

TRANSIT TALK

VOL. 22

Edmonton Plays the Fool City ends Electric Bus Service with Peak Oil on Horizon

As global oil supplies approach peak production and inexorable decline and concerns grow worldwide about the impacts of urban pollution, the City of Edmonton defiantly terminated its electric bus service on May 2, 2009. Diesel buses, some older than the electric trolleys they replaced, took over service in the city's core that afternoon, breaking the quiet of inner city neighborhoods and belching plumes of noxious black smoke at pedestrians and transit patrons waiting at stops. Only days later, crews began tearing down sections of the overhead wire network despite the fact that funds earmarked for overhead dismantling in 2009 were removed from the city's budget.

The sudden closure was the result of a decision a week earlier by City Council to terminate electric service earlier than a previously set date of 2010 on the dubious claim that \$700,000 could be saved to help with a sudden deficit. In a June 2008 vote, Council had voted to phase out trolley service in favour of diesel hybrid buses by 2010, a decision regarded by professionals and transit observers around the world as backwards. The City later cancelled its order for new hybrids in December 2008 due to budgetary reasons and the poor reliability record of hybrid buses it had on test.

Clean and quiet trolleybuses had served Edmonton just a few months short of 70 years--longer than any other mode of public transit. The end of the longstanding service was marked only by a small ceremony on the afternoon of May 2nd held outside the city's Westwood Transit Garage, as trolleybuses were pulled from their runs and directed back to the depot. A 1954 CCF Brill trolleybus from the City's historical fleet was operated in service during the afternoon and was one of the last trolleys to return to the garage. Senior administrators had originally wanted no ceremony of any kind to mark the end of the service which had been a salient feature of 46 neighborhoods and the downtown core which, ironically, the City is seeking to revitalize.

City administrators bent on eliminating electric trolleys battled citizens in a debate that continued for over four
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21st Century Beijing – the Face of a Modern, Progressive City



New articulated trolleybuses began revenue service on Route 109 in Beijing on Sunday, March 15th.
[Courtesy W. Young]

\$2 a Litre Fuel around the Corner, says Leading Economist

Oil is poised to rise to US\$200 a barrel during the next economic cycle, says Canadian author and former CIBC chief economist Jeff Rubin. Rubin is credited as being the first economist to predict triple-digit oil prices in recent years.

In his new book, *Why Your World Is About To Get A Whole Lot Smaller: Oil and the End of Globalization*, Rubin explains that while oil has been cheaper during the current recession, it's not going to be that way for long. Because global demand remains strong and oil reserves are continually being depleted, prices will go up. This will, in turn, drive up shipping costs, forcing many countries to rely on their local economy to support manufacturing and other key industries.

It will no longer make "economic sense" to produce goods in one part of the world and sell them in another

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News Bulletin of the Edmonton Trolley Coalition
Sustainable Transit for Liveable Communities
www.trolleycoalition.org

Member of the Alberta Environmental Network and Electric Mobility Canada
Edited by Robert R. Clark, retired supervisor of transit planning

etc

EDMONTON PLAYS THE FOOL (continued from page 1)

years. The purchase of modern, low floor trolleybuses and expansion of the system would have provided a sustainable transit service not dependent on petroleum fuels for a large core area of the city. Instead, its decommissioning will now result in a loss to Edmonton taxpayers of over \$124 million in assets and capital dollars to taxpayers—the value of the system plus the cost of dismantling, minus the claimed 2009 operating savings of \$700,000.

\$2 A LITRE FUEL (continued from page 1)

"no matter how much the wage difference is," Rubin told reporters. Transportation costs will be a bigger determinant of what is viable.

Rubin argued while the current global recession has been blamed on a faulty financial sector plagued with toxic assets, oil is really to blame. "When we look around the world, we see recessions that were twice as deep as they were in the U.S. and occurred even before the U.S. recession. That can't just be about sub-prime mortgages." Rather, oil prices that reached \$150 a barrel is what caused the globe to slip into its deepest recession since the 1930s, he explained.

"Every time we've had huge oil shocks in the past we've had global recessions. Guess what? This was the biggest shock of them all, so why wouldn't we have the deepest recession of them all."

On Monday, May 25th, the average price of gasoline in Canada rose to \$1 per litre for the first time in seven months. Leaders from the Organization of Petroleum Producing Countries have said the price of crude will top US \$70 a barrel before the end of this year. [Source: CTV News, May 26, 2009]

SAUDIS WARN OF \$150 OIL WITHIN THREE YEARS

Saudi Arabia warned oil prices could spike to beyond the near \$150 record high of 2008 within three years unless there is more investment to boost production. The announcement came out of an oil summit held in May.

Saudi Arabian Oil Minister Ali Naimi said the world was heading for a fresh spike after the current phase of faltering demand and lower prices, which he said reflected the economic downturn rather than being an indicator of things to come. "We are maintaining our long-term focus rather than being swayed by the volatility of short-term conditions," he said in prepared remarks at the summit. He predicted a price spike worse than what the world witnessed in 2008.

Mr Naimi painted a bleak picture of the oil investment scenario, saying low prices, high costs, tight credit markets and dwindling reserves all combined to hurt spending on new projects. He has been warning about the drop in investment in oil over the last few months.

The International Energy Agency also expressed some concern regarding the impact the financial and economic crisis might have on global energy investment, including investments in petroleum. Long term supply issues would have a dramatic impact on prices.

[Source: The Guardian, May 25, 2009]

MOVE TO ALTERNATIVES NOW – NEW REFINERIES WILL NOT BE BUILT: GIUSEPPE MARCONI – THE OIL DASHBOARD

Oil companies will not be building more refineries, because there won't be enough oil left to refine by the time new refineries could pay for themselves. Crude oil is a finite resource more and more depleted. As such, an increasing demand put on this finite supply necessitates careful management in order to stretch its lifespan and profitability.

There hasn't been a new refinery built in the US since 1976. In 1982, there were 301 operable refineries in the U.S and they produced about 17.9 million barrels of oil per day. Today there are only 149 refineries, and they're producing 17.4 million barrels. While this increase in efficiency is impressive, it is not a miracle. As with everything, outputs are carefully calculated to optimize profitability.

New refineries require tremendous financial commitments which take anywhere from 15 to 25 years to amortize. With record oil prices it would make perfect sense to invest in a few refineries today, except for the lack of oil to be refined 20 years from now.

Trends have predicted that peak oil production, where the production of oil starts to decline, will be reached around 2007-2010. After that, there will be less and less oil to refine no matter where drillers look. In this context, building expensive new refineries does not make economic sense, as existing ones will be sufficient to process whatever little oil is left.

[Source: The Oil Dashboard, July 23, 2008]

CANADIAN TRANSIT NEWS

VANCOUVER AREA'S CANADA LINE SET TO OPEN_{al}

The Canada Line connecting Vancouver with the Vancouver airport and Richmond will open by Labour Day weekend, according to project officials who took part in a full system test of a Canada Line train in late March, riding from Waterfront Station to YVR-Airport Station. The Canada Line will carry people between the centre of Richmond and Vancouver's Waterfront Centre in 25 minutes or less. The \$2.054 billion project is on budget and ahead of schedule.

"I want to thank the thousands of people involved in the construction of the Canada Line for their hard work and determination in getting this critical transit project completed as quickly as possible," said Premier Campbell. "The Canada Line will result in an estimated 200,000 less one-way car trips every day as commuters choose this convenient and efficient link between the airport, Richmond and downtown Vancouver."

Canada Line trains are already travelling the complete length of the 19-kilometre line as part of testing and commissioning of the system. Finishing work continues at all Canada Line stations and the restoration of station sites is close to completion. The exact date for welcoming the public to the Canada Line will be announced shortly.

"TransLink is delighted to have the showcase Canada Line open early in September as part of our fall service improvements," said TransLink CEO Tom Prendergast. "We are excited about the additional capacity it will provide and pleased to be able to provide tourists the advantage of a swift, highly reliable rapid transit trip linking the airport and downtown, something most cities cannot do."

[Source: Office of the Premier, Province of British Columbia, March 27, 2009]

BOMBARDIER WINS TORONTO STREETCAR BID

The Toronto Transit Commission has chosen Bombardier Inc. to supply 204 new streetcars for more than \$1.2 billion. Two companies were in the running to replace Toronto's aging streetcar fleet: the German-based Transportation division of Montreal-headquartered Bombardier, and Germany's Siemens.

The procurement recommendation from the staff of the country's largest transit authority envisages spending \$993 million for the streetcars, plus \$293.1 million for spare parts, options and other items, a total of \$1.29 billion including taxes. A new maintenance facility will also be constructed for the larger vehicles at an estimated cost of \$345 million. TTC Chair Adam Giambrone suggested it would likely be located in the city's Port district.

Giambrone observed that the city, province and federal governments traditionally split such spending evenly, "but the funding charts often get incredibly complex."

A prototype of Bombardier's vehicle is to be delivered in 2011, with the first cars entering service in 2012 and all 204 being delivered by 2018, at which time the last of the current cars will be retired.

The new LRVs will be low-floor, quieter, and have features such as air conditioning for greater customer comfort. They will be able to carry almost twice as many passengers as the TTC's current streetcars, the Transit Commission said.

The contract would include an option to purchase up to 400 additional vehicles.

"There's something really iconic about the streetcar in Toronto", Giambrone said. "Streetcars also provide a practical, pragmatic solution for public transit; they are essential to providing good service."

[Source: The Hamilton Spectator, April 27, 2009]

GO TRANSIT TO LOOK AT ELECTRIFYING ONTARIO TRAIN LINES

Metrolinx, operator of Ontario's GO train lines, has announced a study, to be complete by winter 2010, looking into the costs and benefits of electrifying GO train service. The study will be overseen by an external advisory committee including community representatives, technical and environmental experts.

The Clean Train Coalition, composed of residents, community associations and businesses living along the Georgetown line - in the path of a huge expansion of GO service - has been pushing the province to go to cleaner electric trains rather than diesel. GO had been planning to electrify the busy Lakeshore West corridor by 2020, but converting the Georgetown line was thought to be 15 years away.

The Coalition says Georgetown should happen first, because it will see 300 to 500 trains a day once GO starts all-day two-way service to Brampton and Georgetown and a high-speed rail service to the airport begins. "Any move toward electrification is good, but I don't want them to be studying this while they're installing diesel," said Mike Sullivan, a representative with the Coalition. "The diesel plans have to be put on hold while the electrification plans proceed. If they need to be preceded by a study, let's have the study. Let's not continue with the wrong plan while we study how to do the right plan," he said.

Sullivan believes it would cost about \$5 million a kilometre, or about \$150 million total, to electrify the line between Brampton and downtown. [Source: Toronto Star, May 27, 2009]

Vancouver Encourages Non Motorized Transport



BIKE LANES FOR BURRARD STREET BRIDGE

Ten years ago, when Vancouver City Council proposed to close traffic lanes on that city's Burrard Street Bridge to create bicycle and pedestrian lanes, motorists revolted. But Vancouver's present environmentally minded mayor is set to try again, and this time things look different.

The change in public opinion was evident at a city council meeting in early May where dozens of cyclists lined up to support the plan. Proponents say the era of automobile domination in urban centres is nearing an end.

"What is so great about cars anyway?" asked Stan Ford, 65, who regularly rides his bike around Vancouver. "They're noisy, smelly and dangerous. No one really likes them." He added: "I can see a big shift coming," and predicted that once life is made easier and safer for cyclists, many drivers will ditch their vehicles and switch to cycling.

City officials say people and city politicians have changed their attitudes toward cars and bikes in the past decade. They say the time is right to clamp down on drivers. Most councillors are avid cyclists themselves and support the bike-lane plan.

As proposed, two lanes - one on either side of the bridge - were to be closed to traffic on a trial basis beginning in June. Council's decision, however, resulted in a modified proposal to close only one lane instead. The impacts will be evaluated at the end of the year.

[Sources: Globe and Mail, 2009-05-06/CBC News, May 7, 2009]

ETC Editorial

by Bob Clark

Retired ETS Supervisor of Transit Development



SCAM! SCAM! SCAM!

The other day I received a phone call offering an "all expense paid" holiday in the Caribbean. It seemed that all I had to do was send six hundred dollars as a token of MY good faith! Needless to say, I didn't fall for it.

In the 1960's Montreal was promised a "silent" rubber tire subway - all it had to do was scrap its cost-effective street car system. In the 1980's, Vancouver was promised a computerized rapid transit system that would do away with expensive operating staff - all it had to do was scrap its plans for LRT and tie into one monopoly supplier for life.

At the start of this century we were promised non-polluting hydrogen cars and buses - all we had to do was to free the hydrogen up from all the other stuff it was tied to!

Four years ago Edmontonians were told we could eliminate pollution from our coal-burning power plants by scrapping our trolleys and buying diesel-electric hybrids. The City bought some samples: these turkeys spend most of their time in the shop, and Transit doesn't want to buy any more.

Sure, the Montreal and Vancouver systems work well enough, but for the total money invested in capital, maintenance and operating cost, those cities could have covered five times the area with efficient people-friendly light rail systems. As for recent Edmonton happenings, well, words fail your editor!

We don't know how many seniors are scammed by "free" offers, but politicians certainly seem to be very vulnerable.

A little advice to Mayor and Council - make sure the Administration accounts for every penny they are supposed to be saving by scrapping our extensive trolley system, and if they can't, heads should roll!

North American News Items

***Transit In Trouble:* TRANSIT AGENCIES HIT BY RECESSION WILL NOW FACE MORE CUTS AS DIESEL PRICES RISE**

Public transportation ridership is at historically high levels across the United States. Last year, Americans took more than 10.7 billion trips on transit, the highest level of ridership in over fifty years and a modern transit record. Yet, at the same time public transit agencies are working to serve their increasing ridership, they are facing shortfalls in state and local revenues and unpredictable fuel prices. Due to these factors, transit agencies are being forced to cut service, raise fares, and lay off workers. As an industry with a huge dependence on diesel fuel, the situation is about to get worse, as oil prices begin another climb.

"Mass transit has a residual benefit to any community," said Missouri Congressman Russ Carnahan. "Local transit agencies need options as they experience record-high ridership and record-high costs. Transit not only connects neighborhoods; it can also be part of any comprehensive plan to secure America's energy independence and reduce global warming." Carnahan is hoping to introduce a bill that would allow some Federal funds to be used towards day-to-day operating costs in his state, rather than being only available for capital improvements. But the proposal comes several months after one Missouri transit agency, St. Louis Metro, cut its bus service by 44 percent to help offset a \$50 million deficit.

Agencies in other states are not much better off. For example, Louisville Kentucky's TARC is looking at major fare increases and service cuts to deal with a large operating deficit. San Mateo County officials in California are looking at cutting up to 15 percent of their agency's bus service. "The first thing that we're going to look at is the least efficient routes, and that would include late-night service, express service and midday service," said Christine Dunn, a spokesperson for San Mateo's SamTrans.

Urban transit agencies are now paying the price for overdependence on one fuel and on the much touted diesel bus.

[Information sources: Louisville Courier-Journal, June 8, 2009; Palo Alto Daily News, June 10, 2009; Mass Transit, June 10, 2009; St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 2, 2009]

GRAIN USE FOR BIOFUELS WILL MEAN HIGHER FOOD PRICES

U.S. corn and soybean reserves have been depleted by exports and by domestic demand for fuels such as ethanol and biodiesel. This year's crops aren't expected to replenish the grain bins, according to a June 10th report from the Associated Press.

Global grain markets are left with a thinner cushion of surplus. It is expected that the tightening supply will force crop prices up, which have been kept down by the global recession. Higher grain prices could hurt already-battered food companies including General Mills Inc. and Tyson Foods Inc., which have had to pay more for ingredients as prices for corn, wheat and soybeans have risen. Prices at the grocery store will also climb as food producers pass their higher costs on to consumers.

[SOURCE: LA Times, June 10, 2009]

STREETCARS FOR STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT?

An engineering firm has started to evaluate development potential along a proposed 3-mile streetcar route in Stamford, Connecticut. "We're looking to find out whether there is a level of economic development in this city that would make a streetcar project worth pursuing," said Josh Lecar, Stamford's transportation planner.

In other municipalities, light-rail systems have been credited with increasing property values, spurring private investment and revitalizing neighborhoods. Supporters say streetcars provide a permanent infrastructure that attracts commuters and investors. Portland, Oregon installed streetcars in 2001, and this created more than \$3.5 billion in property investments within two blocks of the line, according to Portland Streetcar Inc. It began as a 2.4-mile loop that cost about \$57 million. The line is now 8 miles long. In Tampa, Fla., \$800 million in private investment followed installation of a 2.4-mile streetcar route after it opened in 2002. The initial cost was \$48 million.

Lecar said a "starter system" in Stamford would make about eight stops and cost under \$50 million.

City officials mostly are enthusiastic about the plan. Kip Bergstrom, director of the Urban Redevelopment Commission, said he considers the project a high priority. "Stamford's future is in being as transit-oriented as it can be, and this will be a key piece of that," Bergstrom said.

[Source: Stamford Advocate, 2009-04-21]

SALT LAKE CITY: DIESEL BUSES SOURCE OF SMOG

Hundreds of the Utah Transit Authority's buses are aging polluters that spew more gunk than the cars they take off the road.

A legislative audit last year found the buses belch more nitrogen oxide than the cars they replace, and that more than offsets the benefits of electric light-rail trains. Legislative auditors found that UTA's bus fleet in 2006 curtailed 164 tons of automobile NOx emissions, based on average bus occupancy of 8.9 people. But the buses emit 297 million tons more of the pollution than they save. To offset the car pollution using existing bus engines, UTA would have to more than double bus occupancy to 21 people. That has not changed this year, UTA officials acknowledge.

NOx pollution is a leading cause of two of the Wasatch Front's persistent health hazards: particulates and ozone. Particulates afflict the circulatory system and contribute to heart attacks and strokes. Ozone inhibits lung function and exacerbates asthma.

"UTA should pump more public money into engine upgrades, and it should expand clean-bus routes. If the bus service were expanded and made more practical, more people would ride," said Brian Moench, president of Physicians for a Healthy Environment. "It's imperative for riders and drivers even more than for the larger public", he said. NOx pollution concentrates inside buses.

Moench's biggest complaint with UTA is that when he rides buses, the drivers often idle them while waiting for scheduled departures.

Of 236 UTA buses on the road, the agency plans to replace 47 of them this year with newer models, and 61 in 2010. Because of more stringent emission standards, the newer vehicles will generate less pollution. However, newer cars and trucks are also less polluting due to more stringent standards. A move toward alternative fuels with vehicles like plug-in hybrid automobiles could still result in automobiles being a cleaner choice.

[Source: The Salt Lake Tribune, May 28, 2009 and subsequent issues]

Printed: July 6, 2009



Pomp and circumstance were in order on April 30th as Mendoza, Argentina inaugurated 80 trolleybuses purchased second-hand from Vancouver, BC. The vehicles have been painted in bright colors and will provide service on the Mendoza system. The vehicles are 26 years old, but Mendoza officials say they have "lots of life left in them", a testimony to the longevity of trolleybuses. [Courtesy R. C. DeArmond, International Trolleybus News]

ELECTRIC STREETCARS TO RETURN TO WASHINGTON, DC.

The D.C. Department of Transportation is close to announcing the start of construction on a two-mile streetcar line in Southeast Washington, according to public information officer John Lisle.

The \$25 million project - the first phase of an initiative to return streetcars to Washington - is expected to be completed in 18 months. The project includes laying track and installing poles and overhead cables; the line could be built at a rate of one block every two weeks. It will be served by three streetcars the District bought in 2005 for \$10 million. They have been mothballed since purchase in the Czech Republic, where they were built, because a previous streetcar initiative failed.

D.C. Council member Jim Graham said that the streetcar line represents "a vision for a light-rail system in the District of Columbia. It's all about getting people onboard. There's just something about streetcars that draws people."

"If we had our wish list, there's an expansion we'd like to see throughout the city," Transportation Department press officer Karyn LeBlanc said.

The second phase of the project is part of a \$65 million, three-year road reconstruction project. Officials plan to begin laying tracks in 45 days while doing the road work.

DC's previous streetcar project was put on hold in April 2005 because of land-titling problems and difficulty finding qualified contractors. Streetcars last operated in the District in 1962, ending 100-years of operation with lines that covered the city and extended into Maryland and Virginia.

[Source: Washington Times, March 16th, 2009]