

TransLink closing all SkyTrain and SeaBus fare gates April 8

A station assistance service is also being implemented to help people with mobility issues

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The fare gates at all SkyTrain and SeaBus locations will be closed by April 8. (CBC)

TransLink is closing all of its fare gates at its SeaBus terminals and SkyTrain stations as of April 8, meaning only those with a Compass card or Compass ticket will be able to enter and leave them.

"We've arrived at this exciting stage by rolling out Compass in phases and listening to customers along the way to make sure we get it right for them," said Cathy McLay, TransLink Acting CEO, in a written statement.

"More than 675,000 customers have made the switch to Compass and we are confident our customers are ready for this transition to a fully closed, gated system."

The closures will begin on April 4 and will be completed by April 8. TransLink said it tested the closures at almost 20 stations throughout February.

Customers will still be able to use cash and Faresaver tickets on buses, but they'll have to change over to the Compass system if they transfer to the SkyTrain or SeaBus.

TransLink began to install the fare gates in 2011. They were originally scheduled to be in place by 2010 and the implementation was rescheduled several times since then.

Station assistance for people with disabilities

TransLink says it has been working with people with disabilities on issues with the fare gate closures.

Advocacy groups had said some people with mobility issues aren't able to access the gates to tap in and tap out.

In response to that criticism, TransLink says it is implementing a station assistance service to help customers who need it at fare gates, including elevators.

"We look forward to working with TransLink to continue to explore a range of options to ensure the transit system is inclusive and accessible for everyone," said Pam Horton, board member of the Disability Alliance of B.C..

TransLink ready to close the fare gates

Oft-delayed system to be fully operational next month

TransLink's Compass card and fare gate system will be fully operational by next month, three years after the system was initially promised to be up and running.

The transportation authority said Tuesday it intends to shut the gates at SkyTrain and SeaBus stations on April 4, with the system in full gear by April 8.

At that time, all transit users will require a Compass card or a Compass ticket to use SkyTrain or SeaBus. Although passengers can still use FareSaver tickets or cash on buses, they will need a Compass card or ticket to access the rest of the system.

"We're hearing from (passengers) that they're ready to have the gates closing," TransLink spokeswoman Jennifer Morland said. "We know more people are using the system."

More than 675,000 people have already signed up for Compass, according to TransLink, with 300,000 of those having registered their cards. She added there has also been an 80 per cent decline in the use of FareSaver tickets, while more people are remembering to tap their cards in and out on the transit system, estimating 300,000 taps daily.

TransLink faced problems when it launched the Compass system last fall because monthly pass holders were forgetting to tap out as they exited a SkyTrain station, resulting in thousands being charged for three zones, even if they travelled only one. The tap-out rate is now 92 per cent, Morland said, adding: "We still have more tests to do between now and when the gates close. We know this is an adjustment for customers."

The \$194.7-million fare gate and electronic smart card system, which was designed by Cubic Transportation Systems, was ordered by the Liberal government in a bid to reduce fare evasion on the SkyTrain lines, and has also been touted by TransLink as a way to get nearreal-time data to improve service delivery and long-term transit planning.

However, it has been plagued by problems, including recurring issues with the speed and reliability of card readers on buses. In some cases, bus validators did not tap out, which meant some passengers were charged a three-zone fare. TransLink also worried passengers could tap out early and stay on the bus, thus not paying for a whole trip. This prompted TransLink to make all bus trips one-zone fares when the Compass card was launched.

Morland said while some tickets have been issued for those not tapping in and out, she would not provide any details on numbers, noting TransLink is focused on an "educational" approach in launching the smart card system. However, she said she expects there will be a reduction in fare evasion when all the gates are operational.

Meanwhile, TransLink is working on ways to offer assistance to people with disabilities who want to access the stations but do not have the ability to tap into the system, or who need help using elevators or other amenities.