

Wildcat walkout strands suburban bus commuters

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VALERIE CASSELTON

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Up to 100,000 morning rush hour commuters in the Lower Mainland were stranded Thursday when they were caught in the middle of a fight between bus drivers and BC Transit.

The wildcat walkout shut down bus service from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m.

The job action resulted from a dispute that began last December when BC Transit agreed to integrate the Maple Ridge bus service — a private operation — into the Transit network.

This allowed the private operator to have common transferring, scheduling and passenger access to bus lines running in to Vancouver.

Transit bus drivers say the private bus operator, Independent Bus and Transportation Inc., is being subsidized by BC Transit and, in the long term, this will result in the loss of jobs that should go to union members.

"No where else is a private contractor allowed to access our system," said Craig McCrimmon, vice-president of the 2,000-member Independent Canadian Transit Union, local 1.

However, BC Transit president Mike O'Connor said Transit negotiated the service extension with the union, and up to 75 per cent of the new work in Maple Ridge and surrounding areas will go to ICTU.