

TransLink to use more taxis, fewer HandyDarts



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HandyDart users may find they're increasingly riding taxis instead, especially if they live South of the Fraser.

TransLink has largely stopped dispatching [HandyDart](#) minibuses on four lesser used runs in favour of sending taxis to carry elderly and disabled clients.

The first phase of the changes began April 1 and targeted four routes – Surrey to New Westminister, Surrey to Vancouver, White Rock to Vancouver and Delta to Vancouver.

Money saved by not running HandyDarts on those routes is being used to cover more taxi service, said TransLink spokesman Derek Zabel.

The targeted routes tend to have a lot of deadhead time when a HandyDart must return empty after carrying only one or two people, he said.

"It's not the best use of your resources," Zabel said. "So if we use a taxi for that it cuts out all the deadhead time."

He said there will be no change in the total spent by TransLink on custom transit, but an estimated 7,000 more trips will be made via taxi due to the greater efficiency.

HandyDart buses will still be dispatched to users who aren't able to take taxis, he stressed.

The strategy of making more use of taxis – which are cheaper to run than HandyDart when few passengers are carried – was [a recommendation](#) of both the independent TransLink Commissioner last year and a provincial audit.

The next phase of changes will convert more HandyDart runs to taxi at times when the service isn't heavily used, mainly evenings and weekends.

Taxis already accounted for about 21,000 custom transit trips a year dispatched through HandyDart, or about two per cent of the total.

Last year TransLink scrapped a plan to phase out [subsidized taxi rides](#) for HandyDart clients after heavy opposition.

Jane Dyson, executive director of the B.C. Coalition for People with Disabilities, said she doesn't object to the planned changes.

"People with disabilities and seniors are not necessarily averse to using taxis and in some cases it can work better for them," she said.

"Our only concern would be that taxi drivers be well trained to help people with disabilities in taxis."

She wants taxi drivers taught tie-down procedures to secure clients in accessible taxis.

HandyDart remains heavily over-subscribed.

Nearly 47,000 trip requests last year weren't accommodated because a HandyDart wasn't available or it was already fully booked at the time requested.

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