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TransLink to replace diesel buses that made people feel ill

Metro Vancouver directors have approved a request by TransLink to use \$9.35 million from the federal gas tax fund to replace 62 defective diesel community shuttle buses that drivers complained were making them ill.

TransLink said new gasolinepowered shuttle buses were “urgently required” because the buses bought in 2012 and 2013 continue to emit too many fumes, threatening the health of drivers and passengers. The buses operate from the Port Coquitlam transit centre and cover the northeast Metro. The problems were noticed just weeks after the buses arrived, with some drivers complaining of headaches and a nausea.

Mike Madill, vice-president of operations of Coast Mountain Bus Co., said TransLink has been working with the manufacturer to fix the problems, but wants to buy new shuttles in case the issues can’t be resolved. Some of the more problematic buses have been taken out of service, and TransLink has pulled buses from retirement to maintain services.

The new buses, he said, would likely be here in six months.

TransLink was asking to use the money left over from the purchase of new HandyDarts buses, as well as money set aside to buy 24 diesel-powered community shuttles in 2015. Those projects had been on the priority list for 2014-15 gas tax revenues.

About 95 per cent of gas tax funds assigned to Metro Vancouver’s local governments by Ottawa are pooled for use toward regional transit infrastructure. In 2014, the gas tax fund totalled \$125.5 million.

Richmond Mayor Malcolm Brodie questioned what other projects would be affected, noting Metro has been given little information on TransLink’s capital plans. Metro directors agreed to the funding Friday but warned the transportation authority it is only a “one-off.”

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