

Western Newsletter

Transport Action Canada

Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba & Saskatchewan



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BEST TRANSPORT SYSTEM ON EARTH?

No, sorry it is not in Vancouver or British Columbia or anywhere else in Canada for that matter. I think it is possibly in Switzerland. They have built an efficient multi-modal transport system centred around the train, but integrated perfectly with buses and lake ferries. The system runs as they say "Like a Swiss watch" and they aren't exaggerating. The trains arrive on schedule almost all of the time and a delay of more than 2 minutes will be announced. It is truly a pleasure to travel in Switzerland so easily with no hassles. Travel between any two cities in Switzerland is possible every hour or half hour with easy connections between platforms at main hub stations like Geneva, Bern, Zurich and even smaller stations such as Speiz (near Interlaken).

A good way to visit Switzerland is with an 8 day (or less) Swiss Pass which allows unlimited travel with inter-city railways, buses, ferries, and urban transport systems of even smaller cities.

Comparing a country with a first-world transport system in a country like Switzerland or Germany, with the under-developed transport system of Canada is unfair. It is order of magnitudes better in Europe; however it is

good to know what is out there, so we can aspire to improve things at home.

Matthew Buchanan.

P.S. Still looking for a new editor for the Western Newsletter. Sorry for the long delay with this issue.

Upper left: #17 Trolley bus leaving UBC for downtown Vancouver. (photo Ian Fisher) Lower right: VIA train #2 at Vancouver's Pacific Central, Aug 14, 2010. VIA has made some improvements to the plat-



PRAIRIE AGM RESULTS

Transport Action Prairie held a successful AGM on Saturday afternoon, May 8, 2010. Fifty people attended for the speakers : George Wooldridge on the Last Mountain Railway: a real success story, and Blair Wagar on the Global Transportation Hub outside Regina.

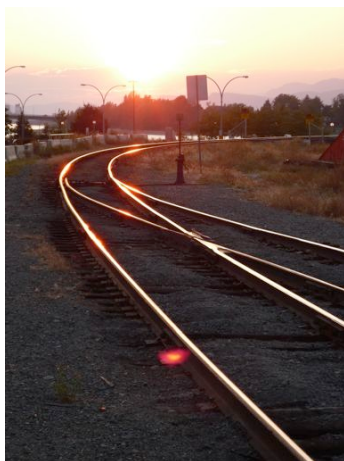
We were blessed by the attendance of our elders : George Burton from Humboldt, and Jim and Marjorie Richards from Melfort.

Because of our phoning campaign, as well as the media attention (article by a Leader Post reporter that morning) , we gained 5 new or long--lapsed members, promises of a few more, and 4 renewals, plus donations, and many contacts.

Transport Action Prairie established a working group Friends of the STC (Saskatchewan Transportation bus Company). We hope to build a support network throughout Saskatchewan with promotion through the many community newspapers. Anyone willing to be part of the Friends Network, and help promote the STC, please contact Catherine Verrall 306-569-7699 or cv.transprairie@yahoo.ca. In Regina, we have been distributing information by posters and email, about the STC program through May : Senior's Ride for \$10. anywhere in Saskatchewan.

Next comes the STC SUMMER YOUTH PASS \$40. a month, during June, July, August, for ages 12 to 25. Travel anywhere the STC goes in Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Transportation Company, a crown corporation, serves 280 communities, with 29 bus routes.

Catherine Verrall, Transport Action Prairie President.



CATHERINE'S EDITORIAL

The oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico shocks us at last to pay attention to the horrors our society brings on ourselves and our earth-life-support by our addiction to oil. Much of the toxic oil is used to support transportation. Each day we are bombarded by more bad news about the desperate state of our mutilated home, the Earth. We also hear about people all over the world, organizing to do something about it ... what Paul Hawken calls " Blessed Unrest". That is our primary mandate ... joining with others to strengthen sustainable, Life-respecting transportation. That is something important we can do.

Our new name challenges us to ACTION. Here is a check-list of possibilities:

Education

- Educating ourselves
- Hosting displays at various community events (about environment, civic planning, social justice, politics, community well-being, etc.) such as ecofairs in schools and colleges, social- and climate -justice events in churches, community festivals, etc. Hosting involves people who create the display, lug it to the location, stay with it to discuss with public. Contact Catherine cv.transprairie.ca for suggestions.
- Writing letters to the editor, calling in to "talk" shows
- Contacting politicians

Communication

- Contacting current and lapsed members, by telephone, email, post.
- Use the revised Transport Action Prairie flyer (if you are in the prairie region: a new national one should be available soon) . Invite friends to join. Post in library, place of worship, etc.
- Write news items for our newsletters.
- Contribute high-tech skills... what can you do ?

Local Action Groups

- Find a group doing action on a transport-related issue (see "Displays" above).. get involved
- Find a few (2 make a group!) Transport Action people to share concerns, ideas, ways to support a local transportation issue.
- Get names of local area members from the executive
- Life Style - take a hard look at our own lifestyles.. see what we can change, to lead by example.

WINNIPEG BUSWAY PROGRESS

As I reported in the last issue of the newsletter, construction is proceeding on the first phase of the busway, from Main Street to Jubilee Avenue. All of the visible work is beside the CN mainline. The busway beside Donald St. as far as Osborne St. is well under way: the concrete roadbed is pretty well laid.



Work on the portion of the line as it curves to the left beside Donald St.

However, there was no convenient site for photos. There is as yet no work started on the bridge across Osborne St. The approach to the tunnel under the CN mainline is also well under way, but again cannot be approached for photos. The photos shown here are taken along Stradbroke Ave., the northern end of the busway.

The second phase of the project (from Jubilee Avenue to the University of Manitoba) is rapidly becoming more and more confusing.



Showing the method of shoring up the embankment of the CN mainline.

First, the City still has no money allocated in its budget for this section. The Province and the Federal Government have earmarked \$126 million for this, but Mayor Katz wants them to divert the money to roads and bridges in the City. He is quoted in the Winnipeg Free Press (June 10) as saying that since the cost of Phase II has risen from \$189 million to \$220 million, that they should

be providing \$146 million: they aren't so things are being held up. Further, he says the province is trying to force the city into building a busway when an LRT system would serve the city much better (well, that was what he wanted! The province agreed to the busway proposal and is naturally getting more and more annoyed at Katz for changing his mind). And Katz has had yet another revelation: he has, apparently very suddenly, become convinced that streetcars are the way to go, even better than his recently favoured LRT!

Once upon a time Winnipeg had streetcars, which were electrically powered and did very well. But internal combustion engines swept the stage in



The northern end of the busway, where the southbound lane leaves Main St. At this point the northbound lane leaves the busway and crosses Stradbroke, to the left.

the 1950's and 1960's and so we now have a bus system. One can't blame the people at the time for making the wrong choice,

because they'd have had to be looking

ahead 35 years or more, but it remains a pity that the decision was made, as now there would be no decisions to make and no vast sums of money needing to be spent. A streetcar system would work very well for the city, once more, once the enormous disruptions on the streets were forgotten. Katz is pointing out, also, that it would cost \$50 million per kilometre for the streetcar tracks and wires - "only" 30% more than the busway. But, understandably, the mayor has no credibility left on the issue, particularly as he is hoping that funding for a streetcar (or LRT) system would come from some other Federal source than the money already allocated.

Photos by Blair Korchinski

Local busmaker New Flyer has weighed in with a comment (Free Press, June 10) that buses on a

busway are the best solution; their newest buses, a spokesman says, do not match the public perception of buses as dirty, noisy and smelly; the first advantage the company cites is that the new buses have Wi-Fi! They are also more fuel-efficient, with more area of natural light and better handicapped access. Their showcase is the City of Cleveland.

It is difficult to see how this is all going to play out. Most likely the busway Phase II will be completed and then investigations will begin into the feasibility of converting the ways to LRT.

It may be coincidence or a sneaky editorial comment - but above the story in the Free Press appears a picture of 24 turtles sunning themselves beside a river near Brandon!

Peter Lacey - Manitoba

musings about trains

trains chugged and whistled through my life
topped with dusty men looking for work
filled with soldiers headed for war
me cocooned in a clicking berth peeking
at little town platforms streaks of light in the dusk
or speeding along north of lake superior
watching a moose swim a spruce bordered lake
but these days i must take a bus quite a distance
to board a train i can ride

by: June Mitchell

THE STM AND THE ULTRA CAPACITOR BUS.

On May 21, 2010, the Société Transport de Montréal (STM) announced its plans to convert all its bus fleet to electric power by 2025 [4]. Some busy routes could be converted to trolley-buses, but the bulk of the conversion is expected to be done by adopting battery (ultra capacitor) powered electric buses.

The well-known weaknesses of any electric vehicle are the trip-length capacity of the battery and the length of time it takes to charge it. Trip-length capacity need not be a major problem for a bus if it can be recharged very quickly at a bus station.

Such could be achieved by using fast-charging batteries, typically relying on ultra capacitor technology. Incidentally, a Proterra bus using this technology was demonstrated to the BC Transit Authority in Victoria on April 11 (www.proterraonline.com) [1][4]. Fast-charging batteries (from less than one minute to 10 minutes) usually provide little trip-length capacity, but it may well be good enough for most urban bus usage, which involves very predictable routes and inherent layover time at stops, making it simpler to decide where to site charging stations along the routes.

Nevertheless, the technology, though looking promising in concept, is still in its infancy. The most notable demonstration project has been deployed in Shanghai in China [2], and one is planned in France: the choice there is to recharge the bus battery in ten seconds or so, giving a trip-length capacity of one kilometer [5]. The French project description highlights the simplicity of the technology, most noticeably in comparison with hydrogen systems. Electric buses are, after all, nothing much more than trolley-buses with a battery; the charging stations can be supplied by a regular electric line, which would keep an on-site capacitor ready for the next bus. It is claimed that the investment could be amortized in as little as twelve years.

In regard to the current state of the technology, the STM announcement seems a bit too bold but it shows a healthy renewed interest in electric buses (which seems also to be favourable to trolley-bus development).

Patrick Rault - Vancouver

Notes:

[1] For some reason, Proterra buses have been equipped of a auxiliary hydrogen generator, but the main feature of the bus is the fast charging battery.

[2] Next Stop: Ultracapacitor Buses, Technology review, October 19, 2009
<http://www.technologyreview.com/energy/23754/>

[3] Transit tests out hybrid bus, March 12, 2010, Times Colonist,
<http://www.timescolonist.com/technology/Transit+ests+hybrid/2674539/story.html>

[4] STM bus fleet to be fully electric by 2025, The Gazette, May 22, 2010.
<http://www.montrealgazette.com/fleet+fully+electric+2025/3059065/story.html>

[5] Wireless Alternative Trolley Technology (french)
http://www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/IMG/spipwwwmedad/pdf/12_Fiche_Watt_cle5794b3.pdf



*Glacier Express at Chur Switzerland June 2010
 (M. Buchanan)*

GRAND FORKS RAILWAY

Officials in Grand Forks BC (Near the BC-Washington border) are concerned about the potential abandonment of the former BNSF rail line from Kettle Falls, WA to Danville BC. The line is actively used by industry in the Boundary Region. Last word was that the current owners of the line were planning to abandon the line in June. In a Grand Forks Gazette article on Aug 18, the City of Grand Forks is spending \$70,000 for a study to try save the railway.

WEBSITE UPDATE AND BLOG

For the latest information on transportation and more information on the stories in this issue please go to our web site and blog. Both are accessible by pointing your browser to:

<http://bc.transport-action.ca/>

By M. Buchanan.

BC-WASHINGTON HIGH SPEED RAIL

The latest news on the Amtrak Cascades train service between Vancouver, Seattle and Portland is that ridership continues to grow. According the Washington State department of Transportation, ridership is up 12% in the second quarter of 2010 compared to the same quarter last year. They expect 2010 to be the best year ever.

Canadian Border Services Agency is still a wild card in plans to increase service from 2 trains per day to four, which is in Amtrak and WSDOT's long range plan for Cascades. They haven't given up on plans to charge Amtrak \$1500 per day for their services.

BC seems to be happy with the 2nd train but is still showing little interest in investing any money in the service or any of the much needed infrastructure improvements such as the New Westminster rail bridge, or track improvements and sidings in Burnaby, New Westminster, Surrey, and Delta.

By M. Buchanan.

COAL TRUCK B-LINE

Transport Action BC response to: "Coal Clouds a Green Future", Georgia Straight, April 22 2010, Page 17

This article raises many important environmental considerations that must be addressed to determine if the proposed Comox Valley coal mine proposal should proceed.

However, it only briefly mentions the plan to truck 2,000,000 tonnes of coal to Port Alberni each year. Transport Action BC calculates that moving this much coal will generate 200 to 340 daily truck trips and the equivalent number of empty returns. These trucks would be coming every 4 - 7 minutes, 24 hours a day, as frequently as buses on Vancouver's 99 B-line in the rush hour.

This truck traffic surge will cause major increases in wear-and-tear on the roadways; there are reports that a single truck causes the same road damage as tens of thousands of cars. There is also a potential increase in highway collisions resulting in higher policing, emergency services and health care costs. Additionally, a truck-based solution is inefficient and wasteful; the Washington State Energy Office estimates that moving freight by rail is 3 times as energy-efficient as the same movement by trucks. And of course greenhouse gas emissions and particulate matter from diesel exhaust and tire and brake wear will be continuously dumped into the atmosphere.

There is, however, a more sustainable alternative to trucking the coal. An underutilised rail line parallels much of the proposed route. A partnership of the rail line's owners, Compliance Energy Corp., other Island stakeholders and various levels of government could refurbish the line. One or two daily trains could replace the hundreds of daily truck trips, avoiding many of the economic and environmental costs of a road-based solution.

A rail-based solution must be considered as part of the various impact assessments of the proposed coal mining project.

By Frederick Jelfs

(This letter was submitted to the Georgia Straight, but not published)

VANCOUVER ISLAND RAILWAY

A provincial study on the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway on Vancouver Island was released recently. The bottom line is that the province doesn't feel that the railway is worth upgrading.

The province has no problem dropping \$24 million on new interchanges (eg. McTavish Rd in North Saanich) with no year long half million dollar studies, but won't spend a dime on actually improving rail service.

Official Study:

http://www.th.gov.bc.ca/publications/reports_and_studies/Evaluation_ENRailway/publications.htm

Transport Action BC will have more on this topic in the next issue.

PROVIDING TIMELY SCHEDULE TO TRANSIT PASSENGERS

I'm just back from a month in Europe, with two weeks spent in Berlin. As many of you who have travelled there know, that City has a splendid public transportation system. A one week pass costing €26.5 was excellent value, and a similar length pass in our cities would encourage tourists to use the transit system.



The one feature that impressed me most was the proliferation of GPS transit readograph signs everywhere. The U-bahn and most buses and tram

lines had these at each stop (or at least each major stop for the buses), so you always had a pretty good idea how long you'd need to wait for the next one. Hopefully, Translink and BC Transit will be working

towards an extensive network of these transit-friendly devices.

Jim Ramsay - Vancouver

Another viewpoint:

All that is needed is to propagate the information to people's work/home computers, cell phones (text) and smart phones. No infrastructure cost to TransLink. All they have to do is make the information available! See what they've done in Portland: <http://trimet.org/arrivals/index.htm>

I would rather stay in my office or in the cafe and get emailed when the next bus is 4 minutes away (real time not scheduled) than have to walk out to the bus stop to find out. This would eliminate all frustrating waits at the bus stop (unless the bus is full).

TransLink already sends out schedule information (text bus and mobile website), now simply share the GPS (real position) information. I understand that all the CM buses have GPS now. We are so close to having this system... why is it taking so long? I'm sure this would convert a lot of potential riders in my high tech office park.

Andrew Feltham - Vancouver.

KUDOS

To Vancouver major Gregor Robertson and city councillor Geoff Meggs for attending the passenger rail workshops put on by the Cascadia institute in Vancouver. It is good to see some politicians pay attention to inter-city passenger rail.

By M. Buchanan.

NEXT TRANSPORT ACTION BC MEETING

Tuesday September 14, 2010
 Firehall Library at 10th Ave and Granville St
 Vancouver, BC
 6:00 PM to 7:45 PM

BOOK REVIEW

WAITING ON A TRAIN

The Embattled Future of Passenger Rail Service

A Year Spent Riding Across America

by: James McCommons

Review by Matthew Buchanan

This book covers a journalist's voyage across most of the USA over a year or so long period on Amtrak trains. The author is not a rail fan, but a long time Amtrak customer who during the course of his travels interviews many other passengers, Amtrak officials, freight rail officials,

The book provides an overview of the different types of trains, the varying quality of trains in different parts of the country and the many problems facing Amtrak such as long delays caused by freight trains, unfriendly employees, old equipment, unreliable timekeeping, not enough equipment, not enough frequency, etc.

Success stories such as the State of California's investment in three inter-city corridors, cooperative freight railroads such as BNSF, are compared with state transportation departments showing little interest in trains, and passenger hostile freight railroads such as Union Pacific.

Many comparisons can be made to Canada's VIA Rail and the lack of interest all Canadian province's Ministries of Transportations are towards any interest in passenger rail.



Intermodal station for long distance and commuter trains, up the stairs is the tram platform. Freiburg Germany. (photo M. Buchanan, Jun 2010)



Clockwise from top left:

- *Sudostbahn Class 526 (Stadler FLIRT) operating ZW route S13 at Wadenswil Switzerland (Sept 2008).*
- *SkyTrain crossing the Fraser River at New Westminster and Surrey, 2010.*
- *New Mark II SkyTrain cars near Science World in Vancouver, 2010.*
- *Canada Line trains passing on Sea Island near Vancouver International Airport, 2010.*

All photos by Ian Fisher.

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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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