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JAMES: Rewind on the bus depot debate

[Elizabeth James](#) / North Shore News

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"In 2012 ... TransLink took another look for a viable property for a North Vancouver Transit Centre. However, after an extensive search into alternatives, it was concluded that there were no other appropriate sites on the North Shore that would be suitable for the facility."

- Marcella Szel, Aug. 1, 2014

After his council's June 23 unanimous support for a different approach, why did City of North Vancouver Mayor Darrell Mussatto vote to approve a TransLink "bundle" that included moving the North Vancouver bus depot off the North Shore?

In her August letter, TransLink board chair Marcella Szel said that once the current bus depot has left the site at Third and St. Davids, TransLink has "no near-term plans to return buses to the North Shore until at least 2028."

When I asked city mayoral candidate Kerry Morris where he stood on the issue, I expected him to echo the calls of some neighbours to see the depot gone. He did not; but that doesn't mean he wants a North Shore reliant on a Metro-based transit centre.

"Not only would we lose 250 well-paid, communitybased jobs but drivers who live here and commute by transit, would add their vehicles to the alreadycongested bridges," he said. On a roll, Morris continued, "TransLink thinks its Plan B - to use West Van blue buses in the event of bridge tie-ups - will suffice," he said.

"Where will the drivers be in an emergency?" he asked. "Stuck on the other side of the bridges?"

Contrary to the board's opinion, Morris claims "it doesn't make sense to move the depot off the North Shore because other possibilities do exist."

While keeping those comments in mind, bear with me while I back-pedal to 2005. That was when the city's mayor at the time, Barbara Sharp, caught District of North Vancouver council off-guard by inviting members to attend an announcement of a new bus depot to be located in the district at Pemberton and First Street.

Norgate residents opposed the associated noise and emissions and the idea was eventually abandoned.

Not abandoned was the wish of the Third Street neighbourhood to see the buses gone and nothing altered the fact that the outdated depot is unsuitable for renovation.

Also not abandoned was my belief that, if 80 per cent of buses exiting a Pemberton location would need to turn eastward, it would be better to find a site closer to the Ironworkers Memorial Second Narrows Crossing.

Coupled with the longstanding need to make Phibbs Exchange safer and more user-friendly, it seemed obvious that a new depot adjacent to the exchange made sense.

Trouble was, every time I made the suggestion to the powers that be, I was told it couldn't be done because the adjacent lands were either zoned and occupied light industrial, or belonged to First Nations.

Discussions of land assembly, or sounding out First Nations' reactions appeared not to be in the cards so I stopped beating my head against the wall.

Now - back to the future: On Oct. 30, 2013, TransLink released its Transportation and Financial Base Plan for 2014 to 2016 and Outlook for 2017 to 2023. If you haven't yet read it and want to know what you must pay for, you can find the **Summary and Context and Conclusions** sections of the Plan by googling the document title.

Approved by the appointed TransLink board and, later, by the Mayors' Council, here are four of the priorities North Shore taxpayers are and/or will be helping to underwrite:

- \$18 million - 36 per cent of the \$50 million cost of the Roberts Bank Rail Corridor project;
- \$3.7 million TransLink contribution to the Port Metro Low Level Road expansion project - in addition to the City of North Vancouver taxpayers' \$1 million donation;
- North Shore share of the new Hamilton Transit Centre in Richmond - currently under construction -
- and of the cost of the TransLink referendum Minister Todd Stone tossed into TransLink's lap.

After contributing to a depot in Richmond and asking why TransLink should underpin two federal Ports operations, what does the North Shore receive for its TransLink dollar?

Easier to say **what's not yet funded according to the 2013 report**: extension of the **15-minute SeaBus service to 24/7 year round** and upgrade of the bus and SeaBus terminals at Lonsdale Quay are three items mentioned.

Now, let's return to the bus depot issue: **Where are the alternatives the TransLink board was unable to identify?**

According to Morris, **there are at least two: n an extension of the Blue Bus depot to replace the soon-to-be-gone ICBC claims centre on Lloyd Avenue, and n an addition to Phibbs Exchange on provincially owned land adjacent to the highway.**

So why would both North Vancouver mayors vote to boot one of the top job-producing operations off the North Shore instead of endorsing the rejection delivered by Burnaby Mayor Derek Corrigan?

Well, developers aside, the concluding observations about TransLink noted by Acure Consulting and others in their March 2013 TransLink Governance Review were that "The province has exercised a dominant interest, feeling free to impose its priorities on the region (while remaining) reluctant to provide a role in transit for local government institutions it did not ... control."

Enough said?

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