of consistent bridge traffic – and especially in the case of an emergency – it makes sense to have a bus depot on the North Shore that could service the community if an unexpected event were to arise.

"We certainly realize the likelihood of a major disaster is remote, but we plan for these events," said Bassam. "And part of that is getting those assets in place so we can effectively operate as an independent community for a sustained period of time, and that means having those resources at hand."

City of North Vancouver council has passed a series of similar motions almost annually since the plan was announced in 2012.

According to a staff report, by the year 2028 TransLink estimates that 250 buses will be required to meet the growing needs of the North Shore.

Coun. Jim Hanson was also critical of TransLink's proposal to relocate the bus depot over the bridge.

"Whatever the net benefit may be to TransLink, it clearly isn't in the best interest of North Vancouver district residents to have all our buses stored in a transit centre on the other side of the bridge. And for that reason it's a very easy decision for me to support this motion," said Hanson.

According to district staff, approximately 6 (2.4 hectares) to 8 (3.2 hectares) acres of land would be required for a new bus depot on the North Shore.

Mayor Richard Walton, who is a former TransLink board member, said it has been an economic challenge for the transit provider to continue having a bus depot in North Vancouver.

"They really, really, really worked hard to try and find a location on the North Shore, but what happened is the funding picture dramatically changed in about 2006," he said.

Despite cutbacks at TransLink, Walton supported the motion to start searching for a suitable replacement location.

Bassam said that if district staff can find space for a new bus depot, "we can then go back to TransLink and really lobby for a revisit on that decision to relocate our fleet off the North Shore."

The transit authority does not anticipate an impact on bus service for North Vancouver as a result of the move because most buses would travel to the North Shore at an early time when bridge closures were rare, said Chris Bryan, TransLink spokesman.

In the case of a catastrophic event, the transit authority could put into service any buses at the West Vancouver Blue Bus transit facility on Lloyd Avenue in North Vancouver, he added.

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