To: GVTA Board of Directors
From: Pat Jacobsen, Chief Executive Officer
Date: December 4, 2007
Subject: TransLink Performance History

PURPOSE

Since its inception on April 1, 1999, TransLink has grown from a $400 million annual operation, managing about $100 million in modest capital projects, to a $900 million annual operation managing approximately $4 billion in capital projects. The evolution of TransLink has occurred at a rapid pace and it is the purpose of this information report to set out the highlights of this transformation.

BACKGROUND

Origins of The Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority (TransLink)

The Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Act (GVTA Act), which was passed into law by the Province in July 1998, was the foundation of a new and visionary model for regional transportation planning. The GVTA Act created a new entity, the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority (which became known publicly as “TransLink”), with a broad mandate and funding agreement—each of which was unprecedented in North America for a regional transportation agency.

Where transportation planning within the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD, now known as Metro Vancouver) had largely been a provincial matter with responsibilities diffused among a number of agencies, TransLink would instead provide the region with a more direct, multi-modal approach to achieve more integrated solutions for its transportation challenges. Responsibility for a network of major regional roads (excluding provincial highways and structures), the public transit system, implementation of transportation demand management programs and the control of vehicle emissions within Greater Vancouver were transferred to the new authority.
The *GVTA Act* established a governance model that gave oversight of the new authority to the region while maintaining the opportunity for provincial input. The TransLink Board of Directors would consist of 12 municipal officials appointed by the GVRD Board, plus three members of the provincial legislative assembly appointed by the Province.

To fund TransLink’s operations, the legislation provided access to a number of dedicated revenue sources, including transit fares, property tax, a portion of the provincial sales tax on regional fuel sales, the transit levy via Hydro billings, plus the ability to raise additional funds through other measures including parking site tax, cost recovery tolls on designated projects and a levy on motor vehicles. The GVRD Board was given ratification authority over any revenue measure approved by the TransLink Board that would involve a new tax, levy or toll, or a rate increase to any existing tax or levy.

TransLink began its official operations on April 1, 1999. While TransLink would oversee the integrated planning of the transit network as a whole, its operating subsidiary companies—Coast Mountain Bus Company (buses & SeaBus), BC Rapid Transit Company (SkyTrain) and West Coast Express (commuter rail)—assumed day-to-day operations of most of Greater Vancouver’s conventional transit network. Responsibilities for contracted transit services—such as the West Vancouver Blue Buses and the HandyDART custom transit system—were also transferred to TransLink on that date, as was administration of the AirCare vehicle emissions reductions program within the Greater Vancouver region (to the TransLink subsidiary, Pacific Vehicle Testing Technologies).

Also on April 1, 1999, TransLink became responsible for the new 1,900 kilometre Major Road Network (MRN), consisting of regionally significant roads owned by the local municipalities plus three TransLink-owned bridges (Knight Street, Pattullo and Westham Island) and TransLink’s Albion Ferry service between Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows and Langley/Surrey. Coordination of the MRN, provision of funding for operations, maintenance and rehabilitation of MRN roads and bridges, major capital project funding, and provision of minor capital funding for MRN cost-sharing projects with municipalities formed TransLink’s core responsibilities for regional roads.

**Transition to new governance model**

In 2006, BC’s Minister of Transportation commissioned a three-member panel to review TransLink’s mandate, financing and governance. The panel’s recommendations were received in March 2007 and formed the basis for provincial legislation. Bill 43, known as the *Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Amendment Act* was passed into law by the provincial legislature on November 29, 2007. Its passage sets the course for a new era for TransLink—building on the foundation of successes from the past nine years.
The organization’s legal name is now South Coast British Columbia Transportation Authority. This change reflects the opportunity for non-Metro Vancouver municipalities, north to Pemberton and east to Hope to join TransLink’s service area if they so choose.

TransLink’s basic responsibilities will remain intact. It will continue to plan, build, fund and operate the Major Road Network, transit system and other components of regional transportation.

DISCUSSION

Highlights of TransLink’s accomplishments

Transportation Planning

The region’s Transport 2021 strategy, drafted in the 1990s, had offered a vision for the future of the local transportation network. TransLink’s Strategic Transportation Plan (STP), released in 2000, was the first document to detail a comprehensive regional transportation blueprint including specific projects, costing and revenue-generating measures in an effort to implement the regional vision. The STP also recognized the importance of goods movement and other economic factors not contained in previous strategies. The subsequent 10-Year Outlook for 2004 to 2013 comprised a long-range outlook and a detailed three-year plan. The 2005 to 2007 STP included financial provisions to fund transportation improvements with a balance of general taxation and user pay measures.

TransLink introduced rolling five-year Area Transit Plans for the seven sub-regional areas to ensure that transit planning would be carried within each community. As well, the rapidly growing South of Fraser area has been the subject of a two-year study and public consultation process to create a detailed 25-year vision for the improvement of transit services in Surrey, Langley, Delta and White Rock.

Roads & Bridges

Since its inception, TransLink has invested more than $500 million dollars into regional roads. Of this total, approximately $170 million has been provided to municipalities for operation/maintenance/rehabilitation of the Major Road Network (MRN)—a 2,300 lane-kilometre system of key arterial roads. TransLink has also invested a further $130 million in MRN minor capital funding to cost-share nearly 400 road improvement projects such as left-turn lanes, improved lighting, traffic and pedestrian signal improvements at intersections; lane widening, provision of bike lanes, and more.
TransLink has also allocated an average of $35 million annually since 2000 for Major Road Capital projects, leveraging these funds to seek cost-sharing arrangements with municipal or senior governments. Completed major capital projects that are now in operation include:

- 204 Street Overpass—a four-lane railway grade separation in the City of Langley that accommodates cyclists and pedestrians above the Langley Bypass and railway tracks, opened in May 2007;
- David Avenue Connector—a two-kilometre, four-lane arterial road with bridges over Coquitlam River and Hyde Creek between Pipeline Road and Coast Meridian Road in Coquitlam, opened in August 2006; and
- Dollarton Bridge Replacement Project—opened in October 2005, a new four-lane structure that replaced an aging two-lane crossing across the Seymour River in the District of North Vancouver, with sidewalks for pedestrians and cyclists plus associated roadworks.

Several other major road projects are in the design phase or under construction. The largest of these is the Golden Ears Bridge, a tolled crossing that will span the Fraser River to connect Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows with Surrey/Langley, scheduled to open in 2009. The new crossing will significantly reduce travel times for commuters and goods movers.

TransLink continues to pursue agreements with senior governments for other priority road projects such as the North Fraser Perimeter Road Project, which proposes improvements on existing roads and bridges to provide an efficient, continuous route from New Westminster to Maple Ridge.

TransLink took over responsibility for the regional transit system after a decade that saw virtually no expansion of services. Since 1999, transit services have been improved significantly, with a 32 per cent increase in annual service hours, the introduction of many new routes and modes of service, and increased frequency of service on routes throughout the region.

Significant service improvements include:

- Expansion of the bus fleet to more than 1400 vehicles in 2007, from 1092 in 1999;
- Modernization of the bus fleet—full replacement of the 223-vehicle electric trolley fleet (to be complete in 2008) plus hundreds of new conventional buses;
- Introduction of three limited stop “B-Line” express bus services on major corridors in Vancouver, Richmond and Coquitlam;
- Introduction of smaller, neighbourhood-friendly Community Shuttle vehicles to provide more cost-effective transit service in areas where demand does not justify larger conventional buses;
• Integration of the SkyTrain Millennium Line (built by the Province, opened for full operation in 2002) with pre-existing transit services;
• Introduction in 2003 of the Vancity U-Pass program at UBC and SFU, resulting in a ridership increase of more than 60 per cent at the two universities;
• Deployment in 2005 of the GVTA Police Service to enhance system security and customer safety—the first transit police service in Canada;
• Construction of Canada Line rapid transit connecting Richmond, Vancouver International Airport and Vancouver (scheduled to open in fall 2009);
• Introduction of West Coast Express TrainBus service (plus a new weekend TrainBus service effective January 5, 2008);
• Approval of a third SeaBus vessel (scheduled to begin service in fall 2009);
• Planning of the Evergreen Line between Lougheed Town Centre and Coquitlam Town Centre;
• Partnership with the provincial Gateway program to develop a future Highway 1 bus system across an expanded Port Mann Bridge; and
• Improvements to transit accessibility—the bus fleet will be fully accessible to wheelchairs and other mobility aids by 2008; several SkyTrain stations have been improved in terms of safety and access; the new Access Transit office provides ongoing resources to respond to user’s feedback and continue making transit infrastructure more accessible to all passengers; HandyDART service hours will increase by 30 per cent over the next three years.

More than 165 million revenue passengers travelled on TransLink’s conventional transit system in 2006, an increase of 32 per cent from 1999.

*Promoting green transportation*

TransLink, through its OnBoard program and other initiatives, encourages cycling, walking, transit, vanpooling and carpooling as environmentally friendly, cost-effective commuting options to single-occupancy vehicle use. These efforts help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and decrease the demand pressures (and resulting congestion) on local roads.

In 1999, TransLink’s Employer Pass Program—which provides a 15 per cent discount toward annual transit passes for employees of participating companies—had 3,600 subscribers from 55 organizations. Through the efforts on OnBoard, those numbers have now quadrupled, with more than 15,000 subscribers from 250 organizations.

TransLink has made a substantial financial contribution toward regional cycling infrastructure. Combined with municipal contributions, more than $50 million has been invested to improve cycling infrastructure and bike access to transit. In 1999, only 40 per cent of the bus fleet was equipped with bike-racks; that figure now exceeds 90 per cent. Bicycle lockers are available at many SkyTrain stations. TransLink is leading the development of the Central Valley Greenway, a traffic-separated active transit route between downtown New Westminster and downtown Vancouver.
The Canada Line project includes a new bicycle-and-pedestrian bridge over the Fraser River between Vancouver and Richmond.

TransLink has also partnered successfully with Jack Bell Rideshare, providing funding to assist Rideshare’s expansion and marketing of its vanpooling and carpooling programs.

**Air Quality & Environment**

The regional AirCare emissions testing program for light duty vehicles was revised in 2006 to reduce the frequency of testing for newer vehicles in recognition of the cleaner technology of today’s engines. Nonetheless, it is estimated that AirCare was responsible for a reduction of approximately 30 per cent in light-duty vehicle emissions during 2006, compared to the base year 1992 when the program was introduced.

TransLink has also developed its own internal policies for emissions control and environmental stewardship. TransLink has reduced the average emissions per vehicle of its own bus fleet through the purchase and operation of compressed natural gas buses and clean-diesel buses, to be joined by electric-diesel hybrid buses in 2008.

Increased transit ridership, along with the provision of cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, also contribute to improved air quality by reducing single-occupancy vehicle dependence.

TransLink won the Overall Sustainability Award in 2006 from the Fraser Basin Council, in recognition of its work with industry and community partners to develop sustainable transportation initiatives.

**Technology & Customer Information**

TransLink’s Intelligent Transportation Systems division has developed the new i-Move.ca web site, which integrates information about construction zones, motor vehicle crash sites, public transit and ferry schedules, cycling networks and conditions at Vancouver International Airport and the Port of Vancouver onto a single real-time outlet.

TransLink has also become the first Canadian transit provider to partner with Google Transit, combining the power and reach of Google Maps technology with TransLink’s own transit scheduling and route data to create another source of online trip-planning information for transit customers, in addition to the trip planner on the TransLink web site. Google Transit information is also compatible with software that makes the information completely accessible to people with visual impairments.

TransLink’s new “Next Bus” text message service allows customers to receive, via their mobile phones, the next six scheduled departure times for any bus route from any stop.
Partnerships with Senior Governments

At TransLink’s inception, the Province of B.C. provided it with funding sources unlike those available to any other transportation authority in Canada. The comprehensive revenue package comprised fuel tax of eight cents per litre for fuel sold in Metro Vancouver (growing to 10 cents by April 1, 2005), sales tax on paid parking, a levy on hydro-electricity (BC Hydro levy) and the potential to levy property taxes.

In 2002, the Province provided a further two cents per litre fuel tax over the initial agreement for an increase in the total annual revenue stream of approximately $44 million. Under the South Coast British Columbia Transportation Authority Act, TransLink has the ability to collect a further three cents per litre gas tax, potentially providing a further $66 million in revenue.

The Province has also contributed $400 million toward the construction of the Canada Line and delivered $34 million to TransLink under the Public Transit Infrastructure Program.

TransLink has worked with other jurisdictions to raise the level of awareness regarding the need for increased funding for transit infrastructure and operations.

The Government of Canada has assisted TransLink through a number of fuel tax revenue transfer programs to assist with transit capital purchases. Through 2014, TransLink could receive a total of almost $800 million of federal gas tax revenues through the federal Strategic Priorities Fund agreement with the province and municipalities to support transit infrastructure.

Additionally, the federal government has contributed $450 million specifically to the Canada Line rapid transit project, plus money for transit security and innovative programs such as the Main Street Showcase. The federal tax credit for monthly transit passes is another substantial benefit for transit customers.

TransLink is a partner in multi-stakeholder federal initiatives such as the Roberts Bank Rail Corridor program that will implement a number of grade separations to contribute to more efficient road and rail operations and enhance the quality of life for residents along the rail corridor. The federal government has committed $75 million to the Roberts Bank initiative.

TransLink and its West Coast Express subsidiary helped to lead a successful effort to enact federal legislation that gives commuter rail operators greater leverage and transparency in negotiations with railways regarding track access.
Finances & Operating Efficiencies

TransLink has been consistently recognized for its strong financial position by bond-rating agencies. In October 2007, both Moody’s and the Dominion Bond Rating service (DBRS) announced that TransLink has maintained its high credit ratings—Aa3 and AA, respectively. The 2006 DBRS Credit Rating Report noted that TransLink has experienced little in the way of cost overruns despite the region’s heated construction market.

The Golden Ears Bridge project, a public-private partnership, has earned recognition and awards nationally and internationally—including Infrastructure Journal’s prestigious “Global Deal of the Year” of 2006—for its innovative financing that has resulted in significant savings to taxpayers.

Since TransLink assumed responsibility for the transit system, operating cost recovery has increased from 51 per cent to 55 per cent—one of the top rates in North America, particularly for a widespread region. Operating subsidiaries have been successful at controlling costs in a number of areas. Coast Mountain Bus Company has reduced its annual costs by $18 million through improved productivity and the use of lower cost Community Shuttle services on routes with lower ridership. West Coast Express has increased its cost recovery to 90 per cent—primarily due to the renegotiation of operating contracts—while increasing service hours by 19 per cent. SkyTrain more than fully recovers its operating costs; at approximately $2 per vehicle kilometre SkyTrain’s operating costs remain significantly lower than other metropolitan rapid-transit systems’ comparable costs.

Employees

TransLink and its subsidiaries now employ approximately 6,000 workers. Coast Mountain Bus Company, which employs about 5,000 people from that total figure, has been recognized by Mediacorp Canada as one of BC’s Top Employers for the second consecutive year, based on factors relating to an organization’s ability to recruit and retain quality employees.

Public Confidence

In a September 2007 random telephone survey of regional residents, 77 per cent said that they had a favourable overall impression of TransLink. Public support has been consistently favourable since 2002 as the organization stabilized, public dissatisfaction over the 2001 transit workers’ strike and failed vehicle levy process subsided, and the pace of service and infrastructure improvements increased.
Overall, is your impression of TransLink very favourable, somewhat favourable, not very favourable or not at all favourable?*

(% very or somewhat favourable)

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CONCLUSION

In its first nine years of operations, TransLink has made significant improvements to the regional transportation network, investing more than $500 million into the region’s Major Road Network, increasing transit service by one-third and expanding and modernizing the bus fleet. TransLink has successfully implemented programs to promote green transportation options and improve air quality and demonstrated leadership on the national stage. The organization has maintained a sound fiscal rating from bond rating agencies through prudent management. A recent survey shows that public confidence in TransLink is high.

The South Coast British Columbia Transportation Authority Act has created a new governance structure and provided greater access to funding that will carry TransLink forward into the future, building on the positive legacy of current and previous directors. The organization’s primary responsibilities will remain intact as it continues to improve the regional transportation network.