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That
Matter



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If you can't move, you are a prisoner. No one likes to sit in traffic, but how do you move more people on transportation corridors that are already full at peak times?

That is the question TransLink is asking all of us in the Greater Vancouver area, to help them address. The Transit Authority just released Transport2050, with the aim of asking users to contribute ideas based on their experiences here, and

from other places they know, or have used while traveling.

The idea is to consolidate those suggestions, package them up, and then present them back to all of us for additional input. TransLink plans on going to the public for input three times before presenting its plan to the Mayors' Council. Kevin Desmond points out that because TransLink is more than just SkyTrain, buses, and SeaBuses, they are seeking input from drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians as well.

We invited TransLink CEO Kevin Desmond to join us for a conversation that matters about the Transportation Authority's long-range plan to meet the needs of the region over the next three decades.

- Conversations That Matter is a partner program for the Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University. The production of this program is made possible thanks to the support of the following, and viewers like you.

- Welcome.

- Thank you. Thanks for having me.

- Oh it's my pleasure. I've been wanting to have this conversation with you for quite some time because I think it's really easy to overlook the value of the transportation, the overall transportation system and the way that it's all interconnected. We can look at TransLink as being one thing, but it's not isolated because it's part of an overall system and since you've come here, you've said okay it's time for us to sit down and come up with a long-term, strategic plan. What is that vision, and what do you want from citizens of the area.

- Well great question. I don't have the vision. The citizens are gonna give us the vision. That's exactly what I think we need to do. I could have my own personal point of view, that's my personal point of view. It might be informed, because I happen to be in this business, I happen to be in charge of TransLink. But with our Transport2050, our long-range plan update, we wanna hear from everybody. We wanna hear just the absolute multiplicity of ideas. No idea's a bad idea. At the end of the day we'll filter the ideas through both a public engagement process and ultimately with our policymakers on what really is gonna make sense for the next 30 years for this region on mobility. Mobility kind of writ large. It's not just more rapid transit, or more buses obviously with the pace of technology change. What's gonna happen with ride handling and shared services, what's gonna happen with automation. What's gonna happen with electrification. So it's an all-in kind of exercise. What we do know, is we're forecasting over a million more people here over the next 30 years or so. We do know that there's not--

- Into the whole greater Vancouver area?

- Yes. And that's just in our service area. In the TransLink service area. That doesn't even include the Fraser Valley for example, or up the Sea-to-Sky Highway, up towards Squamish and Whistler. That's just within--

- Oh my gosh.

- The current TransLink service area, so what we do know is we're not gonna build a lot more roads.

- No.

- There's not gonna be a lot more road capacity. We're very hemmed in. Most of the land is developed in one form or another. It doesn't leave a lot of room for building roads. So we've gotta maximize the mobility within a capacity that exists today, and hopefully build more high-capacity transit in the meantime.

- But how do we do that, when there's already established infrastructure, that is like bulging at the seams already? Like how do we find that mix that's gonna work, and build it, and hopefully ultimately maintain it, so that it stays there?

- You know, two answers to that question. One I'll use a little jargon. Transportation demand management. Something you know we in our business--

- That is jargon. Okay, what does it mean?

- Well it's, so if you've got, everything's bulging at the seams. You've got, there's only so much capacity within the curbs, or if you include the sidewalks or on the highways and so forth, so the idea is, how do you maximize the ability to move people and goods in the same bit of pavement? So that means more people carpooling for example. Just imagine on the commute on Highway 1 every morning, let's say every single person who drives alone in their car was carpooling with someone else. Simple math you have half the cars on the road. So how do you get more people ridesharing? How do you get more people taking buses? Taking high-capacity transit? Can we make effective carpool lanes all the way out on Highway 1 all the way into Vancouver for example. So on the one hand you gotta manage the demand on your roadways. You can manage it by demand incentives or supply incentives. The second piece is, how do we expand our rapid transit system, or high-capacity system? I personally believe, and I think most would assume, that that's the quickest and most efficient way to move a lot of people. You're always gonna, if you have a dedicated, exclusive right of way, such as SkyTrain, you can maximize the ability to move people really, really efficiently. Now, takes a long time to build projects like that, and they cost a lot of money. And I think that's why we need a lot of public engagement. We want the public at the end of the day to feel like they own the plan. Because at the end of the day, once the plan is then adopted, we're gonna have to go back out to the public and say okay this is your plan, now how do we implement it? And implementing it means among other things, raising the money for whatever the idea is. Or it could also be regulatory changes, legal issues. How do you sort of think about the world, the oncoming world of automated and shared and electric vehicles. There probably are gonna be a new regulatory framework to make that work for us.

- Gotta get you to hang on for a second while we take a commercial break. We'll be right back.

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- So I wanna go back to the bit about the roadways first, and then we'll come back to expanding resources through TransLink, because I think that a lot of people don't understand what the relationship between TransLink is and our roadways. Like when we take a look at the Patullo Bridge, and what's gonna happen there, they don't understand that TransLink is gonna play an important role in how that gets played out. And so when you talk about saying, well how do we create that kinda rideshare, which on the top of my head I think, how do you do that, especially when we have a culture, I'm sorry I'm rambling on here, but when we have a culture where people are, said well I bought a car because it gives me autonomy. Now you're telling me that I'm gonna be wedded to somebody else's schedule and I'm gonna be driving with them. How do we do that, and how does that fall under the umbrella of what TransLink brings to this overall equation?

- Well, you know, when TransLink was created 20 years ago we just turned 20 in April as a matter of fact.

- Well happy anniversary.

- Yeah.

- The folks that wrote the TransLink Act, had a vision for a singular organization that would not only deliver public transportation services but would also be the larger go-to planning entity. And I think we need to embrace that role. And, you know one of the things that the general public probably doesn't know much about, we co-manage what we call the Major Road Network. We talked about the roads, so all the arterial roads in the region, not the major highways but the arterials, we kinda co-manage it with the cities. We help fund it, and with that come certain amount of regulatory authority, in terms of goods movement and how the streets and those roads can be changed and adjusted over time. So we can have sort of this umbrella overall view, using modeling data, future projections and so forth, to try to understand how you get the most out of your capacity. How do you create mobility options? We're not all about you must take the bus. Or you must take the train. It's how many options can we give you, so you have the choice to select the best option for whatever your travel need is, if it's goin' to work, if it's goin' to school, if it's goin' to a show at night on Friday night or something, it in my ideal world you have a lot of different choices and if driving alone in your car or with your family in the car is the best way to get around, ideally a lot of other people are choosing another way to get around so you're not stuck in traffic.

- Hmm. So in the midst of that, like having control over all those arterial road networks, there is the movement of goods and service people to help fuel the economy. When we think of transit it's usually individuals. We're saying okay you make a choice to get on the bus, or SkyTrain or SeaBus or whatever it is, that's your transportation. You're going to work or for some sort of personal need. This means that your authority also plays an important role in understanding what the movement of--

- Absolutely.

- Of goods and services is, and how do we ensure that that can happen efficiently, because that all goes to the cost of living in the region as well.

- So we participate in a couple of very important bodies. One is the Gateway Council. The Gateway Council, it's supportive Vancouver, YVR, shipping industries, the railroads, the Province, and some of the municipalities focused on international trade and goods movement. We created something called The Greater Vancouver Urban Freight Council, which TransLink chairs, which is focused on inter-regional goods movement. Part of our mandate at TransLink is the movements of goods as well. So the more people that we can get off of driving alone in their cars because we're providing good choices, the more we can free up road space for moving goods. We believe that the port and all the goods movement and our gateway port here in this region is very, very important and vital for the economic success and prosperity of this region, and therefore the quality of life of the region. So we need to partner and join with other freight movement interests to understand how we can make sure there's a good balance between moving people and moving goods on our very crowded byways.

- It's an integrated system.

- Absolutely.

- But part of that is the fact that there's, what 22 different communities that sort of fit within that great port environment, and then the gateway system. How then do you manage those relationships? 'Cause they're changing all the time, you know. New mayors are elected, and then they come along and say, I don't want that part of the plan anymore, I want something different. How do you manage that, and with a long-term strategic view?

- Well I'll give you a little, it's a really small example, and it's not something the average citizen's ever gonna think about. I didn't think about it before I got here. Each of the 21 municipalities

- 21, yes, thank you.

- Could have different rules and regulations associated with the weights, the weight and regulations of trucks within their cities. So you could go between Vancouver, Burnaby, New West, and Surrey, and have four different regulatory environments for your truck, and you might have a different, have to get a different permit from all four of those cities.

- Wow.

- Depending on the size and the weight of your truck and whatever goods. So we took the initiative through the Greater Urban Freight Council to harmonize all the regulations, and I hope by the end of the year we're gonna have complete harmonization of all of those regulations. Now how'd we pull that off? We got everybody together. We understood what a common interest is, and then let's work towards the common interest. It actually isn't very hard to do. The governance of TransLink is in part by the Mayors' Council. So we have all 21 cities and the Tsawwassen and electoral area A, so 23 entities. They all sit together and we make policy, and we work by consensus, ultimately so that there's a common approach and a common objective. So yeah the different cities might differ on various different approaches, but at the end of the day if we work well together, generate that consensus towards a common objective, prosperity, quality of life, movement of goods and services, you can actually make good things happen. But it takes work and it takes a lot of consensus building.

- This is our second break. We'll be back in a moment.

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- So how then do you also work with those 21 different jurisdictions, and say okay, you're planning out your city or your municipality, and you need us to provide transit services for those who aren't driving. How do we help you make decisions that are going to reduce the requirement for longer trips? And do you play a role in helping to do that kind of planning? Because you can't have constant bus service everywhere. The region's too large.

- Oh yeah. Well, so we're right now within the second phase of the Mayors' 10-year plan. So in November of 2016, the Mayors' Council, with a lot of funding from the Province and the federal government, started the first phase of the project. And the first phase of the Mayors' vision was fundamentally, get a lot more bus service out as fast as possible, get more SeaBus service out, get more bus service out, get more HandyDART service out, which we did in 2017 and 2018. Last summer, almost a year ago, the Mayors' Council and the Board adopted a \$7.3 billion, very, very aggressive plan to expand this system that funded the Broadway Subway. It funded the light rail project in Surrey, and it funded a multi-year program to dramatically increase the capacity by

about 40% of the Expo Millennium Line program by buying more fleet primarily. So we're now funded to about \$9 billion of expansion. Next year, hopefully around this time next year, our policymakers I hope will adopt the third and final phase of the 10-year plan. It will complete the south of Fraser, the Surrey rapid transit program. More bus service and perhaps other projects as well. A lot of what we have to do is improve transit service south of the Fraser River.

- Yes.

- That's where people are living, that's where it's more affordable. That's where we do not have good enough transit service. So we've gotta catch up. Vancouver has really good transit service for the most part. New Westminster and Burnaby, abundant transit service. Surrey, Langley, Delta, and the Tri-Cities, and Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge not so much. So we've gotta move as quickly as we're able to make the right investments to catch up for those communities. You know, Surrey in the next couple decades is gonna be the largest city in the region. So there's a lotta people living there. We need to work with the city to get rapid transit, high-capacity transit, and they gotta figure out their land use planning as well, 'cause they've gotta figure out ways to densify around the transit assets.

- I know \$9 billion is a lotta money, but is it enough?

- No.

- No? And so then how do we put together the kind of funding model that's gonna support this? 'Cause it won't solely come through ridership. I know there is tax on gasoline consumption and so on, but still the funding we need to figure out what that model is, to ensure that if we're building this, we don't run into roadblocks to bring it to a halt, or prevent us from being able to maintain it.

- So variety of answers to the question. First of all you need partners. First partner is the federal government. So the Trudeau Administration in 2016, right after I got here so the timing was great, announced their public transportation infrastructure, nationwide funding of \$22 billion, of which this region got 2.6 billion for funding. It's the first and biggest kind of allocation from a systemic standpoint nationwide for public transit over a 10-year period. So we need the federal government in this country, and my belief is to have ongoing 10-year programs. We need another 10-year program. It's something we're talkin' to Otto about. We're talking to various different parties about, you know in the upcoming federal election. You also need the provincial government to continue to be a very, very strong supporter and funding source for the system. So that \$9 billion on the capital for the big projects, about 35% of that comes from the federal government, 40% of that comes from the provincial government, and then the region comes up from the rest. So you've gotta have those partnerships. If it was just on the region, and collecting resources from the region, we couldn't do it, number one. Number two, we need really, really strong public consensus. And that's why it goes back to 20--

- And that is the key isn't it? Yes.

- Absolutely. And we need to get out. We need to talk to the public about, what are you dreams, what do you wanna see happen? And in sorta what sequence? And then people are gonna be much more willing to then fight for the same resources that we're fighting for politically and bureaucratically because we're all sort of marching to the same tune. Yes, let's get high-capacity transit in Surrey. Let's figure out how to fund it, and then yeah if it takes more tax dollars or more fees, if people know where the money is going, and if people accept that that is gonna be a

net positive for their life, and even if it's a few years out, you know my experience, strictly in the Putics Sand where we go out to referendum all the time for these things, people are willing to say yes. They're willing to take that little bit of hit in their pocket book because they see something positive going forward. It's our job at TransLink and my job as the CEO to make sure that we're transparent and accountable, and that we are good to our promises to deliver, and then I think the taxpayer feels pretty good and pretty confident that their dollars are being used for a good purpose, but that consensus building

- Right.

- Means a lotta public engagement.

- And so thus the Transport2050 program where you are reaching out to people. Because we've tried to change funding models in the past here, and it met with resistance and I think it's for the very reason that you point out. There wasn't a clear vision of what am I going to pay for it.

- Yes. That's, I've seen that play out over and over. You know I'm from the United States and I've been in transit in New York and in the Seattle region and what I've seen and with my colleagues elsewhere. If you're very upfront of what it's gonna be used for and you're a solid, respected delivery organization, the taxpayer's gonna be much more likely to support what you're doing because at the end of the day nobody wants to sit in traffic.

- Nobody does.

- Nobody wants to sit in traffic. Nobody wants to see their free time progressively eaten up by longer and longer commute times. People want solutions, they want answers. And that's kind of a bipartisan thing. It's just hey it's quality of life. Quality of life is not a partisan political issue. It's all about, you know, what's gonna be good. I go back to that issue of choice. If you and I have different choices and we can make the choice on how to get, we took the train here for the interview today. It was the most efficient way to get around. I just want to promote to the general public, help us figure out the plethora of choices, and then we'll develop a plan that will meet those various different ideas.

- Third and final break. We'll be right back.

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- The train is incredibly efficient. I used it yesterday to go to a meeting at the Vancouver Sun. Way easier than driving and far less expensive. The question going forward I think for people when they look at this initiative, they're gonna say will my voice really matter? Like is this a public relations exercise, or does my voice really matter? And how do you give them assurance that yes we do want to hear from you, because without that we're not gonna be able to make the appropriate planning choices.

- Yes, the public's voice will matter, as I said at the outset. At the start, no idea is a bad idea. One of the cool things on the website, on the T2050, Transport2050 website, is you can post your ideas,

- Yeah I saw that.

- And people can basically like your ideas. And I was just looking at some of the stuff yesterday. You know the top ideas have 30, 40, 50, 60 likes. And actually, none of them are bad ideas. All of them make perfect sense. How do you make buses move faster? Expand the SkyTrain system. The like, how do you improve the capacity of the highways? So we're gonna pull those ideas, and we're gonna extract those ideas, get a sense of what's sticking, where a lotta people are gravitating towards those ideas. The good thing is they don't really diverge a whole lot from what planners at TransLink may think or our politicians may think, and I hope in the final plan, the majority of the public that engages with this will see a plan and they'll go, makes sense.

- Yeah because

- I can see some--

- To your point, they will then get behind it.

- Yes, yes.

- Because it will reflect the input that they've offered over a period of time.

- We're not gonna have a plan that's developed by bureaucrats. We want a plan that ultimately the general public can say, yeah this is part of the fabric of how we see our community developing over the next couple decades.

- So what is the length of time? How long do people have to be able to offer their thoughts and ideas?

- So we're gonna, we're doin' the public engagement in three stages. So this is really the big stage we're in right now. Started earlier in May through the end of the summer. Through early September. The website's gonna be open. We have a poll, some a survey. You can answer a bunch of questions as I mention, you can throw out your own ideas. We're gonna be out at as many community forums for face-to-face contact as much as we can. We'll get most of the input I'm sure online, but that face-to-face contact is absolutely invaluable, so we're gonna be as community events this summer as we possibly can. We'll then pull all that information together in the fall. We'll see how to assemble it, how it makes sense. We'll work with policymakers. We'll then assemble it into a sort of first cut. Here's some ideas based on what we heard, and then early next year we'll do a second round of public engagement, okay. How's it looking? This is what we heard, how do you wanna further shape it? And we'll do a final round of public engagement probably in the third quarter of next year before we finalize the plan. So the public will have three chances to weigh in.

- Right, yeah.

- The final chance will be, here's kind of the draft final document. Here's a final chance to help shape it.

- Well, without effective transportation, we're blocking ourselves in, and that's the last thing we want. Thank you very much for coming

- Okay, it's my pleasure.

- In and sharing this with us

- Thanks for having me.