

Edmonton sells 28 Year Old Trolleys For Further Service

28 of Edmonton's BBC trolleybuses, which administrators told Council were past their life expectancy, were sold in October to the City of Plovdiv, Bulgaria for \$2,000 apiece. The vehicles are 28 years old, and will be used to provide service on that city's extensive trolleybus network.

The City of Plovdiv, located in south-central Bulgaria along the Dresden-Bucharest-Sofia-Istanbul corridor, is an international transportation hub. With a population of around 400,000, it is Bulgaria's second-largest city and administrative center of the Plovdiv Province. Trolleybuses have been in use there since 1956.

The long economic life expectancy of trolleybuses is well documented around the world, and it is not uncommon for used trolleybuses to find a second or even third life. 80 of Vancouver's previous trolleybus fleet, for example, were sold to Mendoza, Argentina for further service, and former Edmonton trolleybuses built in the early 1970's are still in operation in Mexico City. The motors in Seattle's current trolleybus fleet date from the 1940's, although the fully accessible bus bodies are only a few years old.

During the debate over the future of Edmonton's trolley system, city administrators claimed that the maximum life expectancy of a trolleybus was 18 years. The cost projections they provided Council were based on this 18-year life, thereby inflating the life-cycle cost. It is ironic that the very administration that put forward such claims should now put its supposedly worn-out 28-year-old trolleys up for sale for
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Edmonton BBC trolleys are loaded at a South Edmonton yard for shipment to a port in the United States, from where they will cross the Atlantic Ocean en route to Plovdiv, Bulgaria. [Photo: M. Parsons, October 2009]

Edmonton Council Approves West, North and Southeast LRT Routes

Despite its backward move in the area of electric bus transit, the City of Edmonton has come a step forward with LRT expansion. On December 15th, City Council approved LRT routes to the West, Southeast and North. Proponents of the approved routes claim the decision will positively influence land development and lead to densification of specific core areas. "[This] decision is huge", said Bob Boutilier, General Manager of Transportation for the City. "It's the first time you have seen an integrated land-use and transportation initiative get approved.

While the North route from Downtown to NAIT and the Southeast route to Millwoods met with relatively little controversy, much debate took place over the
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further service.

Edmonton is the only city in North America to have abandoned an extensive electric trolley system in the 21st Century, at the dawn of the age of Peak Oil.

[ETC article; Information Source: Edmonton Journal, December 3, 2009.]

LRT Routes Approved

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proposed West line from Lewis Estates to Downtown using Stony Plain Road east of 156th Street.

A previous proposal for a more direct West LRT that would employ a route running west from the University, over a high bridge and along 87 Avenue still had support from many Edmontonians seeking a quicker connection to the West End.

West End businesses also argued that construction of the line along Stony Plain Road would disrupt business and cause traffic congestion through the use of in-street, low floor LRT cars; they advocated for building the line along 100th Avenue. "104th Avenue and Stony Plain Road are really our main routes to Downtown for a majority of cars," said Councillor Jane Batty, who sought to have this section of the line removed from consideration pending more information.

Most councillors supported the administration's proposal and shot down motions that would have further examined 100th or 107th Avenues as possible routes. The high level of support for the approved West route resulted from claims that the route would contribute to urban densification and more compact development. "If we want to move to an urban transportation system that encourages people to depend on transit ... and encourages people to live in the heart and soul of the city, then going with [this] route makes sense," Councillor Ben Henderson said.

While LRT plans have been discussed for decades -- Councillor Ron Hayter told reporters it was under discussion when he was first elected in 1971 -- officials still are uncertain when construction will actually start. The three lines will cost between \$800 Million and \$1.2 Billion apiece. Mayor Stephen Mandel said that even if other levels of government contribute half the funding, the city will need a tax hike of 11 to 12 per cent to cover the other half.

On January 12th, discussion took place about setting timelines for the completion of the lines. The City's LRT expansion proposal has been advertised as a 30-year plan. The question of advancing construction to complete the lines by 2016 was raised. Transportation Manager Boutilier indicated administration will be bringing a report to Council in three months outlining possible sources of money.

While the City's newly updated *Transportation Master Plan* identifies the heavy dependence on petroleum fuels for city fleets as a potential problem area in future, even the construction of the approved LRT lines won't necessarily provide much of a solution. Over 1,000 diesel-fuelled buses will still continue to serve other areas of the city and to feed the LRT lines owing to a 2008 decision to scrap 140 km of electric trolleybus infrastructure rather than expand and beef up that system.

[Information Sources: CBC News, Dec. 16, 2009, Edmonton Journal, Dec. 16, 2009]

Pollution increase a result of Oilsands, says U of A Researcher

After an exhaustive study of air and water pollution along the Athabasca River from Fort McMurray to Lake Athabasca, researchers say pollution levels have increased as a result of nearby oilsands operations. Professor David Schindler was part of the team that conducted a long-term air and water study and found high levels of polycyclic aromatic compounds, a group of contaminants containing known cancer-causing agents, mutagens which can change the genetic composition of a material, and teratogens, chemicals that disrupt the development of embryos.

"We found PACs in parts per trillion, which are toxic at [those levels]," said Schindler. "We found concentrations that can cause death, mutations and deformities in fish embryos." The highest levels of PACs were found within 50 kilometres of two major oilsands upgraders.

The research was carried out in 2008 at 60 locations along the Athabasca River. Schindler describes current government monitoring of the Athabasca's water and air quality as underwhelming. "Environment Canada has cut back and back to where they sample from only one site downstream from the oilsands," said Schindler. Schindler is hoping that government and industry will follow up this research with testing of their own. "We're alerting people to PAC levels and now something has to be done."

[Source: U of A Express News, December 7, 2009]

Editor's Note: Studies conducted in 2008 by U of A Mechanical Engineering Professor David Checkel that led to a City Council decision to scrap Edmonton's 140 km electric trolley system essentially ignored high levels of pollution from petroleum production in the oilsands. During the trolley debates, this was brought to light by citizens, but ignored by the Mayor and majority of Council.

Audit Slams Edmonton's Hiring of Consultants!

Edmonton's civic administration met with some sharp criticism in a recent auditor's report that examined the way outside consultants were used.

The report found that spending on outside consultants has increased 30 per cent a year since 2000, and hit an all time high of \$92 million in 2008.

"When used incorrectly, consultants can drain budgets very quickly, with few or no productive results," the report said. The report indicated that administrators often had no need for outside consultants and could do more of their own work.

The report also criticized the way consultants have been hired. "Our analysis shows that only 12% of consulting engagements in our sample were acquired through open tender, 68% were awarded through the sole-source process, and 20% through department-managed tenders," the report mentioned. In other words, many consultants were hand-picked. In some cases, one for as much as \$220,000, consultants were paid out without the necessary documents. In one case, a consultant was hired to define the work required by a department.

Consultant contracts were found to vary from department to department, some even lacking guidelines or terms of reference.

"That there are problems with the way consultants are used by the city is all too apparent to us," said Brian Tucker, Chair of the Edmonton Trolley Coalition. "Our experience has been that consultants have often been used as 'hired guns' by city administrators who want to lend their case the appearance of credibility. We saw this in the extreme in 2004 and 2008 in the trolley debates, when the City paid out hundreds of thousands of dollars to consultants to present administration's case for trolley elimination rather than conducting an objective analysis."

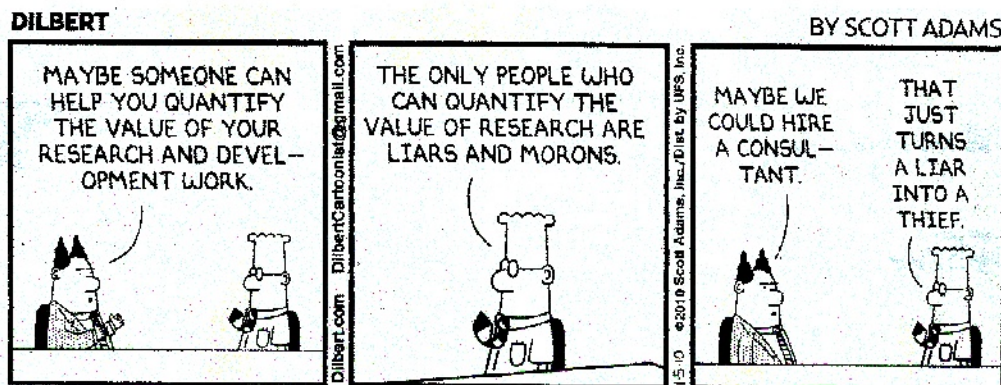
Michael Marriott, Chair of Citizens for Better Transit, also had little good to report on his group's experience with consulting reports done for the city. He felt taxpayer dollars were being squandered in most instances, and cited the trolley reports, the Ridership Growth Strategy report, and recent LRT consultations as major examples. "If administrators want to make a specific case, let them present their own data and recommendations. Why should taxpayers foot the bill for someone else to do the talking for administrators?" Marriott commented that the one-sided nature and predetermined outcomes of many consultant analyses negated any value that they might lend to creating objective debate at Council.

Tucker stated his group feels the City needs to establish a body that is not tied to any city department to look after the hiring of consultants according to a uniform protocol. "Tenders need to be taken, and the consulting work needs to be monitored to ensure that it is truly objective and independent, and not being influenced by administrators. It's the only way Council and taxpayers will see any benefit from consultants reports in arriving at objective decisions."

Commenting on the auditor's report, Mayor Stephen Mandel stated "We need to be very serious when we look at this with the auditor and with the administration."

Edmonton City Council is expected to deal with the audit during a meeting in February.

[ETC Article, Information Sources: CBC, Dec. 23, 2010]



Experts forecast Growing World Oil Demand – Higher Oil Prices

Global oil demand during 2010 will reach its highest level in the past four years, the International Energy Agency said in a January 8th report. The IEA revised its consumption expectations, forecasting an increase in demand by 1.4 million barrels per day.



"Oil demand in China and Asia has already been revised higher by 70,000 bpd over last month," said David Fyfe head of the oil industry and markets division of the IEA. "By 2011, we're expecting something like another 1 million barrels per day of growth, which would be the highest ever." He added that this forecast could vary depending on the extent of economic recovery.

In terms of pricing, crude's price will average \$78.50 a barrel in the first half of 2010 and at \$92 a barrel in the second half, noted Francisco Blanch, a commodity strategist at Merrill Lynch who correctly predicted the record \$147 a barrel price of oil in July 2008. "Oil will potentially break through \$100 a barrel as we enter 2011," said Blanch.

As oil prices dipped below \$70/bbl on unseasonably warm weather in mid-December, Blanch had argued that an incoming cold front and an improving global economic outlook would put significant upward pressure on oil prices. Blanch confirmed that economic recovery in China, India and Japan is playing a key role in driving the demand for oil, and that gasoline and diesel pump prices will be higher worldwide as a result.

[Sources: Reuters, Jan 15, 2010; Emirates Business, Jan. 13, 2010]

California Transit in Crisis

After enduring a brutal year, a number of California public transit systems are barreling down a track toward bankruptcy. The inevitable result will be costlier and longer commutes for all, whether they ride or drive.

In an effort to deal with budget shortfalls and financial woes, nearly every agency has increased fares and cut service, but the changes have resulted in fewer riders and even less revenue -- leading some to worry that public transit has entered a death spiral.

Solano County transit systems are grappling with a dramatic loss of funding for buses and paratransit services, plus loss of riders, Solano Transportation Authority Executive Director Daryl Halls said. In 2009, transit services in Vallejo, Benicia and Fairfield lost at least \$1.4 million, Halls said. Vallejo has cut services and raised fares. Fewer riders are also boarding the Capitol Corridor train service, resulting in a recent 13 percent decline.

More than a million riders are spending extra money and time each day just to get around. And a staggering 66,000 daily riders have abandoned Bay Area transit in the past year. Six major agencies have lost at least 7 percent of their riders in the last year. Some officials fear they'll never get them back.

The worst may be yet to come, with higher oil prices said to be on the horizon. The problems of rising costs, vanishing state subsidies and declining tax revenues are shared by all. Without fundamental changes, they project a cumulative budget shortfall in 25 years of \$8.5 billion, and a capital projects deficit of \$17.2 billion. In other words, as a report by the regional Metropolitan Transportation Commission concluded, it is a road to bankruptcy.

The effects of the transit crisis reach far beyond those who ride buses, trains or ferries. The trouble facing Bay Area transit will pack more congestion on roads, cripple the region's ability to rebound economically, increase the region's contribution to global warming and disrupt the lives of all who rely on public transportation.

One of the main problems is simple, arithmetic. The average Bay Area commute is 24 miles round-trip. In 2008, someone who drives a car that gets 24 miles a gallon was saving \$1.57 on gas each day by taking public transit. But most daily transit tickets are 50 cents to \$1 more now, so the savings are dropping. As service is cut, commuters are finding it less convenient to take trains and buses, worsening the problem. Thousands of bus riders have seen their routes vanish.

The pace of the transit crisis continues to gain steam. Bay Area transit operators began losing revenues because of the recession and have been stripped of \$532 million in state aid during the past three years. California is now one of 15 states that provides no subsidy for transit. For all, a long-term deficit remains which will make tackling future challenges even more difficult.

[Source: *Vallejo Times Herald (California)*, January 12th, 2010]

New York Hybrids Do the Jerk

Acceleration on the MTA's new hybrid buses have made for a rocky ride and caused passengers to fall in the last year, say NYC Transit officials.

The hybrids were touted for their smoothness by manufacturers seeking to market the vehicles.

"You get scared of getting flung to the front," said Beverly Dawkins, 63, a hybrid bus rider in Manhattan. "You felt stable on the old buses. Now you have to hold on with both hands."

The rate of customers claiming injuries on buses rose by 13 percent from July 2008 to July 2009, which officials attributed to the jerking hybrids. The hybrids, which have been in service for more than a year, account for about a fourth of the MTA's total fleet of 6,250 vehicles.

To resolve the problem, officials undertook outfitting all of the hybrids with a patch that will smooth acceleration and hope the fix will bring down the rate of customer injuries.

[Source: AM New York, Oct. 28, 2009]

New Vancouver streetcars unveiled in False Creek

The first of two Bombardier “Flexity” streetcars, which will operate in Vancouver beginning in January, 2010, was unveiled December 7th in False Creek.

The streetcars are the first 100 per cent low-floor vehicles to be used in North America.

"This is the latest state-of-the-art modern European streetcar design," Bombardier General Manager Steve Hall said. The streetcars will transport passengers from the Athletes Village Canada Line stop to Granville Island from January 21st to March 21st. The service will run 18 hours a day, seven days a week -- for free. "We want everybody to enjoy it and have fun," Hall said. "It's a demonstration for all the people in Metro Vancouver to see what this transit option is really like—to ride it, feel it, and get a sense of what could be possible here."

A permanent streetcar service, with 21 stops from Main Street to Stanley Park and running through the downtown core, has also been proposed.

Hall said he hopes the streetcars will help combat climate change by drawing people out of their cars. "There's a whole wave of effort to make transit vehicles as attractive and comfortable as possible," Hall said. "Big windows, open, and comfortable."

The Flexity streetcars are on loan from Belgium's Brussels Transport Company and will run on existing Downtown Historic Railway infrastructure, which was upgraded for \$8.5 million by the City of Vancouver.

[Source: CTV News, Updated: Mon Dec. 07 2009]



Bombardier's "Flexity" will run in Vancouver during the Olympics. [Photo: D. Lam]

Winnipeg Councillor pushes Trolleybuses

Each time the cost of diesel fuel goes up by a penny, it costs the City of Winnipeg an extra \$150,000 a year to keep its buses going. With much higher fuel costs forecast in the long term, Councillor Russ Wyatt has suggested putting electric trolleybuses on the streets like the kind used in Vancouver. "If fuel costs rise the way most experts say they will, we will be forced to find alternatives, because the cost of diesel fuel will be a real burden on the transit system", he says.

Wyatt, City Council member for Winnipeg Transcona, says that electric trolleys not only have the potential to stabilize costs, but could also reduce greenhouse gas emissions. He wants the City to explore the idea of replacing diesel-powered buses with trolleys. The new Co-Chair of Mayor Sam Katz' Environmental Advisory Committee says that Manitoba's ample access to relatively cheap hydro-electric power should make trolley technology viable in Winnipeg. "We could use renewable, clean, Manitoba-made energy," Wyatt told reporters.

Specifically, Wyatt wants the City to investigate whether electric trolleys could be used to connect Downtown Winnipeg and the University of Winnipeg with the \$327 million rapid transit corridor that will extend from Queen Elizabeth Way to Chancellor Matheson Road at the University of Manitoba. In January of 2009, the City of Winnipeg made a request for funding toward an integrated rapid transit system.

Winnipeg previously operated electric trolleybuses for 33 years, beginning in 1937. Subsequent to the system's closure in 1970, there were two unsuccessful attempts to return trolleybuses to Winnipeg streets. Mayor Sam Katz commented that he laments the day that the trolley system was dismantled.

[Sources: Winnipeg Free Press, April 28, 2009 and CTV News Winnipeg, April 29, 2009]

INTERNATIONAL

New Trolleys to Arrive for 70th Anniversary in Eberswalde

The German city of Eberswalde will be receiving 12 new trolleybuses to renew its fleet this year – just in time for the system's 70th Anniversary. The 18-metre long articulated trolleys will be supplied by the Polish manufacturer Solaris Bus and Coach Company. Plans are to place the new vehicles in service for the 70th Anniversary on November 6th, 2010.

[Source: Trolleyemotion, Nov. 16, 2009]



Lausanne Switzerland Plans Trolley Expansion

With the installation of overhead trolley wire completed in the summer of 2009, Lausanne's Route 21 is now ready for trolley service to replace diesel buses. An order of 34 new low floor trolleybuses was due to start arriving in November of 2009, with the new vehicles first being employed to replace older, high floor trolleybuses in service on other routes. Electric service on the new route will begin as vehicles become available.

[Source: Trolleyemotion, October 12, 2009]

Salzburg Continues Expansion of Trolley Network—Retail Outlets, Airport and Communities Chip In

As of September 7th, 2009, trolleybuses on Salzburg's route 8 began operating over a 5.7 km extension of the route to Wals, where a Designer Outlet Centre opened its doors three days later. The extension was financially supported in part by the Designer Outlet, the community of Wals as well as the nearby Salzburg airport with additional funding from the city and province. The financing model could serve as a model for the expansion of transit infrastructure in cities around the world.

With the addition of the most recent extension, the Salzburg trolleybus network now covers over 180.3 km and is served by a fleet of 83 trolleybuses operating on 9 routes. Announcing the inauguration of the recent extension, Managing Director Gunter Mackinger commented: "Powered by electricity generated from water, our trolleybuses produce no greenhouse gases, release no exhaust particles, and make no noise. They even produce a quarter of the energy they use themselves during braking, when the motor acts as a generator. Every passenger who travels with Stadtbuss is therefore making an active contribution to environmental protection." [Source: Trolleyemotion, September 14, 2009]

New Articulated Trolleys and Trolley Extension for Solingen, Germany

November 16th, 2009 marked not only the opening of a 1.1 km extension to Solingen's Route 683, but the conversion of the line to articulated trolleybuses. For 23 years, 12 metre trolley vehicles typified trolley operations in Solingen, but as the Manager of SWS pointed out in his speech at the opening ceremonies, the new 18 metre trolleys will mean a marked increase in passenger capacity on Solingen's third busiest route. The new Hess articulated trolleys can accommodate 135 passengers, as compared to the old MAN 12 metre coaches that had space for 105 at full load.

The old terminus of the Route 683 was known for its turntable, a device for turning the trolley vehicles around for the return trip. The new articulated coaches, however, cannot fit on the turntable. The 1.1 km extension to the route is traversed on auxiliary power, with automatic lowering and setting of the trolley poles.

[Source: Trolleyemotion, Nov. 19, 2009]

New Trolleybuses draw Public Interest in the Netherlands

An Open House at CONNEXION's Westervoortsedijk Depot in early September in the Dutch City of Arnhem drew large numbers of people from the public. Star of the day was the new SwissTrolley made by the Hess Company that the operator had taken delivery of a few days earlier. A display of historical fleet was also featured, with vehicles dating back 60 years. Electric trolley operation on Arnhem's Route 2, absent since 1997 and brought back by popular demand, was inaugurated on the day prior to the Open House with special runs over a portion of the route. Trolley service over the full length of Route 2 will be reinstated sometime during the first part of 2010.

The first test runs with the new trolley on the Arnhem system commenced the following week. The new SwissTrolleys are to replace older Volvo trolleybuses currently in service.

[Source: Trolleyemotion, September 29, 2009]