

Open Letter to Rob Fleming, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure; Dan Coulter, Minister of State for Infrastructure and Transit; and George Heyman, Minister Responsible for TransLink

Re: Insourcing HandyDART

Dear Minister Fleming, Minister Coulter, and Minister Heyman,

We are an alliance of unions, disability advocates, and other groups 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](#)¹ 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. Last year, 22% of HandyDART trips were performed by taxis; despite TransLink previously committing to limit taxi trips to 7% by 2021.

TransLink has repeatedly reneged on such promises. In 2016, TransLink's CEO at the time committed to conduct a multiple accounts Public Sector Comparator to compare the costs and benefits of continued outsourcing to insourcing at HandyDART. Instead, TransLink hired a privatisation-friendly corporate consulting firm to conduct a financial analysis which not only ignored considerations of 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.

¹ <https://ecoplanning.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. Provide accessible, affordable and increased HandyDART transportation as part of the government’s commitment to implement the *Accessible BC Act*.
3. Develop and conduct an unbiased Public Sector Comparator (PSC), with the full participation of HandyDART riders and workers, to compare the costs and benefits of insourcing to continued outsourcing as TransLink promised in 2016.
4. 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,

Mark Beeching, **Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1724**

Sam Wiese, President, **B.C. Federation of Union Retirees (BC FORUM)**

Kassandra Cordero, Director, **BC Federation of Labour**

Leslie Gaudette, President, **Council of Senior Citizens’ Organizations of BC (COSCO)**

David Ravensbergen, **Council of Canadians - Vancouver**

Helaine Boyd, Executive Director, **Disability Alliance BC**

Wendy Cook, Chair, **Langley Human Dignity Coalition**

Louella Vincent, President, **New Westminster & District Labour Council**

Miyuki Shinkai, President, **Sunshine Coast Labour Council**

Stephen von Sychowski, President, **Vancouver District Labour Council**

Cc:

- Premier Eby
- Deputy Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, Kathryn Krishna
- Parliamentary Secretary for Seniors’ Services and Long-Term Care, Harwinder Sandhu
- Parliamentary Secretary for Accessibility, Susie Chant