

## Open Letter to Rob Fleming, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure; and Dan Coulter, Minister of State for Infrastructure and Transit

Re: Insourcing HandyDART

Dear Minister Fleming and Minister Coulter,

We are an alliance of unions, disability advocates, seniors' groups and other organizations who are writing to you out of concern for the worsening crisis transpiring at Metro Vancouver's HandyDART system.

HandyDART is crucial infrastructure for some of Metro Vancouver's most vulnerable populations, but for years now it has been unable to provide adequate service levels that meet demand. [A recent report](#)<sup>1</sup> found that last year, TransLink provided just half the service per senior as it had in 2008. This failure means that every day, riders are stranded without any safe, reliable means of getting to kidney dialysis appointments, cancer treatments, adult daycare facilities, and other essential services. It also means social isolation for many HandyDART riders.

The primary reason why TransLink is unable to provide adequate HandyDART service is not budget shortfall, but because the various private contractors that have operated HandyDART over the last several years have all been unable to attract and retain enough staff to do the work properly. The solution to this crisis is not to find yet another private contractor to come in and prioritize its bottom line over service quality—rather, we are advocating for HandyDART to be brought in house as a subsidiary of TransLink.

Although riders and workers have pushed for insourcing HandyDART for years, TransLink has leaned into its contracting model by using private taxi cabs to provide HandyDART service. In the last quarter of 2023, 25% of HandyDART service was performed by taxis, which is up from 23% earlier in 2023 and far exceeds TransLink's previous commitment to limit taxi trips to 7% of service.

TransLink has repeatedly reneged on such promises. In 2016, TransLink's CEO at the time committed to conduct a Public Sector Comparator containing a multiple accounts evaluation that would take rider and worker input into account while comparing the costs and benefits of continued outsourcing to insourcing at HandyDART. Instead, TransLink hired a privatisation-friendly corporate consulting firm to conduct a strictly financial analysis which not only ignored considerations of safety and service quality, but also lacked any transparency in its methodology and authorship.

Outsourcing this essential public service to private contractors such as First Transit (now Transdev) and subcontractors in the form of various taxi companies has resulted in chaotic mismanagement and lowered safety standards in addition to labour shortage. Although in years past TransLink has spoken to these issues in its strategic plans, no aspect of this worsening crisis was addressed in *Transport 2050*. In fact, the terms 'HandyDART', 'custom transit', and 'paratransit' are completely absent from the *Transport 2050* executive summary.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ecoplaning.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Access-for-Everyone-Final-2023-03-20.pdf>

*Transport 2050* is yet another demonstration of how as a contracted service, HandyDART is deprioritized and TransLink can essentially wash its hands of these problems. We are calling on the Province to prevent the continued hollowing-out of this vital public service.

We are writing to you because, in the words of Minister Heyman in his introduction to *Transport 2050*, the provincial government has been a “proud senior partner in developing *Transport 2050* since its inception.” TransLink receives provincial funding, has a legislated responsibility to consider provincial policy priorities, and has had its decision-making structure shaped by provincial legislation. We will no longer accept broken commitments and finger-pointing among various levels of government. Ultimately, the buck stops at the Provincial government, which is why we are asking you to support this initiative to bring HandyDART in-house.

**We call on you to take your role as senior partner seriously, and immediately direct the TransLink Board to:**

1. Fulfill TransLink’s original pledge to limit the percentage of taxi trips to 7% or lower of total HandyDART trips.
2. Develop and conduct an unbiased Public Sector Comparator (PSC) with a multiple accounts evaluation containing rider and worker input, to compare insourcing to continued outsourcing while taking into account safety and service quality.
3. Develop and implement a plan to bring HandyDART in-house as a subsidiary of TransLink, including providing provincial and federal funds for permanent facilities for an expanded and electric HandyDART fleet.

Sincerely,

*Mayors & City Councils:*

Burnaby City Council  
Councillor Adriane Carr, Vancouver City Council  
Councillor Christine Boyle, Vancouver City Council  
Councillor Pete Fry, Vancouver City Council  
Langley City Council  
Langley Township Council  
Maple Ridge City Council  
Mayor Brad West, Port Coquitlam  
Mayor Eric Woodward, Langley Township  
Mayor Linda Buchanan, North Vancouver  
Mayor Mike Hurley, Burnaby  
Mayor Nathan Pachal, Langley City  
Mayor Patrick Johnstone, City of New Westminster  
North Vancouver City Council

*Community & Labour Organizations:*

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1724  
BC Federation of Union Retirees (BC FORUM)  
BC Federation of Labour  
BC Health Coalition  
Council of Canadians - Vancouver  
Council of Senior Citizens’ Organizations BC (COSCO)  
CUPE BC  
Disability Alliance BC  
Down Syndrome Resource Foundation  
Langley Human Dignity Coalition  
Langley Seniors in Action  
Movement: Metro Vancouver Transit Riders  
New Westminster & District Labour Council  
Richmond Poverty Reduction Coalition  
Sunshine Coast Labour Council  
Vancouver District Labour Council  
Vancouver Elementary and Adult Educators’  
Society Local 39-1 (BCTF)