

New buses hit the road this month
TransLink to add 51 new vehicles to its fleet in July, 126 by year's end

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Last November, the arrival of the first of the new Quebec-built Nova low-floor buses to TransLink's Burnaby depot coincided with a major snowfall that caused disruptions to transit services across the Lower Mainland.

Nothing like a heavy snowfall to try out the all-wheel disc-brake ABS traction control system -- the first such braking system to be fitted to a Canadian bus.

"We had the demo bus and we tried everything we could to make it go sideways in the yard," TransLink maintenance engineer Kevin Plimbley said.

"But we couldn't do it. It was like the bus was on rails," he said Friday.

A few of these new buses entered service two weeks ago, but this month 51 of them will be on the road, said TransLink official Drew Snider.

By year's end, a further 75 will be in service.

Plimbley said, by all accounts, the drivers like them.

"They accelerate smoother, they brake smoother and they give the driver great visibility because there's no break in the windscreen; it's just one big piece," he said.

The buses were bought by TransLink for about \$50 million with the money coming from federal gas-tax transfer payments.

Most will be used for high-demand routes within Vancouver and Burnaby, where passengers generally travel short distances and expect to have to stand.

"Having a lot of seating on those routes isn't an issue. It will allow us to take buses with more seating and use them on other routes," Snider said.

The diesel-powered Novas will carry 82 passengers instead of the 77 now carried on the old buses. They are slightly wider, and will handle wheelchairs and scooters more easily than existing vehicles.

"They are the most energy-efficient non-trolley buses we've ever had," Snider said.

Emission filters will remove 90 per cent of smoke and soot from the engine, which operates on low-sulphur diesel. The bus frame is built from stainless steel, which will eliminate the need for extensive mid-life refit while the outside of the bus is made of fiberglass and thermoplastic so there will be no corrosion.

The bus is about 1,000 kilograms lighter than a comparable vehicle, which helps its fuel efficiency, said Snider.

Nova Bus Corp. is a subsidiary of the Volvo Group and has been producing buses since 1976.

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