

Gov't blocks plan to sell PSL bus line

SUN APR 2 8 1978

The provincial government has quashed a plan by B.C. Hydro directors to dispose of Pacific Stage Lines sightseeing and charter operations, The Sun has learned.

The move to sell came to light in a confidential letter dated March 22 from then Transport Minister Jack Davis to Premier Bill Bennett and leaked to a member of the bus drivers' union Thursday.

However Municipal Affairs Minister Hugh Curtis today denied the government was planning to sell its PSL and Vancouver Island Coach Lines services.

He said the letter was "stale" at the time it was leaked to the union.

"They took a stale letter and drew a lot of conclusions," Curtis said.

"It's true that the directors (of Hydro), operating in their isolation, wanted to dispose of the agency," he added.

Curtis said he intervened when he learned of the proposed move and got the government to "direct or suggest, or whatever you want to call it" that the directors shelve the plans, at least until a complete survey on urban transit in the province is carried out.

"I said 'look, Bill (Bennett), we're pulling this thing together and don't want people flying off unilaterally when in fact that (selling the operations) could be the wrong thing to do'," Curtis said.

Curtis said he expects an interim report on the transit situation at the end of May and a full report in July.

The union member who obtained the letter in question, said he was handed it while visiting the parliament buildings in Victoria. He asked that his name not be used.

Union members had gone to Victoria to meet with the NDP caucus to express fears the government was planning to sell its PSL and VICL charter and sightseeing services.

Davis, fired as minister of energy, transport and communications by Premier Bennett April 3, said in his letter dated March 22 that Hydro directors decided a week earlier to phase out the PSL services during the fall and to terminate its Grey Line sightseeing franchise.

The letter says that the move would leave about 50 regular operators and 10 office staff redundant but adds that at current attrition rates "all these employees can be absorbed into other Hydro operations in 1978."