

Get Rolling on Streetcars, Say Gathered Experts

They reduce carbon, promote healthy development, and tourists love them, Translink is told.

By [Monte Paulsen](#), 1 Oct 2010, TheTyee.ca



Map of streetcar route proposed by City of Vancouver.

Four out of every five people aboard the Olympic Line streetcar last spring were not tourists but Metro Vancouver residents.

And many of those 550,000 passengers -- about a third, during peak transit hours -- rode the 60-day demonstration train not for amusement but as part of a daily commute to work or school.

These results were among the boxcar of data unloaded during a daylong symposium sponsored by the University of British Columbia and entitled, "Streetcars: The Missing Link?"

The presenters argued that the Olympic Line not only proved the existence of significant pent-up demand for new transit options in the downtown core, but also that massive additional investments in regional transit will be necessary in order for the region to meet the carbon-reduction goals set by either the Province of British Columbia or the more ambitious City of Vancouver.

'Streetcars are the missing link'

Dale Bracewell, the City of Vancouver manager who put together the Olympic Line demonstration, was unabashed in his support.

"Streetcars are the missing link," he said, arguing that streetcars fill a needed niche between bus and SkyTrain service.

"This is the piece we don't have. When you look at modern cities in Europe, they have all of these modes," he said.

The Olympic Line carried 25,000 riders on its peak day -- with only two trains in operation. Bracewell said streetcars have longer life-spans and lower operating costs than do buses. He said streetcars

attract tourists (who subsidize the service for locals) and stimulate development.

"It's not about streetcars versus busses," Bracewell said. "It's about figuring out where is the right place for a streetcar."

The right place, according to the City of Vancouver, is a downtown route that links the city's disjointed transit terminals. (See map, above.) The city's plans for a [Downtown Streetcar](#) line are divided into three phases:

Phase Zero would extend the demonstration line from Granville Island to Science World. This mini-line would connect SkyTrain with the Canada Line.

Phase One would extend the Downtown Streetcar line to Waterfront Station via Quebec, Powell and Cordova streets. This line would connect SeaBus, West Coast Express, and nearly all of the city's downtown bus routes (most of which were formerly streetcar lines), as well as providing yet another connection to the Expo, Millennium and Canada lines. Along the way, the streetcar would tie together neighbourhoods including Gastown, Chinatown, the Downtown Eastside, the Olympic Village, Fairview and False Creek South.

A "**Stanley Park Extension**" would continue the Downtown Streetcar from Waterfront Station to Stanley Park. This addition would connect the West End and Coal Harbour neighbourhoods. In addition, it would tie together the city's most visited tourist destinations: Stanley Park, Granville Island, and the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre.

A "**Pacific Boulevard Extension**" would run west from Science World along Pacific and Drake to Granville. This spur would connect to BC Place, Rogers Arena (née GM Place) and Yaletown.

Possible future extensions could include a leg through the False Creek Flats to Commercial Drive,

"Of the people who travelled during the weekday peak, more than one third of them were traveling to work or school," Archambault said.

And even though the streetcar was free, 64 per cent of those surveyed held valid fare cards and were using the streetcar to extend the range of the Canada Line or another TransLink route.

"Many people were using transit to connect" to the streetcar, Archambault said.

Moreover, 30 per cent of those predominately local riders said they would not have come into the city if it were not for the streetcar.

"Almost a third of all trips... would not have [been] taken if the streetcar did not exist," Archambault said.

He calculated that more than 27,000 automobile trips were avoided as a result of the 60-day experiment, resulting in a savings of more than 20,000 kilograms of greenhouse gas emissions.

and/or a line through Vanier Park and along the existing Arbutus rail corridor linking Broadway, Kerrisdale and Marpole.

"We will continue to seek opportunities to move this project forward," Bracewell concluded. "Broadway is our number one priority right now, but we will continue to pursue a tandem approach."

Locals loved the Olympic Line

UBC graduate student Silas Archambault presented the results of a rider survey that he and fellow students conducted during the Olympic Line's 60-day trial.

The team interviewed 455 of the more than 550,000 people who rode the streetcar. (Though data was collected at different times of day and during different periods, the sample is not proportional to the total ridership.)

The UBC survey found that 82 per cent of the streetcar riders interviewed were residents of Metro Vancouver -- not Olympic tourists -- and that a surprising number used the temporary line as part of a daily commute.

"There is evidence that a dedicated rider base exists, and that many people would support... a streetcar," Archambault concluded.