

http://www.nsnews.com/story_print.html?id=5209773&sponsor=

Bus changes drive NV riders from transit

New 246 route leaves some users waiting

BY TESSA HOLLOWAY, NORTH SHORE NEWS AUGUST 5, 2011

CHANGES to the 246 Highlands bus route mean North Shore residents are waiting longer and walking further to get where they want to go - or just skipping the bus altogether.

TransLink changed the routing of the 246 Highland bus in June so all buses go to downtown Vancouver rather than to Park Royal. Before, they only did so during peak hours. Evening bus frequency was also cut to once an hour from every half hour.

The transit authority has also changed the route, with the bus now turning left on Capilano Road from Marine Drive instead of Garden Avenue, stopping at a new bus stop there that's just a sign pole on an empty sidewalk and bypassing the sheltered stop on Marine Drive.

tholloway@nsnews.com

The route change means riders like Hilda ten Cate have to cross eight lanes of traffic over Marine Drive to transfer between buses when they're coming from Park Royal, and often have to wait an extra half hour with no bench before the bus arrives in the evening.

"It's very unsafe," she said. "Of course now it's still light, but wait until it's November, five o'clock and pouring rain. An ablebodied person can walk that if you step off the curb and go, but somebody who's any bit slow won't make it."

The Marine Drive and Capilano Road intersection has the highest number of injuries and ICBC claim costs of any on the North Shore, according to the insurer, and ten Cate said the traffic signal is too short for many senior residents to get across in one light. She's worried someone's going to get hurt.

She and several neighbours near Highlands have all written letters to TransLink and the district complaining about the change, but the transit authority says Garden Avenue isn't an option anymore.

That's because the new bus lane and other recent changes to the bridge approach eliminated the left-turn lane off Marine Drive onto Garden, making the corner too difficult for buses.

"It was very difficult to kind of stickhandle through all these," said TransLink spokesman Drew Snider. "We knew there were going to be some people impacted by this, and we had to say: 'This is the best we can do.' "

Snider said service was cut purely because of ridership, adding any bus operating at less than 10 per cent of capacity gets reviewed. The average trip had just 12 boardings, he said.

That explanation doesn't square with Chris Radziminski, a resident of Edgemont who also relied on the bus service. Buses elsewhere are exempt from left-turn restrictions, he said.

Lowering frequency on a low-demand route will just lower demand even further, he said, adding he now takes his bike home from downtown events instead of the bus.

"I know that several neighbours are (too)," said Radziminski. Ten Cate also said she would use her car more often. "It's like the reverse Field-of-Dreams strategy. If you take it away, people will go away. . . . If there are not enough riders, why not use a community shuttle or something?"

The District of North Vancouver has done some work on the Marine Drive and Capilano Road intersection aimed in part at helping pedestrians cross. It expanded the median, removed a rightturn slip lane onto Capilano Road and added pedestrian-countdown timers, LED crossing lights, and more time to the traffic signal.

Mayor Richard Walton, also chairman of the TransLink mayor's council, said he had heard concerns from residents on Garden Avenue about the buses as well as complaints from residents about the change in routing for the 246.

He said he had passed concerns along to staff and TransLink, adding that changes to routes often get altered a second time to smooth out problems.

© Copyright (c) North Shore News