

Still no 3rd SeaBus in sight

No TransLink funding despite surge in riders

BY JEREMY SHEPHERD, NORTH SHORE NEWS MAY 18, 2011



A lack of funds means North Vancouver will have to make do with two SeaBuses for the foreseeable future, according to TransLink.

Photograph by: Mike Wakefield, NEWS photo

North Vancouver won't be getting its long-awaited third SeaBus any time soon, despite a spike in ridership last year, according to TransLink.

Drew Snider, a spokesman for the transit authority, made the comments last week in the wake of a City of North Vancouver council meeting at which the possibility of expanding service on the popular crossing was once again debated.

The idea of adding a third vessel to the sea route between North Vancouver and downtown -- intended to drop wait times and alleviate congestion -- has been on the table for years. TransLink has bought a third boat, and during the Olympics ran all three simultaneously, but has not made any move toward introducing that level of service on a permanent basis despite rising demand. Ridership on the route rose 7.2 per cent from 2009 to 2010, according to the authority -- a figure that excludes the spike seen during the Winter Games. It was the largest increase in any of TransLink's modes of transportation.

On Monday, councillors debated a motion to make a formal request for a third vessel to

meet that surge.

"We've been promised a third SeaBus for many years, and this is an excellent way to move forward," said Coun. Bob Fearnley at the meeting.

Coun. Mary Trentadue concurred, saying improved SeaBus service could be simple and beneficial.

"I think the SeaBus is low-hanging fruit," she said. "We know that the demand is there."

City staff cited reducing greenhouse gas emissions and boosting the city's economy as reasons to back the request, while Coun. Craig Keating noted that the 30-minute wait between crossings in the evening and the complete lack of service after 1 a.m. were a "huge disincentive" to passengers.

But despite the reasoning, it is extremely unlikely there will be any change in the near future, said TransLink's Snider.

"Right now, we don't have the money to put all three SeaBuses into operation," he said.

Despite projecting a \$79-million deficit for 2010, TransLink ended the year with a \$16-million surplus, according to its annual statutory report. The difference was made up largely by the extra \$42.8 million in revenue the authority earned from the parking tax.

But that money can't go towards expanded service, said Snider. Rather, it must serve as TransLink's insurance against rising fuel and labour costs as well as a disaster.

"The surplus we've posted into our reserves. . . as a hedge against the unexpected," he said.

The authority requested additional funds from Metro Vancouver's Mayors' Council last year, in part to complete the Evergreen Line, but their requests were rejected.

City councillors ultimately decided to defer their request for another SeaBus until after a meeting with TransLink.

jshepherd@nsnews.com

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