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CHAIR

To: GVTA Board of Directors

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From: Glen Leicester, Vice-President, Planning

DIRECTORS

Date: February 23, 2007

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**Subject: 2006 Transit Ridership**

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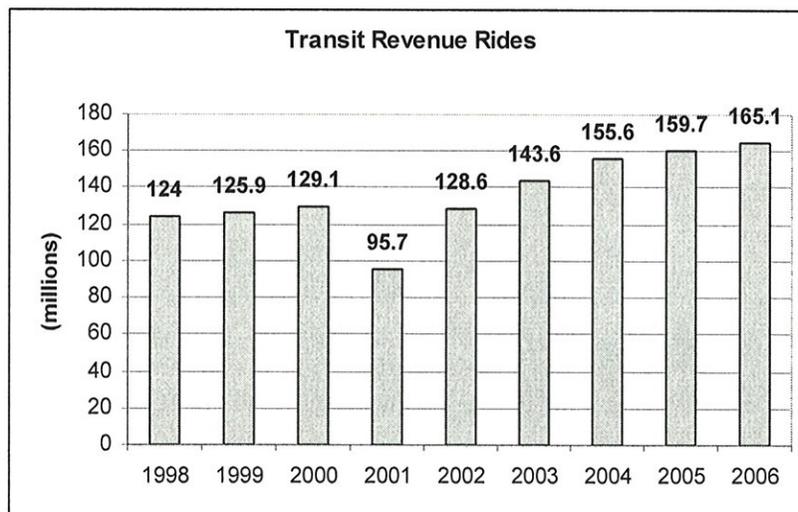
## PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of TransLink's transit ridership during 2006.

## BACKGROUND

TransLink estimates and reports the number of customer trips, or revenue rides, taken on its transit services every month. Ridership is measured separately for each of the main transit modes: bus, SeaBus, SkyTrain and West Coast Express. The ridership figures are continually compared to previous years and to the projections for the current year to identify key trends and the actual performance versus budget.

The following chart shows historical trends in transit ridership since the formation of the GVTA in 1999.



Transit ridership reached 165 million in 2006, an increase of 33% since 1998, the last year under BC Transit. Over the same time period, the average number of annual transit trips made by each Greater Vancouver resident increased from 62.6 to 75.7, a gain of 21%. This trend shows that the significant investments in the transit system made over the past seven years have succeeded in attracting the region's residents to use transit more frequently.

Following a period of flat ridership in 2001-2002 due partly to the impacts of the four-month service disruption in 2001, ridership rebounded strongly in 2003 and 2004, with increases of 11.7% and 8.3% respectively. This growth resulted in large part from the opening of the Millennium SkyTrain Line in August 2002, increased capacity on the Expo Line, introduction of the Vancity U-Pass Program at UBC and SFU in the fall of 2003, introduction of new and improved rapid bus services (B-Lines), improvements to other bus services, and an increase in the proportion of customers using monthly passes as a result of the policy change in 2002 to build more frequent use. Ridership increased more slowly in 2005, by 2.6%, as a transit fare increase introduced in January 2005 had a short-term dampening effect on ridership growth that partly offset the positive impact of bus service expansion introduced late in the year.

It was expected that 2006 ridership growth would be driven mainly by bus service expansion introduced in the fall of 2005, and by a further 5% expansion in bus service of 200,000 annual service hours to be introduced mostly in the fall of 2006. The forecast also reflected regional population and employment growth, and the combined impact of transit fares being frozen in 2006 and the expected continuation of higher gasoline prices, making transit a more economical alternative to driving.

## DISCUSSION

The following table compares ridership levels by transit mode in 2006 with 2005, and with the 2006 budget forecasts. The key trends in ridership overall and for each mode are described below.

<b>Ridership Comparison</b> (Revenue Passengers in Millions)					
	2005	2006 Budget	2006 Actual	% Change 2006 vs. 2005	% Difference 2006 Actual vs. Budget
Bus <sup>1</sup>	117.03	120.90	119.91	2.5%	-0.8%
SkyTrain	38.15	38.32	40.37	5.8%	5.3%
SeaBus	2.65	2.67	2.73	3.1%	2.2%
West Coast Express	1.89	1.91	2.06	8.6%	7.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>159.72</b>	<b>163.80</b>	<b>165.07</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>

<sup>1</sup> Bus includes all conventional bus service (operated by Coast Mountain Bus Co. and West Vancouver Blue Bus) and Community Shuttle services

## **Transit System**

Transit system ridership increased by 3.4% in 2006 to 165.1 million rides, a level 0.8% above the original budget forecast.

Ridership growth was strong in the first half of the year (4.3%), before slowing during the second half to 2.4%. Poor weather in November and December including disruptions to bus and SkyTrain service contributed to a 3% ridership decrease in December. The moderate ridership growth pattern is attributed to a combination of factors including:

- New ridership attracted by bus service expansion introduced in the latter half of 2005, and further service improvements in 2006. Overall, bus service was expanded by 5% in 2006, the highest increase since TransLink came into being;
- A further increase in the proportion of customers buying monthly passes, and using them to make more frequent transit trips. In 2006, customers purchased 9.9% more monthly passes than in 2005. The new federal tax credit for transit passes that took effect in July 2006 appears to be contributing to the increase in pass usage and ridership growth;
- A strong Greater Vancouver economy in the past year, with 3.0% growth in regional employment; and
- Higher gasoline prices compared to 2005 during most of the year. With the exception of September and October, in 2006 gasoline prices in the Vancouver region were higher compared to the same period in 2005, peaking at \$1.20 per litre in May. TransLink's ongoing Performance Scorecard Survey of customers provides evidence that changes in gas prices have caused some residents to switch between car trips and using transit. In the first half of 2006 when gas prices were highest, 15% of transit customers surveyed mentioned gas prices as a reason for using transit, up from 13% in the first half of 2005. However, in the second half of 2006 when gas prices moderated, the proportion of customers citing these prices as a reason for using transit decreased to 13% from 18% in the last half of 2005.

## **Bus**

Ridership on bus services was up by 2.5% in 2006, slightly below budget by 0.8%. The moderate ridership growth is attributed in large part to new customers attracted by region-wide bus service improvements implemented in the second half of 2005 and in 2006 (mostly in September and December). These included more frequent service on major bus corridors to improve passenger capacity, improvements to cross-town services, new and improved regional connector routes, new Community Shuttle services in nine areas, and improvements to existing Community Shuttle services. The largest percentage bus ridership increases were observed in the growing South of Fraser area and Northeast Sector.

The small shortfall in bus ridership relative to the budget target was mainly due to the impacts of poor weather in November and December, which resulted in reduced usage due to disruptions to bus service across the region including trolley routes in Vancouver, and in other areas such as Surrey-Langley and the North Shore. In December bus ridership declined by 4%, bringing down the annual growth rate by approximately 0.6%.

### **SkyTrain**

SkyTrain ridership grew by 5.8% in 2006, above the target in the budget by 5.3%. In the first half of the year, ridership growth was 7.9%, but it slowed to 3.9% in the second half, due mainly to reductions in gas prices. Weather related service disruptions in December led to weaker ridership growth of 1.9%. The strong ridership growth in 2006 is attributed in part to economic growth in SkyTrain's service area, combined with the higher gas prices, which tend to encourage longer distance trips to switch to transit. The ridership increase was achieved even though SkyTrain service levels in 2006 remained essentially the same as in 2005. The Scott Road Park and Ride lot in Surrey has seen strong growth in usage and now is at capacity on most days.

Ridership has been growing most rapidly on the Millennium Line, as new development is taking place around several stations including Gilmore and Brentwood Town Centre in Burnaby. During rush hours on the Expo Line, trains between Broadway Station and downtown Vancouver are now operating with full passenger loads in the peak direction of travel. While this is expected to limit further ridership growth in peak periods in the peak travel directions until 34 new SkyTrain cars are put in service in 2009, ridership is expected to continue increasing during off-peak times, in the reverse peak direction of travel during peak periods, and on the outer sections of the line including the Millennium Line where there is still capacity available.

### **SeaBus**

SeaBus ridership was up 3.1% in 2006, or 2.2% above budget. Most of the ridership growth occurred in the first half of the year, partly attributed to higher gas prices making SeaBus a more economical alternative for travel across Burrard Inlet. Increased tourist volumes in Greater Vancouver (up 1.2% over 2005) and population growth in Lower Lonsdale have contributed to SeaBus ridership exceeding targets.

### **West Coast Express**

Ridership on West Coast Express was up by 8.6% in 2006, and was 7.9% above the budget target. This strong ridership growth is attributed mainly to higher gas prices, with more commuters in Mission, Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows and the Northeast Sector finding West Coast Express to be an economical alternative to driving for long distance trips. A 2.1% increase in train service in 2006, through the addition of one passenger car to a train in the peak shoulder period, also contributed to the increase in ridership. West

Coast Express park and ride lots are now operating at or near capacity during rush hours. About 50% of West Coast Express customers drive to a station.

### **2007 Transit System Ridership Forecast**

In the 2007 Transportation Plan approved by the Board in October 2006, TransLink projected 173.2 million transit rides in 2007 – an increase of 4.9% over the 2006 level. It is expected that much of this new ridership will be generated by the large increase in bus service capacity introduced in late 2006 and planned for introduction later in 2007.

### **CONCLUSION**

Following modest growth of 2.6% in 2005, TransLink's ridership growth improved to 3.4% during 2006, exceeding the budget target by 0.8%. Ridership growth was strongest in the first half of the year, as new riders were attracted by bus service improvements introduced in the latter half of 2005, higher gas prices caused more residents to switch trips from car to transit, and strong regional economic growth generated increased transit demand. Ridership continued to grow in the second half of the year for the above reasons, but poor weather in late November and December resulted in transit service disruptions and a temporary drop in ridership. Overall year-to-year ridership increased on all transit modes – bus, SeaBus, SkyTrain and West Coast Express. The highest ridership growth occurred on West Coast Express and SkyTrain, with bus ridership growing more slowly.

Staff will continue to monitor ridership levels in 2007 and will report to the Board on key trends.