



**14<sup>th</sup> October, 2015**

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services  
Room 224, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

To the Chair, Deputy Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing today on behalf of 381 online signatories and on behalf of countless residents, business owners and transit riders who have been misled by decision-makers in their community.

We are concerned about the recent comments from the Surrey Board of Trade that an at-grade Light Rail Transit (LRT) system is the preferred option in the City of Surrey.

First, we would like to re-iterate that regardless of what level of support there is for LRT in Surrey, the province cannot commit to any specific technology as no finalized business case has been produced, and should wait on that primary indicator of whether this would be a good investment.

The groups that have signed with Light Rail Links are likely not well informed on Surrey transit matters. Light Rail Links is barely active as a transportation coalition; stakeholders who visit the website, which has almost never been updated since its conception, cannot make a fair comparison between LRT and SkyTrain as barely any information is given on this matter.

Supporters of LRT insist that because an LRT will offer more kilometres of rail than SkyTrain, it will offer more benefits for everyone in the city. This does not tell the whole story and is an irresponsible way of presenting the argument. It has left thousands of stakeholders, decision-makers and leaders in support of an option that is simply not fully understood.

LRT would be a foolish option to choose for pressing transit needs South of the Fraser that require a combination of faster, region-wide rapid transit and an expansion in local transit. An at-grade LRT project will only partially provide one of these things, while failing to provide the other.

Previous transit projects like the Canada Line, which had an emphasis on travel time and featured full grade-separation, have demonstrated the importance of the transportation and travel time outcome in these projects. A slow, street-level LRT with more stops will not attract high ridership. It would fall short in every aspect where SkyTrain has found success – it would result in fewer customers, slower growth around transit, more suburban sprawl and more congestion.



For many transit users, there will be no transportation benefits from an LRT – the first phase of the system, on 104<sup>th</sup> Ave and King George Blvd, has been estimated to offer only a 1 minute improvement over existing B-Line buses, which use dedicated lanes built on King George Blvd.

The transportation aspect of this project has been constantly ignored – which was effectively demonstrated when the City of Surrey released an economic study, written for the purpose of defending the choice of LRT, that failed to assess and consider transportation outcomes. *(appendix: #1)*

There are numerous LRT proposal issues that just haven't been addressed by anyone. The higher operating costs of an LRT, where drivers are required on every train and new operations & maintenance facilities are required (versus extending an existing system), is a subject that every LRT supporter in this city has either left out of the discussion or misunderstood.

So far, not a single person on the Surrey Board of Trade, Light Rail Links, the City of Surrey, TransLink and the Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation has provided any indication or plan for how an ongoing \$22 million LRT operating deficit will be funded. This is a shortfall that's nearly 40% of what it costs to provide the bus network in the South of Fraser today. *(appendix: #3, 5)*

As there is no plan to pay for these operating costs, an LRT will most certainly result in both the gutting of local bus services – creating difficulties for many, especially the transit-dependent – and a need to raise taxes locally, siphoning dollars that would otherwise be used to support local business. It's an ironic reality that Surrey business owners and the Board of Trade will have to face, and it goes to show how the blindness LRT supporters have had in choosing their position.

We have attempted, numerous times, to raise these issues with local organizations, the City of Surrey and the Surrey Board of Trade – only to be met with ignorance.

With the focus often turned to focus on capital costs and nothing else, the SkyTrain alternatives we advocate for tend to be rejected. However, we have suggested that the city consider alternatives like BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) as well, which would offer the same benefits and meet the same needs on some of the proposed LRT corridors – at a far lower cost, and with a more gradual and less disruptive construction process. *(appendix: #2)* This has also been met with ignorance.

In fact, in a recent CitySpeaks survey undertaken by the City and a consultant, participants were told that a BRT system would not offer the features that an LRT provides – like all-door boarding, real-time arrival information, lighted stations, and traffic-signal priority. Buses can support all of these features – and this is already being demonstrated at many locations in Metro Vancouver, such as the #3 Main (real-time arrival displays at every stop) and #99 B-Line (all-door boarding). *(appendix #6)*



A SkyTrain extension, linking Surrey with Langley, is the only option for the South of Fraser that will offer region-wide benefits and can be supported throughout the region.

SkyTrain has proven its economic gains with the creation of many pedestrian and transit-friendly communities around its stations, and a ridership that is higher – both in sheer numbers, and on a per-km basis (*appendix: #6*) – than any Light Rail Transit system in Canada and the USA. SkyTrain has driven Metro Vancouver to become one of the best-performing metropolitan areas in transit ridership on this continent. (*appendix: #7*)

With the lower operating costs of a driver-less system, a faster service attracting higher ridership, and far higher economic benefits for the cost, TransLink and the Province have previously affirmed that a SkyTrain extension to Langley would present no such deficits (*appendix: #2,3,4*). It would generate the revenue to support further bus services in the city, increasing their service and improving transit coherency throughout the city.

It would present none of the issues that an LRT will face. Inevitable vehicle-train collisions on LRT systems, which have never been accounted for in any study, can cost taxpayers and insurers millions of dollars – and any other collisions along the corridor can cause track blockages, disrupting LRT service for hours. A SkyTrain extension would be immune to all of these issues.

The most important aspect, however, is that a SkyTrain will offer the most travel time and transportation benefits. A rider boarding in Langley Centre would reach Waterfront Station within 60 minutes. This is a massive opportunity to tie the region together, creating billions of dollars in economic benefits, and ending the constant divides between the South and the North.

A SkyTrain and Bus Rapid Transit alternative has been previously studied by TransLink at the Province and would cost the same to build as an LRT, yet cost less to operate and offer twice the travel time savings on all of the corridors. (*appendix: #2*)

We urge the Province to take the leadership to overrule the choice for LRT, and refuse to fund a Surrey rapid transit project if the City of Surrey is not willing to accept a SkyTrain alternative.

Best regards,

**Daryl Dela Cruz**

Campaign Manager – Better Surrey Rapid Transit

Campaign website: [skytrainforsurrey.org](http://skytrainforsurrey.org)



**Appendix A: Footnotes and sources**

1. See our review of the “Economic Benefits of Surrey LRT Study”  
<http://skytrainforsurrey.org/2015/05/16/review-surrey-lrt-study-ignores-transportation-outcome/>
2. Data on SkyTrain+BRT alternative (RRT1A) costs is taken from the 2012 TransLink/MOTI joint study **Surrey Rapid Transit Alternatives Analysis (SRTAA) Phase 2 Evaluation**
3. The \$22 million LRT operating deficit estimate is taken from the same study (see below)

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT  
**Exhibit 3B.21 - Cost-Effectiveness** TRANSLINK/MOTI  
SURREY RAPID TRANSIT ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

Alternative	BRT 1	LRT 1	RRT 1	RRT 1A
<b>Benefit/Cost Ratio</b>	1.30	0.69	1.55	1.45
<b>Average Costs</b>				
<b>Average Annual Costs</b> (Undiscounted Annualized Capital Costs plus Operating Cost in future year of operations)				
Capital Cost (Undiscounted)	\$900	\$2,180	\$1,800	\$2,220
Average Asset Life (Construction, Vehicles, Property)	48	41	61	59
Annualization Factor (6% over asset life of components)	0.068	0.070	0.066	0.066
Annualized Capital + Renewals Cost	\$ 61	\$ 154	\$ 118	\$ 146
2021 Net Operating Cost (Op. Cost -Revenue)	\$ 22	\$ 22	\$ 6	\$ 19
<b>2021 Total Annualized Cost (\$M)</b>	<b>\$ 83</b>	<b>\$ 176</b>	<b>\$ 124</b>	<b>\$ 165</b>
2041 Net Operating Cost (Op. Cost -Revenue)	\$ 35	\$ 28	\$ 3	\$ 23
<b>2041 Total Annualized Cost (\$M)</b>	<b>\$ 96</b>	<b>\$ 182</b>	<b>\$ 121</b>	<b>\$ 169</b>

\*\*"RRT1" represents a SkyTrain extension to Langley. "RRT1A" represents that extension combined with BRT on 104 Ave and King George Blvd. The operations costs for this BRT are already being funded as the 96 B-Line (introduced 2013)  
All numbers were measured in 2010 dollars.

4. SRTAA: SkyTrain would offer faster, safer, and more reliable service – which would attract more ridership, generate more fare revenue and as a result cost only \$6 million per year to subsidize operations. If surrounding local bus routes are optimized further, as suggested on Suggested on SRTAA PAGE 536 (“For RRT 1A, savings of \$170 million” in discounted net present value), this deficit would drop to 0.
5. Added cost of all South of Fraser bus routes (300 series, 500 series, C shuttles) on TransLink’s Transit System Performance Review and adjusted for inflation  
<http://www.translink.ca/en/Plans-and-Projects/Managing-the-Transit-Network/Transit-System-Performance.aspx>
6. **See next page (Appendix B)**
7. Annual ridership (per capita) numbers were taken by South Fraser Blog and can be referenced by anyone through APTA ridership collection data. See  
<http://sfb.nathanpachal.com/2014/07/transit-service-in-metro-vancouver.html>



## Appendix B

### **SkyTrain ridership/km vs. other transit systems**

Data is from the [American Public Transit Association](#) (Q3 2014) unless stated

City	System name (type)	Weekday daily boardings	Daily boardings per mile
<b>Vancouver</b>	<b>SkyTrain (driverless)</b>	<b>377,900</b>	<b>8,870</b>
Calgary	C-Train (LRT)	310,700	8,510
Boston	MBTA light rail (LRT)	214,500	8,250
Edmonton	Light Rail Transit (LRT)	98,144*	7,550
Toronto	Streetcar (on-street)	281,900	5,525
San Francisco	Muni Metro (LRT)	145,500	4,076
Houston	METROrail (LRT)	45,700	3,571
Newark	Newark/Hudson Bergen LRT	72,939**	3,143
Minneapolis	METRO Light Rail (LRT)	64,500	2,938
Los Angeles	Metro Rail (LRT)	203,400	2,892
Seattle	Link Light Rail (LRT)	40,300	2,330
Portland	MAX, Streetcar (LRT)	113,900	2,330
San Diego	Trolley (LRT)	124,100	2,320
Phoenix	Valley Metro (LRT)	41,200	2,060

\* Q3 numbers were not reported. Data from Edmonton Transit, collected during the same period, is presented instead. See: [http://www.edmonton.ca/transportation/RoadsTraffic/2014LRT\\_PassengerCountReport.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/transportation/RoadsTraffic/2014LRT_PassengerCountReport.pdf)

\*\* Q3 numbers were not reported. NJ Transit's own FY2014 data is used in place (the same number is reported in APTA's Q4 ridership report). See: <https://www.njtransit.com/pdf/FactsAtAGlance.pdf>