

August 28, 2006

Would the last bus to leave OTC please turn out the lights?

One era ends and another begins over Labour Day Weekend, as the Oakridge Transit Centre (OTC), home of Vancouver's trolley bus fleet for over half a century, retires from active service. For more than three generations of Vancouverites, the destination sign "41st & Oak" has meant that a bus is going home to bed. But over the long weekend, a convoy of trolleys and other buses will make the trip to their new home at the new multi-million dollar Vancouver Transit Centre in Marpole.

The transfer of the buses coincides with the largest overhaul of Coast Mountain Bus schedules and routes since TransLink came into being in 1999.

"This is truly an historic event," says TransLink Chair Malcolm Brodie. "The Oakridge Transit Centre has been the headquarters for bus service in Vancouver since the very first trolleys arrived almost sixty years ago. TransLink's plan to deliver more transit service throughout the Greater Vancouver region has involved buying more buses and increasing the fleet. Along with that expansion comes the need for newer and bigger facilities, like the new Richmond Transit Centre, which we opened in 2000, the new Vancouver Transit Centre now coming on line and our plans for a new and bigger operations centre on the North Shore."

Brodie says the Oakridge Centre will remain in use for a while longer as the preparation site for TransLink's fleet of 224 new low-floor electric trolleys, which will gradually replace the existing fleet over the coming year.

While the relocation will start early Saturday morning, Sept. 2, a parade of buses will leave Oakridge at noon. The event will be a parade in every sense, led by one of the original 1948 Canadian Car/Brill trolleys, which was part of the new fleet that was first to call the Oakridge Centre 'home' when it opened 58 years ago. Other vintage buses will also be part of the procession, along with one of the new generation New Flyer trolleys.

With the trolleys rounding the turn for the last time at 41st & Oak, the parade presents a delightfully visual and historic occasion. The route will follow 41st Ave. west to Oak, south on Oak to Marine Drive, then left on Hudson Street and into VTC. Transit buffs will find some excellent vantage points along the way: the most desirable photo location would be a spot at or near 41st & Oak, with OTC in the background.

The vintage buses that will be on display have been lovingly preserved for about 20 years by The Transit Museum Society (TRAMS), sponsored in part by TransLink and the Coast Mountain Bus Company. The vintage coach will be in the livery of the BC Electric Railway Company, which originally operated public transit in Greater Vancouver, and will be driven by Angus McIntyre, who operated the Brill buses when they were still in service. Angus is one of about 50 active Coast Mountain operators now beginning a "fourth generation" of trolley buses in Vancouver. In fact, he recently gained the distinction of having driven a vintage Brill for TRAMS, a current New Flyer trolley on the job and a new trolley in training on the same day.

