

TRANSPORTATION

TransLink warns of reduced services

‘Service optimization’ will happen even if funding plebiscite approved, agency says

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TransLink passengers will likely see reduced service across the system next year regardless of whether Metro Vancouver residents support or reject a 0.5 per cent sales tax increase to fund transportation expansion.

Interim CEO Doug Allen said the transportation authority will look at “service optimization” — moving buses from lower performing routes such as Port Coquitlam to those with higher demand such as Vancouver’s Broadway — even if the recent plebiscite passes.

“In some areas, if you can get more passengers, or more ridership, then you’re better off,” Allen said following TransLink’s annual general meeting Friday.

Allen maintains TransLink is “up for the challenge whatever the future brings,” but noted the situation will be more acute should the public reject the 0.5 per cent sales tax because there won’t be any new money flowing into the system. Regional mayors had

suggested the proposed sales tax would generate \$250 million annually for the system, and help pay for more buses and road maintenance, light rail for Surrey and a subway along Vancouver’s Broadway corridor to Arbutus.

Allen said while he didn’t want to speculate on the fallout from a No vote, TransLink would likely have to look at reducing service across the system, including on the weekends, in areas where there is lower demand. TransLink estimates it has already reallocated 390,000 bus service hours — taking service from one area and moving it another — across the system since 2010.

“If anyone thinks that in a No scenario we can move on or even deliver the status quo, we can’t,” he said. “Our job will be to deliver the highest quality service day in and day out, but we will be restrained. We’re going to have to be very efficient and smart while we do it.”

Allen acknowledged service levels per person are not “at the level where we want them to be,” but noted the system cannot continue to grow without

new funding sources. TransLink has the ability to generate transportation funding mainly through gas taxes, which have been declining, as well as property taxes, set at three per cent annually, and fares.

George Heyman, MLA for Vancouver-Fairview, suggested that if the plebiscite fails, the public should call on the provincial government to honour the memorandum of understanding it had signed with the regional mayors’ council in 2011, supporting their transportation plan. Premier Christy Clark had ordered that a plebiscite be held.

Those on the No side, led by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation’s Jordan Bateman, have argued TransLink should not be trusted with any more public money because of its high executive salaries and recent SkyTrain problems.

Elections BC said it expected to have the results of the plebiscite by late June or early July. The plebiscite requires a 50 per cent-plus-one vote to pass.

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RIC ERNST/PNG FILES

Interim TransLink CEO Doug Allen says the agency is looking at further ‘service optimization,’ which would see buses moved from quieter routes to those with higher demand.