

New buses all white until transit colours picked

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New transit buses will hit Lower Mainland streets this summer without the familiar BC Transit logo or any other markings.

The 101 vehicles will be painted solid white and will remain that way until the new regional transportation authority, which assumes control over transit operations from the province April 1, adopts a new corporate logo and colour scheme for the entire bus fleet, SeaBus, SkyTrain and WestCoast Express.

One regional official labelled them "ghost buses," and the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority hopes they will serve as a rolling visual reminder that there is a new transit body in town.

The final look of the GVTA, like its new buses, is very much a work in progress as civic politicians hasten to build the municipal agency from scratch before the April 1 deadline. The multi-faceted authority will also be responsible for AirCare, major roads, certain bridges, the Albion ferry and transportation planning.

The GVTA board approved Monday the hiring of Quay Strategies to help oversee the creation of a new corporate identity and communications program at a cost of \$178,000.

The authority wants a logo the public can clearly identify with the GVTA and its many services.

Ken Dobell, the authority's chief executive officer, told the GVTA board he anticipates a strong financial case will be made to retain the red, white and blue colours of BC Transit.

Meanwhile, some suburban politicians on the GVTA board are concerned the proposed relocation of about 120 BC Transit employees to Burnaby from Surrey represents a centralization of transportation services that was not supposed to happen under the new authority. These BC Transit office workers will become GVTA employees effective April 1, along with hundreds of bus drivers and other transit staff.

Surrey Mayor Doug McCallum and Langley City Mayor Marlene Grinnell predicted Monday that such a move would be construed as shifting transportation resources away from the high-growth areas south of the Fraser River, communities most in need of improved transit.

Joan Smallwood, the MLA for Surrey-Whalley and a provincial appointee to the GVTA board, said the proposal is another example of "moving the brains and leaving the brawn" in the suburbs.

Smallwood argued that these transit planners and managers should stay in the suburbs where the worst transportation problems exist.

A report to the GVTA board cites the critical link between regional land-use and transportation planning as one reason for the move to Metro Tower II in Burnaby from the Gateway office tower in Whalley. Regional land-use planners are already in Metro Tower II and Greater Vancouver regional district headquarters is located just down the street.

Office space at Metro Tower II, including relocation costs, is estimated at \$1.6 million per year, compared to \$1.47 million at Gateway.

The GVTA board voted Monday to postpone for two weeks a decision on the proposed move.

