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TransLink puts alt-fuel buses into service

TransLink has put two test buses, powered by a blend of hydrogen gas, recovered from an industrial process and compressed natural gas (CNG) into regular service carrying passengers.

The buses, converted 1998 New Flyer coaches as part of TransLink's Bus Demonstration Project, have been going through evaluation for the past two years. Now, they are in service in the Coquitlam/Port Coquitlam area, carrying fare-paying passengers to see how well they perform in regular service conditions and to give transit passengers a chance to comment on them.

"This is the last alternative fuel technology to be tested under Phase 2 of TransLink's Bus Demonstration Project," said TransLink chair Malcolm Brodie. "We have also been looking at CNG, low-sulphur diesels with particulate filters, biodiesel, and two types of diesel-electric hybrid. TransLink has already chosen CNG and low-sulphur diesel for the new non-trolley buses that are arriving through next year."

The buses run on a mix of 80% CNG and 20% hydrogen, obtained through the Integrated Waste Hydrogen Utilization Project (IWHUP). The result is an engine, which produces 40% less oxide of nitrogen (NOx) than straight CNG, along with 20% fewer hydrocarbons and 11% less greenhouse gas.

TransLink, working with its partners Sacré-Davey, Westport Innovations and Clean Energy, plans to convert two more buses to HCNG and evaluate all four in revenue service over the next 18 months.

Only one other transit system in North America uses HCNG: Palm Springs, California, has converted some of its buses to the alternative fuel.

A report on Phase Two of the Bus Demonstration Project – evaluating the performance of CNG, low-sulphur diesels and diesel-electric hybrids as well as the new electric trolley buses – is expected this fall. An updated report covering the HCNG buses will come out in the spring of 2008. That report will assist TransLink directors and staff in deciding whether to bring these technologies into wider service in the region.

TransLink is contributing just over \$2 million to the HCNG project, of which \$1 million is an in-kind contribution – foregoing 18 months' revenue service on the two buses during the initial testing period. The remainder is funded by the Government of Canada through IWHUP.

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