

TransLink Public Consultation

Summary

Organization

TransLink (Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority)

Status

Ongoing

Overview

The Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority, or TransLink, is Greater Vancouver's regional transportation provider and regional transportation planning agency. The organization was created by an Act of B.C.'s provincial legislature in 1998. The Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Act included requirements for public consultation for a number of proposed actions, including the assessment of taxes to help fund transit and transportation services (property, parking site area and paid parking sales tax), preparing capital plans and the preparation of all strategic transportation plans.

As an organization, TransLink consults much more consistently, broadly and frequently than the legislation mandates and has undertaken public consultation on a wide variety of transportation planning and transportation projects within the region. Experience, both at TransLink and with other regional and municipal planning agencies, clearly and consistently shows that working with stakeholders and other potentially affected parties through a meaningful consultative process can facilitate wider support and legitimacy for programs, policies and projects. The involvement of stakeholders can also enhance the final outcome and end product, as the experience and expertise of stakeholders and communities can substantively contribute to the optimization of the work. While TransLink estimates that between 0.5 and 1 per cent of a project budget can be spent on public consultation and engagement for a typical large infrastructure project (or between 5 and 10% per cent to a planning-only project), it has resulted in consistently high public support for TransLink's work, as indicated through regular opinion polling the organization conducts.

In December 2006, the TransLink Board adopted the report, Principles for Public Consultation and Community Engagement. It outlines corporate principles for public consultation and community engagement and formally

commits TransLink to integrating public consultation into the planning of all major capital projects, the development of all significant new policies and all major planning processes.

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Resources

- The Principles for Public Consultation and Community Engagement document is available at: www.translink.bc.ca/WhatsNewandBoardMeetings/Board_Reports/2006/20060524.asp
- The provincial enabling legislation, the Great Vancouver Transportation Authority Act, including Part 1, Section 15 of the Act which covers required public consultation is available at: <http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/G/980301.htm>

Community context

The Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) is one of Canada's fastest growing urban regions with a current population of over 2.3 million people. TransLink is the agency responsible for transit services and the major road network across the region's 1,800 square kilometres. While the actual delivery of public transit services takes place through subsidiary companies and contractors and the maintenance and improvement of the major road network is done in partnership with the municipalities, TransLink is responsible for regional transportation planning, administration of service contracts, management of capital projects and public affairs. TransLink also provides security and enforcement services through the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Police

Service who have the full powers of provincial police.

TransLink's transit system carries about 130 million passengers annually, making it Canada's third largest system behind Toronto and Montreal. Ridership is up 24% since 2002 and by as much as 40% in some corridors. Transit's market share has grown from 10% to 12% region-wide since 2001, and today transit carries around 45% of commuters into downtown Vancouver.

Policy context

In 1998, the provincial legislation creating TransLink was passed with the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Act. The Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority, or TransLink, is Greater Vancouver's regional transportation provider and regional transportation planning agency. The organization was created by an Act of B.C.'s provincial legislature in 1998. The Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Act specifies the circumstances under which TransLink is required to undertake consultation, including the assessment of taxes to help fund transit and transportation services (property, parking site area and paid parking sales tax), preparing TransLink's three year capital plans and the preparation of all strategic transportation plans.

Following consultation with member municipalities and other community and business stakeholders, the TransLink Board adopted the report, *Principles for Public Consultation and Community Engagement*, in December 2006. It outlines corporate principles for public consultation and community engagement and formally commits TransLink to integrating public consultation into the planning of all major capital projects, the development of all significant new policies and all major planning processes.



A public open house for the proposed Evergreen light rail transit project in Coquitlam, B.C.

Rationale and objectives

Public consultation effectively allows those most affected to add significant, informed value to the development of an initiative. As an organization, TransLink understands that the policies, programs and projects that it undertakes can profoundly affect the lives and interests of a wide range of stakeholders, from neighbourhoods to transit users to truck drivers to cyclists and to the business community.

Experience, both at TransLink and with other regional and municipal planning agencies, clearly and consistently shows that working with stakeholders and other potentially affected parties through a meaningful consultative process can facilitate wider support and legitimacy for programs, policies and projects. The involvement of stakeholders can also enhance the final outcome and end product, as the experience and expertise of stakeholders and communities can substantively contribute to the optimization of the work.

Actions

TransLink consults on a wide variety of projects including the development of long term transportation strategies, area transit plans, policies for accessible transit and the detailed planning of major capital projects. TransLink provides more conventional public consultation opportunities including the public meetings and open houses on every project undertaken, an interactive website, a transit newsletter available

on buses, SkyTrain and the SeaBus, and regular press advertisements and notices. In addition to these consultation opportunities TransLink also carries out and provides:

- **Public Opinion Research** – Regular public opinion polls are conducted on major projects and to provide input into strategic transportation plans and three year capital plans.
- **Workshops and Charrettes** – TransLink has carried out facilitated design workshops in the development of design guidelines for the Golden Ears Bridge, a new public-private toll bridge over the Fraser River. Highly interactive workshops were also carried out in the development of an accessible transit strategic plan (Access Transit).
- **Council Meetings** – TransLink staff will attend municipal council meetings to provide information on specific major capital projects.
- **Community Leaders Panels** – TransLink assembled a panel of community leaders and champions to review and make recommendations on the technology and alignment of a new traffic separated transit line, the Evergreen Line, in Greater Vancouver's north-east communities.
- **Advisory Committees** – Project/Public Advisory Committees, Municipal Liaison Committees and Municipal Communications and Consultation Advisory Committees have been established from the Cities of Burnaby, Coquitlam, Port Moody and Port Coquitlam for the Evergreen Line Project and for the South of Fraser Area Transit Plan, a major transportation planning project for Greater Vancouver's fast growing cities of Surrey, Langley (District and City), Richmond and Delta.
- **Urban Transportation Forum** – For major planning projects, TransLink convenes stakeholder sessions at the Wosk Centre for Dialogue in Downtown Vancouver, engaging 50 or more people in a large group policy discussion. Typically 80 to 100 people attend these events.

- **Transportation Outlook Roundtables** – A consensus based process used for TransLink's three-year and long range planning processes. The process involves smaller groups of people and agency representatives, who in facilitated sessions walk through the trade-offs and balances needed to be achieved in a final plan.

For TransLink's most recent long-term strategic plan, the organization developed an on-line web exercise called "Building Your Transportation Future," where citizens could use information on the planning options to craft their own proposed plans. Their only constraint was that they had to balance the books and not run a deficit. 12,000 people visited the site, and 4000 people took out user IDs to develop a plan. Of these, 500 plans were completed.

The *Principles for Public Consultation and Community Engagement* policy document outlines corporate principles for public consultation and community engagement at TransLink. The principles it identifies for TransLink's public consultation efforts are outlined below.

1. **Integrate public consultation into all aspects of TransLink's business.** Public consultation will be integrated into the planning of all major capital projects, the development of all significant new policies, and all major planning processes.
2. **Consider both local and regional perspectives.** Where geographically-specific projects have broader implications, perspectives from throughout the region should be sought in addition to local views.
3. **Work with municipal partners.** Public consultation programs will be planned and implemented in cooperation with interested Greater Vancouver Regional District municipalities and other levels of government as appropriate.

4. **Clearly define the parameters of the consultations.** When initiating its public consultation processes, TransLink will define the objectives, scope and parameters for the consultations, noting which matters are subject to dialogue with the public and stakeholders. This process will include estimated timing of any decisions, who the decision makers are and what criteria will be used in guiding these decisions.
5. **Consult in advance of key decisions.** Public consultation will be undertaken well in advance of decisions by the TransLink's Board of Directors on major projects, policies and programs, when options are still open to consideration. The results of the applicable consultation process will be communicated to the TransLink Board and the public for the TransLink Board's consideration of the project, plan or policy, either in a separate report or within a broader report to the TransLink Board.
6. **Be inclusive and accessible, by offering a variety of opportunities for input.** A range of opportunities and information in a variety of formats will be provided for meaningful public input, to ensure the process is appropriately inclusive. Public consultation will be tailored in response to the needs of the public and stakeholders regarding the issue at hand. Activities may include, but will not be limited to, open houses, advisory committees, workshops, public forums, websites, and survey research. A public consultation web page will be identified on the TransLink home page. This web page will clearly state TransLink's principles for public consultation and community engagement and will direct viewers to the appropriate areas of the website where public consultation reports, opportunities for feedback, etc can be accessed.
7. **Ensure participants have the opportunity to provide informed input. Public consultation requires informed**
- participants.** TransLink will ensure sufficiently comprehensive and accurate information in a variety of formats is available to participants in a timely manner, and that opportunities for interaction with TransLink representatives are provided, so questions can be answered as part of the information-sharing process.
8. **Consider public input as advice:** Public input obtained through consultation processes is considered as advice to the GVTA Board of Directors and other decision makers. The Board will use this advice in its decision-making processes, in addition to technical, environmental, social, economic, and financial information, and other considerations deemed appropriate.
9. **Inform participants about the results of the consultation process.** TransLink will report to the public on the results of its consultation processes in a variety of locations and formats, and will demonstrate how public input has been used in its decision-making processes.



A sample of some of TransLink's well-designed public information materials. This pamphlet was designed for a proposed light rail project..

In addition to these principles, the document also provides a useful public consultation toolkit adapted from one developed by the International Association for Public Participation. It provides a summary of techniques to share information, to compile input and provide feedback, and to bring people together.

Results

The benefits of TransLink's ongoing public consultation and engagement activities is reflected in recent public opinion polling and in the organizations who have rallied behind key projects plans and policies.

Recently, the B.C. Trucking Association has come out in support of increased transit investment on key corridors, as they recognize the benefits of improved modal splits and the subsequent improvement of goods movement in the region. The B.C. Automobile Association has also supported TransLink, surveying their members on their use of transit and advocating for expansion of a key Fraser River bridge crossing for improved goods movement and transit.

More recently, TransLink carried out comprehensive community consultation as part of its Urban Transportation Showcase Program Main Street project. Open houses, neighbourhood surveys and meetings with business owners were all carried out to help optimize the location of on-street improvements (e.g., bus bulges, improved pedestrian crossings, public art, etc.).

TransLink also carried out extensive public consultation for its proposed Evergreen Line project, an 11-kilometre light rail system that will connect Vancouver's north east suburbs with the SkyTrain system and the West Coast Express commuter rail system. While the general route corridor had been established and approved by the TransLink Board, precise routing details were determined with the public's input. The Evergreen is scheduled for completion and service commencement in September 2011.

Recent public opinion polling on major issues and TransLink capital projects found that 93% of the public feel that TransLink has identified the right set of projects for funding in its latest strategic plan.

Participants

TransLink's public consultation activities involve a large number of organizations, agencies, governments, businesses and residents. Formal consultative relationships have been established with most of the 21 municipalities that make up the Greater Vancouver Regional District, both the provincial and federal governments, business organizations, transportation-related trade unions and organizations, major employers and major transit destinations, including universities and post-secondary schools, and residents.

Resources

There are additional costs associated with involving the public in its decision-making. TransLink estimates that between 0.5 and 1 per cent of the preliminary planning costs for a typical large infrastructure project can be spent on public consultation and engagement, while planning project public consultation and engagement costs typically range between 5 and 10% per cent.

TransLink's public consultation department is one of the few such departments in Canada. Currently, the office is staffed with two coordinators, an outreach consultant, an administrative assistant and the department's manager. For larger projects, such as Evergreen light rail line now under development, outside consultants with expertise in community engagement are sometimes brought in.



A TransLink employee and community member at a recent open house for a proposed light rail transportation project.

Lessons learned

Some of the lessons learned in carrying out public consultation and engagement activities include:

- **Public engagement builds better projects, policies and programs:** Experience at TransLink clearly and consistently shows that working with stakeholders and other potentially affected parties through a meaningful consultative process can facilitate wider support and legitimacy for their programs, policies and projects. Public consultation effectively allows affected stakeholders to add significant, informed value to the development of initiatives and enhance the final outcome and end product. Among other things, TransLink's ongoing commitment to meaningful public engagement has resulted in improved detailed route alignments on its Evergreen light rapid transit project, broad public and stakeholder support for larger planning projects, including TransLink's Urban Transportation Showcase projects, and has effectively managed more contentious projects like the implementation of its Parking Area Tax in 2006.
- **Effective public consultation commences at project outset:** Effective public consultation should not be considered an "add on" to be carried out at any point in the project process. Effective consultation begins at project outset by identifying how the broader community can be engaged (i.e., what tools should be used), when (i.e., surveys, open houses and the like should be tentatively scheduled) and what stakeholders need to be involved in more direct focus groups and one-to-one meetings (e.g., neighbourhood business groups, environmental organizations, etc.). Early public consultation also avoids the strong public reaction that can come up through more traditional "decide and announce" approaches to transportation planning.

• **Effective public engagement uses different tools:** TransLink understands that not all stakeholders will directly involve themselves in more traditional outreach activities, such as open houses and community meetings. For this reason, the organization is committed to using a broad range of engagement and consultation tools, including surveys (on-line, mail out and in-person intercept surveys), direct mail newsletters and individual stakeholder meetings and/or smaller focus groups. TransLink also maintains up-to-date web sites for its all of its planning and transportation projects which include monthly project newsletters, downloadable versions of open house panels and other relevant information. For larger projects, such as the Evergreen rapid transit line, TransLink even produced a series of three short videos to show at public events that are also available on the project web site.

• **Meaningful public consultation incorporates input received:** TransLink is careful to not only report to the public on the results of its consultation processes, but also to demonstrate how the input has been used in its decision making processes. During the Evergreen light rapid transit routing project, TransLink staff not only shared the comments they received, but were also careful to illustrate how public comments or concerns were incorporated into route changes. TransLink also sought to provide an explanation or rationale where public input was not acted upon. This careful reporting clearly demonstrated TransLink's use of public input and helped increase public support for the project.

Next steps

In December 2006, the TransLink Board adopted the report, *Principles for Public Consultation and Community Engagement*, which outlines corporate principles for public consultation and community engagement. The policy document formally commits TransLink to integrating public consultation into the planning of all major capital

projects, the development of all significant new policies and all major planning processes.
