

TransLink expecting nearly a million passengers a day during 2010 Games

BY KELLY SINOSKI, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 11, 2009

VANCOUVER - TransLink's transit system will face the ultimate challenge during the 2010 Olympic Games when its daily ridership is expected to swell by 33 per cent to close to a million people.

But even though TransLink is confident it can meet the demands of the extra passenger load by adding capacity to its fleet of buses, SkyTrains and Seabus, it is calling for patience by residents and visitors, saying they will likely face long line-ups and delays to access transit during the two-week Games.

TransLink spokesman Ken Hardie warned travellers to allow extra travel time no matter what route, whether it's along rapid transit or a key bus line — or time — they plan to travel.

With events on all day downtown, a commuter crush could occur at any time, while people going to Thunderbird Stadium, Hastings Park or the Olympic Oval should consider the time it takes to walk to transit.

At any given time, Hardie said, there could be upwards of 100,000 people in the downtown core.

"All things considered it would like having the fireworks and a Madonna concert in one night," Hardie said. "We'll be telling people to expect crowding; it will take awhile to get on a train or bus because there are so many people wanting to get on at the same time."

Under the Olympics transportation plan, TransLink will provide public transit services throughout Metro Vancouver during the Games, while Vanoc will offer the connections to Whistler and Cypress for the main Olympic events.

Under the deal, TransLink would receive about \$17.3 million from the sales of Olympic Games tickets, which roll in the cost of transit with a Games pass. A two-zone souvenir pass for the two months will cost about \$200, about the same as a regular transit pass, and will allow unlimited access to TransLink services.

Hardie said the money from Vanoc would cover overtime for bus drivers and other incremental costs and TransLink hopes to recover the rest of its Olympic costs through increased ridership.

TransLink is counting on another 230,000 people per day — besides ticket holders — to use transit during the Games, which would bring in \$1.3 million in revenue and allow the transportation authority to break even, Hardie said.

The passenger estimate is based on population at the venues, the expected crowds going in and out and the conversion of people from other modes of transit — such as vehicles — to buses and SkyTrain.

"If it doesn't occur, some of that [money] would be at risk," Hardie said, but added: "We don't want the

Olympics to be a net cost to us.”

TransLink doesn't consider its new Canada Line or the expansion of its bus and SkyTrain fleet as Olympic-related costs because they're included in TransLink's transportation plan and provide a legacy for the future.

He's also optimistic people will use transit during the Games, mainly because most major roads leading into the downtown core will be fully or partially closed and rush hour parking restrictions will be in effect for most of the area to allow priority Olympic bus lines.

Starting this fall, TransLink will also ramp up a campaign to get people to get out of their cars and take transit. Three hundred people have already registered with TransLink to get information on specific venues and options to get there and a paid media campaign will urge businesses to shift working hours, encourage people to work from home, rideshare or take transit.

Hardie said he didn't know the cost of the ad campaign, which will also urge passengers to buy a two-month souvenir pass and buy into the Know Before You Go message, which encourages travellers to factor in the time it's going to take them to reach their destinations.

He added it's important that people factor in the time it will take for security searches at the venues, which could add an hour or two to their travel time.

“Whatever trip you're making it's going to take longer than normal. As we get more information on the logistics, we're going to do some of these calculations [on travel times],” Hardie said. “If you're going to an event, allow this much travel time from your front door to your seat.”

Hardie said the majority of people participating in the Games live close to frequent transit corridors and TransLink will be running extra buses along the priority Olympic routes all day as well as more frequent SkyTrain services to ferry people to and from downtown, BC Place and Canada Hockey Place.

SkyTrain, which now runs about every two to 2.5 minutes on the Expo line and three to five minutes on the Millennium line, will be able to provide service at just under two minute intervals. It will also be extended for another extra hour to 2:15 a.m.

“Because of the flexibility of the system, let's say we have a big hockey game and ceremonies and BC Place. We can reconfigure all the trains they can whisk a lot of people away very quickly,” Hardie said.

“One thing we have to accommodate is sudden change ... we have to basically turn on a dime to make sure the transit capacity is there.”

TransLink is also in negotiations with Surrey shopping centres to about using their parking lots for overflow SkyTrain parking, and the New Westminster parkade, which provided space to commuters during the closure of the Pattullo Bridge earlier this year.

The West Coast Express will also offer six additional trips on weekdays, nine new trips on Saturdays and seven new trips on Sunday, while a third SeaBus will be added. Hardie said another 180 buses will also be on standby for use on overloaded routes.

He expects there shouldn't be a problem providing drivers, as Coast Mountain is recruiting 500 new bus drivers and is looking into luring back some of those drivers who recently retired to work during the Games. It has also put a holiday blackout in place during the Games to ensure drivers are available.

The HandyDart fleet will also be expanded by 30 vehicles and will be available to visitors.

"It's going to be a challenge; public transit has been critical in every Games," Hardie said, adding that bus drivers went on strike in Torino. "It should give people some comfort that we're one of the largest cities to ever host a winter Games. During the Games we would probably be moving passengers similar to Toronto's transit system."

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