

**TransLink**

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South Coast British Columbia
Transportation Authority

December 2, 2015

Isabel Kolic
Executive Director, The Heights Merchants Association
4019 Hastings Street
Burnaby, BC V5C 2J1

Dear Ms. Kolic:

RE: The Heights Merchants Association submission to TransLink

Your November 6th letter to Tim Savoie, TransLink's Vice President of Transportation and Policy, was forwarded to me for response.

Thank you for writing to share your feedback about TransLink's proposed changes. We recognize that these proposals may affect you and your community and appreciate you conveying your concerns. No decisions have been made at this time, and your input along with other input from residents and transit customers will be seriously considered before moving forward with any changes.

The Transit Network Consultation invited customers to have their say on over 85 proposed bus route changes across Metro Vancouver, from October 13 until November 6, 2015. An extensive marketing campaign was used to raise awareness of the proposals, which included 400 posters and 6,000 post cards distributed to community centres, pools, and public libraries across the region, including 14 in Burnaby. We ran ads in six local newspapers, including the Burnaby Now, used all social media channels, and ran digital ads targeted at each municipality. Through email and phone calls, we reached out to over 3,400 key stakeholders, including many local organizations in Burnaby.

At the close of consultation, TransLink had received over 12,000 completed surveys, had over 3 million visits to our website, and gathered hundreds of additional customer comments through emails, phone calls, and letters such as yours.

We understand that online consultation does not meet the needs of all customers and stakeholders. In addition to the online survey TransLink staff answered countless phone calls and written letters to help ensure the proposals were understood. We also assisted residents without internet access in recording their feedback and completing surveys over the phone. In addition, TransLink planning staff spoke on the phone and exchanged emails on a number of occasions directly with The Heights Merchants Association to share information about the proposals and receive your feedback. Direct discussions such as those have helped us appreciate the range of perspectives of our customers.

TransLink staff are now focused on analyzing the numerous responses received through the survey and correspondence such as yours, to determine whether any adjustments to the proposals or further engagement are

required. We expect to report back to the public in early 2016, and we will continue to liaise with Burnaby staff as we confirm the next steps.

Please let me know if there is any further information or assistance I can provide on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'D. Freeman', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Daniel Freeman
Manager, Transit Network Management
Transportation Planning and Policy Division

Cc: **Dan Johnston**, Burnaby City Councillor, Chair of Burnaby Transportation Committee
Leon Gous, Director of Engineering, City of Burnaby
Doug Louie, Assistant Director of Engineering, City of Burnaby



Nov. 6, 2015

Tim Savoie
Vice President of Transportation Planning and Policy
Translink
287 Nelson's Ct #400,
New Westminster, BC V3L 0E7

Dear Mr. Savoie,

I am writing on behalf of the Heights Merchants Association, its 330+ businesses, 2,000 employees, and untold number of customers. Our friendly and vibrant neighbourhood shopping district is located along a two-kilometer stretch of Hastings Street in North Burnaby. We are comprised of mostly smaller, independent businesses, and we are continually trying to attract customers to our area, keep local people shopping closer to home, and struggling to compete with "big box" retailers and shopping malls.

When informed about Translink's proposed changes to the #135 SFU/Burrard Station bus route, our Board of Directors expressed dismay and concern and directed that their views be sent to you.

Translink's changes, as proposed, mean there would no longer be a single local-service bus that would span the length of our district from Boundary to Gamma, or connect it easily to the communities east and west of us, where many of our customers live in East Vancouver and East Burnaby. Instead, there would be up to four "local" buses, each only covering a fraction of Hastings, and requiring burdensome transferring from one route to another, to cover distances currently efficiently served by the #135.

Of our 330+ businesses, 54 of them are medical service-related (physicians, specialists, x-ray, ultrasound, labs, and many others). We are home to 9 major banks/credit unions and an additional 6 financial services companies. Approximately 10 businesses are specialty schools; for example, art, music, and dance schools, martial arts, Kumon, and so forth. Our area generates 127 million in annual revenue. We have almost as many businesses as Metropolis at Metrotown.

Our 2015 market research also shows that 58% of shoppers come here specifically for groceries. We are a prime location for running errands such as purchasing basic daily staples and banking.

Proposing to eliminate local stops from the #135 bus route will possibly double the duration of many (previously quick) public transit trips, reduce frequency of Hastings Street's local bus service, create unreasonably long waiting times for an urban area's public transit, and require walking an additional city block and waiting to cross the busy Willingdon and Hastings intersection simply to catch a connecting bus. This doesn't include the wait time when one actually arrives at the bus stop.

People with young children and baby strollers in tow (sometimes both), senior citizens of all mobility levels, people with heavy groceries, and many others, will no longer be served by a quick 3 to 5 minute single-bus trip. If they are travelling from a local stop to another local stop in North Burnaby, factoring in street crossings and potential wait times, their previously "easy" trip may now be 15 to 18 minutes long and require a cumbersome multi-faceted transfer.

Our Board believes that Translink is prioritizing and favouring the long-distance commuter, and the public transit user's links to big urban shopping areas in Downtown Vancouver, Brentwood and Metrotown, and de-prioritizing the needs of local commercial areas and their stakeholders.

While having an express B-Line route is a positive prospect for commuters, Translink is forgetting the shorter-distance commuter whose daily travel range of distance is smaller, although no less important. Arguably, Translink may be speeding up the Burnaby Mountain to Downtown traveler at the expense of the local who makes shorter daily trips and depends on easy and fast public transportation to continue to live a "car-reduced" or car-free lifestyle, or not be dependent on others. This runs counter to the efforts of the City of Burnaby to create a more environmentally sustainable City.

Many local families have aging parents who cannot drive any longer, or young teens who are venturing out on their own for their first part-time jobs, sports, or socializing. And there are others, yet, who are in a low income bracket and simply cannot afford any other option.

15-minute frequency is not acceptable in a medium-density urban setting during business and school hours. Requiring a two-bus transfer in a 10- or 20-block stretch of a very busy commercial area with density increases underway is also not acceptable. Requiring a bus transfer that necessitates walking a whole block and crossing a street is also not practical. From our Board's viewpoint, these sorts of decisions contribute to a shift of public transit users to private modes of transportation.

The Heights Merchants Association wishes to encourage Translink to continue building up our region's local commercial areas, rather than fostering the "local shopper's" need to travel farther afield to obtain what they need from big shopping centres. If you make the former difficult, and the latter easy, it can erode the viability of the local shopping areas to compete and survive, after which travelling longer distances to buy what you need could actually become the only option available to us.

We urge you to speak with your Transportation Planning team about the real human experience on Hastings Street, to consider the qualitative data of the people who need public transit the most.

Lastly, we are concerned that Translink's exclusive "online only" consultative process has inadvertently excluded many seniors who are unable to use the Internet, or don't have Internet access. It also may have excluded lower income people who don't have a computer at home, teens who are not generally inclined to participate in public surveys, new immigrants with limited English ability, and busy parents of young children who may not be paying attention.

We believe localized open forums and notices at all bus stops may have given you opportunities to hear more stories and more voices.

Thank you for considering our input. We are hoping for the best possible outcome for our district, our City, and our region at large.

Sincerely,



Isabel Kolic
Executive Director

C: Dan Johnston, Burnaby City Councillor, Chair of City of Burnaby Transportation Committee
Leon Gous, Director of Engineering, City of Burnaby
Doug Louie, Assistant Director of Engineering, City of Burnaby
Mia Pears, Planner, Transit Network Management, Translink