

VANCOUVER AND SURREY MAYORS LATEST TO CALL FOR BRINGING HANDYDART IN-HOUSE: TRANSLINK HOLDS PRIVATE MEETING TO MOVE AHEAD WITH CONTRACTING OUT

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Vancouver—Vancouver Mayor Ken Sim and Surrey Mayor Brenda Locke have joined seven other mayors and city councils from throughout Metro Vancouver calling for HandyDART service to be brought in-house under government control, rather than continuing to contract out to foreign corporations. These nine mayors represent 73% of the region's population.

Mayor Sim's letter to Transportation Minister Farnworth, dated October 28, came the day before Translink CEO Kevin Quinn held a private meeting with the TransLink Board of Directors regarding the future of the service. Sources close to TransLink have stated that Quinn informed the Board that he would be recommending continued contracting out of HandyDART, and that the Board would be expected to vote on a recommendation at its scheduled meeting on December 3.

"This is a flagrant violation of TransLink's previous commitments to improved transparency and public consultation," said Stephen von Sychowski, the President of the Vancouver & District Labour Council, which is part of the Save Our HandyDART Coalition which has championed insourcing. "For the past year, TransLink has been conducting a review of the HandyDART service delivery model, but it has consistently refused to provide riders, workers, and the community with any data or analysis from this review."

"TransLink seems to be barreling forward with plans to continue contracting out, without providing any meaningful opportunity for a response from older adults who ride HandyDART" said Leslie Gaudette, President of the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC.

Transdev, a French corporation, currently operates HandyDART which serves seniors and people living with disabilities. Following widespread criticism of deteriorating service quality, skyrocketing taxi usage (which last month reached 28% of all service, four times higher than TransLink had previously committed to), and a three-week-long strike by HandyDART workers in 2024, TransLink commissioned a study to compare the cost and benefits of insourcing versus continued private contracting. Although the agency had committed to consultation, advocates say that TransLink has not kept its promise.

"This is incredibly frustrating, given that nine mayors representing the vast majority of people served by HandyDART are in agreement that the public would be better served by a publicly-operated HandyDART," said Gaudette.

In Mayor Sim's letter to Minister Farnworth, Sim stated that insourcing HandyDART "would strengthen oversight, improve accountability to riders, and ensure decisions about service delivery are guided by public interest. It would also advance the priorities of [Vancouver's] Age-Friendly Action Plan by reinforcing a transit system that supports dignity, independence, and community participation for seniors and people with disabilities."

Mayor Brenda Locke wrote a similar letter to Minister Farnworth earlier this summer, in which she stated that "Outsourcing the HandyDART operation to a Multinational Company based out of France is a travesty during a time that requires Canadian solidarity."

"This Spring, TransLink delayed their decision regarding the future of HandyDART," says Janet Andrews, Secretary Treasurer of New Westminster & District Labour Council. "Since that time, we've had no response regarding how the public can engage in the decision-making process. Now we hear that the public will receive a copy of a report one week before the meeting where the decision will be made. That's not consultation, that's a publicly funded agency operating by its own rules, in apparent disregard of local and provincial government input."