

Western Newsletter

Transport Action Canada

Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba & Saskatchewan



Olympic Line Streetcar photo by Matthew Buchanan.

FROM THE EDITOR

By now the Olympic line trams supplied by the city of Brussels are on their way back to Europe. For two months Vancouverites were treated to a modern European style low-floor tram 18 hours per day every 10 minutes. The free service went from Olympic Village Canada Line Station to Granville Island. The service was phenomenally successful with over 500,000 riders in two months. For many people this was their first ex-

perience on a rail vehicle other than SkyTrain and most people were impressed with the smooth quiet vehicles.

During the Olympics TransLink offered extra increased service such as three SeaBus's running on 10 minute headways, rush-hour SkyTrain service all day long, extra buses utilizing special transit-only 'Olympic Lanes' and extra West Coast Express service provided by Canadian Pacific Railway.

Apparently TransLink was paid \$17 million ? by the Vancouver Olympic Committee for the extra services for the two week period. Extrapolating that over a full year would require \$442 million which TransLink doesn't have right now, and the province doesn't want to give them the tools to raise the necessary money such as tolls, vehicle levies, or distance based car insurance. In the meantime, transit surface is back to normal and many Olympic riders are back to their cars. Is the opportunity lost?

M. Buchanan.

EDITOR'S NOTE

A new editor must be found for the Western Newsletter beginning after the next issue. Due to too many other responsibilities I can no longer perform editing duties. Please contact Matthew or Peter if you're interested in being editor. M. Buchanan.

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GOOD NEWS! REGINA'S TRANSIT INVESTMENT PLAN

The Long-awaited Transit Investment Plan (TIP) has been approved by Regina City Council. Based on a 2-year process led by Burnaby-based AECOM, this comprehensive transit review involved widespread and varied public consultations. Regina Transit Administration then analysed AECOM's report and developed an Action Plan for going forward.

Transport Action members are a large part of the very active Regina Citizen's Public Transit Coalition. The Plan lists our Coalition as one of transit's strong partnerships. We have had numerous, helpful meetings with senior staff. We are pleased to see that both consultants and staff were really listening to the concerns we have been clamouring about. Enhanced marketing will focus on attracting "choice riders"- those who are free to choose transit, or not -, while better serving those dependent on transit. More direct and automobile-competitive route networks, linked with small neighbourhood buses, will shorten travel time. Customer information will be greatly improved. Transit will develop stronger partnerships with outside groups, such as the Saskatchewan Transportation (bus) Company, private businesses, school boards, universities and colleges.

Transport Action, through the Coalition, has been advocating persistently for accessibility for persons with disabilities. (The Coalition has 3 active members who are confined to motor-chairs). We recognize the Plan's commitment to 100% low floor bus fleet by 2016, and we know that each new bus will be low-floor. But until all are low-floor, the riders dependent on them still will have extreme problems in traveling and making transfers.

Efficient public transit depends upon compact, smart, urban planning. Transport Action has made many presentations to City Council regarding ever-more sprawling development. We note the consultants' recommendation to "enhance the integration of transit in the land development process" As Regina Transit attempts to serve sprawling development, more challenges are created, sucking resources from basic services. For example, Transit has already introduced service to the new WalMart Supercentre in the new Harbour Landing Development. It is good to provide transit for the 300 WalMart workers as well as customers, but this need shows that sprawl costs. And why is it not WalMart which must pay for the service to its store, as a condition of being allowed to expand to the city fringe?

On the other hand, last March, our Coalition presented City Council with a petition bearing 7,700 signatures, beseeching for transit service on holidays, and more weekend service. (Transit then, with no extra money, did manage to provide extended Sunday service, but at the cost of less frequency and reduced routes.) Although the consultants' report calls for what we wanted, the Action Plan states "additional new services will be introduced as resources allow" - only then.

Despite these cautions, we have confidence that the many new initiatives will give markedly better transit service which is also more efficient and cost-effective. Coalition members have been meeting with federal and provincial politicians, appealing for stable transit funding. The sincere and respectful commitment of transit staff, and the persistence of us, the public, are our best assets.

This Plan is to be brought into being over 10 years. We must keep on reminding council that wise "investment" is for well-being into the future. The unprecedented global crisis we live in demands that we give priority to major investment toward human and planetary well-being. Good public transit is a survival necessity for a smart society. The Plan aims to make "transit the mode of choice for urban mobility" in our city. Wherever we are, and whatever we can do, this is our working goal as members of Transport Action.

Catherine Verrall, Transport Action Prairie President.

BC NEWS BRIEFS

- Issues that Transport Action have been working on include a letter regarding Canadian Pacific's proposed abandonment of the Sicamous to Armstrong branch line sent to the BC government. The Minister of Transport, Judith Reid, replied saying that BC has no policy on purchasing rail rights of way.
- The second Amtrak daily train has been extended until the end of September. We are still waiting for the CBSA's demands of money from Amtrak to be waived and the train will be made permanent. Transport Action BC must press the BC government to make infrastructure investments to support this service.
- The Broadway corridor rapid transit workshops put on by the City of Vancouver and TransLink are continuing. Transport Action BC members are attending the workshops to learn more and contribute.

Matthew Buchanan.

WINNIPEG BUSWAY PROGRESS

When I first reported on this, I remarked that at several places on the Phase 1 route, there just wouldn't be sufficient room for the busway and for regular traffic lanes. Well, I was right, but the problem has been solved in the most obvious fashion - which was the last one I expected.

The route is closely beside the CN Rivers Sub. mainline for most of its length, until it dives under the railway and surfaces on the other side to proceed to Jubilee Avenue. For the southbound portion, the City appears to have purchased or pre-empted sufficient space from the railway right-of-way to accommodate the busway, having made some rather small changes in the traffic lanes as well. The first portion, which runs from Main Street along Stradbroke Avenue to Donald Street, has been fitted in to the landscape by shaving many feet from the CN embankment (which is on a slight uphill grade for the distance). It's still tight but sufficient. This has resulted in the removal of a treed strip between the road and the railway; a pity but it does offer a unique viewpoint for photos. Very large steel walls have been driven into the ground to support what's left of the sloping side of the embankment. So construction is proceeding properly to all appearances.

However, the inevitable accompaniment of any construction project - cost overrun - has already begun to occur. The city had set aside \$12.7 million to acquire land around the underground portion, but this has already increased to \$18.2 million. The report doesn't say if more money will be needed. It does say that the overrun will come from other parts of the budget for the project. Finally, it notes that funding for Phase II of the busway has not been secured.

CALGARY COINCIDENCES

It's been announced that two major developments near Calgary will be undertaken: both are projects on the order of \$100 million. One is a Walmart distribution centre; the other is a CN intermodal yard and industrial park. It is also the case that CN wants to abandon the rail line between Saskatoon and Calgary, leaving themselves dependent on the Edmonton-Calgary line. The recent potash train derailment near Rivers, MB, demonstrates the urgent need for alternate routes. In Manitoba, CN was able

to reroute its trains. Will there be an alternate route if the Calgary-Edmonton line is closed? If not, one has to wonder about the wisdom of either decision.

WINNIPEG MAYOR KATZ GOES BIG-TIME FOR LRT

A Winnipeg Free Press article stated (Feb 22) that Mr. Katz plans to try to persuade the provincial and federal governments to help fund a light-rail rapid transit system for Winnipeg. He envisages four routes from the outskirts to the centre of the city, and if funding is available, a line to the airport. (A transportation study is currently being prepared by city planners - as if it hasn't already been studied to death). This would cost over \$600 million; an interesting amount when compared to the current busway plan, which will cost \$327 million for a mere nine kilometers; no funding for the second phase is in the city's long-term capital plan. The provincial government is not opposed to the idea, says Transportation Minister Ashton, but feels that LRT should wait on the completion of Phase 2 of the BRT, then "over the next 10, 20, or 30 years there may be discussion about light rail". The province has committed funding for both phases of the BRT. Federal Minister Toews stands with the city on the project, but says that changes in focus have happened from time to time, which have caused delays in commitments.

Katz' actions with regard to rapid transit:

2004 (when he became the mayor) - cancelled previous Mayor Glen Murray's \$50 million BRT plan

2005 - Katz got the federal government to redirect \$43 million from transit to recreation facilities.

2008 - initial funding for transit in Manitoba is announced by the federal government; and the Winnipeg BRT plan is announced. It is very similar to Mayor Murray's but has completely separated bus lanes, which makes it so much more expensive.

2009 - Katz publicly muses about an LRT system.

2010 - today - announces LRT hopes.

BOUNDARY TRAILS SHORT-LINE SHOWS PROMISE

Once there were elevators and brick factories here, but folks had all but given up hope of any commercial development returning to the tiny community of Darlingford, MB. So the appearance of six spanking new hopper bins on the rail line last year was something of a turnaround. They represented the \$300,000 station grounds built to service the new farmer-owned Boundary Trail Railway Company.

It's the first significant investment here in at least 20 years, says Kim Taylor reeve of the Rural Municipality of Pembina. It's the kind of thing rural reeves definitely like to see. He's not sure how much tax revenue this will ultimately generate in the years ahead. But it's significant. "It certainly increases the tax base. And not only that, but it's the fact that this is generating economic activity in the local area. That's the big thing."

Last year, Pembina municipality turned over \$400,000 in abandonment fees received from CP for its portion of the rail line abandoned in a put-your-money-where-your-mouth-is vote of support. "There's things that can come out of this that we can't even foresee right now," Taylor says. The BTRC became the proud new owner last spring of 23 miles of track, formerly owned by CP between Morden and Binney corner, three miles west of Manitou. It also acquired 33 miles of abandoned right-of-way running beyond Binney through the Pembina Valley to Holmfield just east of Killarney. The farmer-owned company has plans to build two more station grounds similar to Darlingford this year, including one at Manitou and the other at Binney. They've stressed from the start that the wealth created through operating a railway has spinoff benefits to rural communities, Kevin Friesen, BTRC president and Manitou-area farmer, told a Southwest Farm Women's Ag Days seminar

last week. An economic impact study done in advance of purchasing the line showed a potential \$5-million advantage, based on \$1,000 saved per loaded producer car, at 500 cars shipped per annum.

But the BTRC has a long way to go before it's a rural success story. Just six months into operations, their biggest challenge remains convincing more farmers of the advantages of loading producer cars, Friesen said. They also continue to emphasize that the farmer-owned rail line is for all farmers needing to ship grain, not just BTRC shareholders.

Peter Lacey (Manitoba Co-operator 2010/01/28)

EDITORIAL - PETER LACEY

One of my ongoing projects is discovering ways that we - whoever "we" are - can make simple changes in our lifestyle which won't affect it negatively but which will cut down on the use of fossil fuels in sufficient quantities to make a difference. One of my pieces was published in "Transport Action": its suggestion was to use electrical lawn and garden appliances instead of gasoline-powered ones. I have just read an article which describes an equally straightforward action which has quite staggering consequences if everybody does it.

The article is entitled "Adding up the real cost of a doughnut"; it's by Graeme Fletcher and is published by Canwest News Service. It's about the to-everyone-else irritating habit of lining up in one's car at the coffee shop and the gasoline consumption thus incurred. In particular, the cost of idling in line is quite astonishing.

Mr. Fletcher goes into some detail on the reasons people use to justify idling rather than shutting off and going into the store, and why they don't stand up (assuming modern, efficient engines. If the car isn't modern the figures are much more appalling). The most common one is that it takes less fuel to idle than to restart the car. Not so: idling for just ten seconds uses more fuel than

restarting! Then, it's thought that too much starting reduces the life expectancy of the battery and starter motor. Possibly if one started the car 100 times an hour for weeks at a time this would be true; but idling does more damage to internal engine components than starting can ever do. People say that cars are much more efficient than they used to be, and that pollution is therefore no longer important. True, partly: hydrocarbon (unburnt fuel), carbon monoxide, and nitrous oxide emissions have all dropped over 90% from 1980 levels. But the amount of carbon dioxide produced has not changed, and cannot be reduced: each litre of fuel burned produces about 2.5 kilograms of carbon dioxide. A more subtle argument is that the catalytic converter doesn't work while the engine is being started, so that idling produces less emissions. It apparently takes 25 minutes for the converter to cool down to ineffective temperatures (and they are often mounted near the exhaust these days to keep them warmer), which under normal circumstances is far more time than it takes to walk in and buy.

Nice facts: but not nearly as convincing as the money arguments. Idling in line for just five minutes consumes enough fuel to drive four kilometres. Over a year, that amounts to 51 litres of gas simply wasted. Extended to the whole country, if the estimated 9,300,000 drivers all idle 5 minutes a day (at Tim's or elsewhere; let's be fair - in normal traffic all of us have probably no choice but to idle

five or more minutes a day, so we're talking about "voluntary" idling) for a year, that wastes the staggering total of 1,309,688 litres of gas a year! It's likely that 5 minutes is a rather low daily time, so the figures must be adjusted upwards accordingly. It's bad enough at the low figure; that's 3,274,220 kilograms of carbon dioxide added to the atmosphere every year. And we're talking anything from \$51 and up just to pay for this! Who wants to pay the gas companies one red cent more than we have to? Considering that the number of vehicles on the road is expected to keep on increasing over the next few years, all these numbers will increase.

So the argument seems pretty solid that it's better for the environment and your pocketbook to park and grab. The effort involved in walking to and from the store might even consume enough calories to offset the sugar!

It's a pity to have to note that the author then negates his own thesis by suggesting a \$1 surcharge per Tim's visit "to buy the carbon credits needed to offset the pollution their customers spew needlessly". Carbon credits are merely accounting games that will do nothing to reduce the carbon dioxide in the air.

Tim's patrons! Do your bit for a greener planet: park, don't idle! (Or - heresy - walk to Tim's!)

Peter Lacey - Manitoba

beach train in the thirties

train's coming across the end of the lake
 down the cutbank i slide
 join the crowd on the platform
 past boatsheds she rumbles
 creaks to a stop at the red station house
 steam engine tender mail car then baggage
 passenger cars far as the eye can see
 out comes mail wire baskets of milk packed in ice
 boxes of bread pork 'n beans mushroom soup
 long rolls of bologna piles of wood pails of paint
 chattering passengers straggle beside tracks
 steam hisses powerful drive bars groan
 gigantic wheels inch ahead then gather speed
 triumphant the engineer waves to the crowd
 with a whistle and clickety clack the train's gone

*written for Transport Action
 by Saskatchewan poet,
 June Mitchell
 (another poem in next issue)*

VICTORIA WORKING GROUP

I am interested in working with a small group of people here in Greater Victoria to improve existing BC Transit bus service in Victoria. The current service is basic at best, and too often, pitiful. Only those who have no other option take transit here. My intention is to work to improve transit so that it is a desirable, competitive and viable transportation option for more people.

Over the last year, I have been talking to transportation-interested people about improving BC Transit service, doing research, documenting, and drafting ideas.

I would now like to approach BC Transit as Transport Action Canada - Victoria, starting with two basic proposals: a) for BC Transit to set up a citizen liaison committee as part of BC Transit's Victoria Regional Transit Commission, and b) to display basic bus information at every bus stop, including route numbers, schedules and small route maps [currently many bus stops simply say Bus Stop and have no other information].

I'll send a draft of the letter/presentation of the above proposals to the Transport Action BC board for input and approval before any action.

If you have any general ideas and input at this point, I'd be happy to hear.

Rob Thompson, Victoria

To get in touch with Rob, contact Matthew Buchanan (see back page)

EDMONTON LRT PLANS

The present Light Rail Vehicles in Edmonton use high platforms at the stations. When Edmonton opened its first Light Rail line in 1978,

high platform vehicles were the only ones available. Calgary also has high platforms, but San Diego did not, instead installing lifts on the vehicles. San Diego is now going to low level vehicles. Portland also started out with high level vehicles and using lifts. It now uses low level vehicles, sometimes paired in the peak with a high level vehicle, which have steps.

Edmonton will continue to use high level platforms on its core lines, namely:

LRT 1 - the North-East to Health Science Centre and

LRT 2 - NAIT to Heritage, The NAIT line may in the future link to St. Albert.

Both these lines go through the tunnel downtown and the University

Council has now approved the Stoney Plain Road alignment for a Light Rail Line to West Edmonton via Jasper, Meadowlark, West Edmonton Mall finishing at a Park-and-Ride lot on the Ring Road. It will use Low Floor Light Rail vehicles. Initially It will terminate at Grant McEwan College, but later it will be extended through downtown on 102/102A Avenue on the surface and have an interchange at Churchill Station. The plan is to continue that line to Mill Woods. The ultimate plan is to have alternate trains go to the University, Health Science and then along Whyte Avenue, eventually maybe go to Sherwood Park.

John Bakker



Rendering of proposed low floor LRT (City of Edmonton)

BOOK REVIEWS

RAILWAY BY THE BAY

by: Barry Sanford

Review by John Bakker

During the Christmas Holidays I had the pleasure of reading Barry Sanford's latest book "Railway by the Bay". This book gives a 100 year history of trains at White Rock, Crescent Beach and Ocean Park. Barry Sanford has a very nice writing style and includes many anecdotes in his book. However to me it is also very relevant when there is talk about High Speed Trains between Seattle and Vancouver. The railway along the Bay replaced a line that went roughly where some now want to build this High Speed alignment. The book explains why that would be difficult.

The railway opened in March 1909 and made the superlative beaches of Semiahmoo Bay easily accessible. Soon scores of beach-goers arrived with almost every passing train. In response the communities of White Rock, Crescent Beach and Ocean Beach sprang up and prospered. But later the automobile usurped the passenger train and residents began to resent, even curse, the railway tracks on their door steps. No longer viewed as providing access to the beach, the tracks were seen as impeding access.

With the occasional death of a beach goer after being struck by a train, demands grew to get of the railway. No section of railway track of comparable length in British Columbia has generated such furious and sustained controversy.

It is a good read and I highly recommend it. The book also shows the importance of the New Westminster railway bridge replacement.

Members should mail a cheque for \$45 made out to "National Railway Historical Society" and mail it to the author Barrie Sanford, Box 3088, Merritt, BC V1K 1B8. Ordering using the Society's Barry will send off the book, duly autographed, the day after receiving the order. If members want any special message in the book, then write that with the order.

CHINA'S GREAT TRAIN

BEIJING'S DRIVE WEST AND THE CAMPAIGN TO REMAKE TIBET

by: Abraham Lustgarten

Review by: Matthew Buchanan

This book is about the construction of the railway from Golmud in north west China across the Tibetan plateau to Lhasa the capital of Tibet. It isn't so much about the technical aspects of how they built the railway across the highest mountains and passes of the world, but about the politics of how the line was built and the affect that it had on the Tibetan people. This railway is now the highest in the world and had many technical challenges to overcome such as the crossing of a very large but fragile permafrost region and interviews many of the people involved in the planning and construction.

A lot of the book focuses on the central government's plan to bring the Tibet Autonomous Region into the fold of the rest of China. Tibet has long been isolated from the rest of the world due to it's harsh geography which limited easy road and railway construction. It is isolated by mountains on all sides.

It was quite sad to read about how the Tibetan people were promised great things by the Chinese government such as lower prices, easy access to the rest of China, and economic opportunity. Many of the Tibetans weren't opposed to the new railway, but were disappointed in the end results as they saw their own culture changing and traditional way or life marginalized. What it did instead was prompt a large migration of people and modern development, while most of the economic benefits went to the new Chinese immigrants leaving the Tibetans marginalized in their own land.

It was a fascinating but slightly sad book, well written and balanced with many viewpoints.

Transport Action Prairie
 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
 Saturday May 8, Regina, SK
 Knox-Metropolitan Church, 2340 Victoria Ave.
 (corner of Lorne St.)

2 p.m. Annual Meeting
 2:30 to 4:30
 Speakers: to be announced...
 THEMES

1. Update on the Last Mountain Railway
 2. Global Transportation Hub (near Regina)
- We hope that you can come. This is a chance to get to know each other, to share ideas and elect our Prairie executive. Please RSVP to Catherine at 569-7699 or cv.transprairie@yahoo.ca

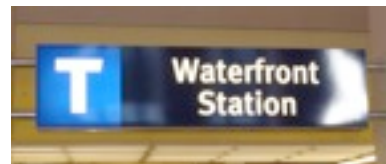


*Clockwise from right:
 Gouda Leiden Tram, built in 2003 are for sale. Could they be used on Olympic Line? (From Modern Railways Mar, 2010)
 New wayfinding signage at Waterfront Station. (M. Buchanan)
 Bombardier Flexity Streetcar on the Olympic Line (M. Buchanan)*

Transport Action British Columbia (Society)
 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
 Tuesday April 20, Vancouver BC
 Firehall Library, 1455 West 10th Ave

18:00 (6PM) AGM
 18:30 Regular Meeting

We hope that you can come to vote for your 2010 executive. Positions are: President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer.
 Please RSVP to bc@transport-action.ca or call Matthew at 604-761-6144



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“Transport Action represents the interests of consumers or users of public transport services in Canada and is involved with a variety of transport issues.”

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