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# Vancouver U-Pass expansion hits financial road blocks

ERIC SZETO  
CUP Western Bureau Chief

VANCOUVER (CUP)—Greater Vancouver postsecondary students are now being told that they'll have to wait until at least 2008 to receive discounted bus passes, as negotiations for expansion of the universal transit pass (U-Pass) program remain at an impasse.

Many of the same problems seen in 2006—common pricing and administrative readiness—continue to contribute to the stalemate, transit officials say.

"All the student societies returned saying, 'We're not ready,' or, 'It's too expensive,'" said Graeme Masterton, manager of transit planning at the greater Vancouver transit authority, TransLink.

Last fall, TransLink came to the U-Pass coalition—a group of students responsible for administering the transit pass—and offered them a common price of \$34 a month. It was immediately rejected because the students wanted a rate similar to what the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University were paying.

At UBC and SFU, the only two schools in the region to have the U-Pass, students pay \$22.50 and \$24.50 a month respectively. The cost is included in student fees, and all students are required to pay, regardless of whether or not they actually use transit. In return, students have unlimited access to transit in the region where a monthly transit regularly costs between \$69 and \$130.

Up to 70 000 postsecondary students stand to gain from the program's expansion to seven community colleges. With the exception of Langara College, the schools—Capilano College, Douglas College, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, Kwantlen University College, Native Education Centre, and Vancouver Community College—have indicated that they wouldn't be ready to implement the program this September.

"The student societies have probably missed the opportunity," Masterton said. "It's only going to get more expensive. They're focused on a common low price, and simply they just don't want to see any price offered."

But Christina Clews, a chairperson on the Students' Union of Vancouver Community College (VCC), has said that TransLink's unwillingness to compromise has frustrated the coalition.

**"If [TransLink] were prioritizing students' needs then we would have already been at a consensus and had the implementation of this."**

CHRISTINA CLEWS,  
VCC CHAIRPERSON

"It's been quite an uphill battle," Clews said. "They've been fickle about what they've offered us before, and then they've gone back and they changed their minds."

Clews claims that TransLink came to the coalition last year with a common price of \$30 but came back soon after with an offer of \$34.

"If [TransLink] were prioritizing students' needs then we would have already been at a consensus and had the implementation of this," Clews added.

Glen Leicester, TransLink Vice-President (Transit Planning), reiterated TransLink's desire to expand the U-Pass to community colleges—but only if the project remained revenue-neutral.

Another suggestion being thrown around is for UBC and SFU to accept a rate increase to offset costs for TransLink.

However, the student government

at UBC, the Alma Mater Society, said it's going to wait until its current contract runs out in 2008 before it reassesses.

"You couldn't sell [the rate increase] as necessary," said Ian Pattillo, AMS Vice-President (External Affairs).

Pattillo was critical of the continued deadlock and felt that much of the problems stemmed from disorganization on all fronts.

"I don't think it's going anywhere in the next six months," he said. "TransLink isn't compromising in their price neutrality. The colleges are just too dogmatic about the philosophy of the same price, and UBC is too privileged with its own price."

Before the U-Pass, transit ridership at UBC hovered around 20 per cent, or 19 000 people per day. With the U-Pass, transit ridership jumped 50 per cent—to 47 000 people a day—and has made UBC the second-largest transit hub in BC's Lower Mainland.

The introduction of a U-Pass to the seven community colleges isn't expected to have such a sharp increase in transit numbers because many of the students already take public transit, explained Leicester, who anticipates a 10–15 per cent increase.

Here at the University of Alberta, depending on the results of a spring referendum, a potential \$75 per student per term student fee will be collected to help cover the full \$120 cost to Edmonton Transit System.

The remainder of the U-Pass costs will be made up in part by a commitment from U of A Administration to fund \$15 per student per term and an additional \$30 will be financed by Edmonton City Council and the City of St Albert—the third municipality, Sherwood Park, is still negotiating.

Since the U-Pass referendum question passed its second reading in Students' Council, the decision to introduce the U-Pass along with the mandatory \$75 fee in fall 2007 lies solely with students who vote in the SU elections to be held on 7 and 8 March, 2007.

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## Race Rocks surfs clean energy wave

New tidal energy turbine, the first of its kind, has British Columbian researchers monitoring the success of harnessing ocean power for future use

LEE GUILLE  
Nexus

VICTORIA (CUP)—The moon has always held sway over the oceans, but now the tides and currents they generate will play a part in powering our way of life. Thanks to Canada's first free-stream current-powered turbine, the Race Rocks tidal energy project, waves can be used as an environmentally friendly power source.

Developed by a partnership between Clean Current Power Systems Inc, Pearson College, EnCana Corp, and Sustainable Development Technology Canada, the tidal turbine costs about \$7 million to develop, install and monitor.

The working model tidal turbine, has been installed 16 km from the Race Rocks ecological preserve and research station off the coast of Victoria, BC, and works by drawing power from the movement of the tides.

Over the next several years, the station will be the test site for this new technology, before fully developing it elsewhere.

Although the system is only a quarter the size of an industrial model, the project is benefiting the research station. According to David Skilling, Communication Co-ordinator for Pearson College, the turbine supplies power to the marine education facility located on Race Rocks, giving it a clean energy option.

"We're very excited, because prior to this the island, and all our facilities there, were serviced by diesel generators. With the tidal turbine we're able to turn off those generators and avoid any damage to the pristine environment," Skilling said.

The Race Rocks tidal energy project is currently on such a small scale that it's unlikely to cause any environmental harm, but later, larger projects may be the cause of some worry.

"If you start doing this kind of thing large scale, putting lots of turbines in a tidal channel like the Discovery Passage or the Johnson Strait, eventually you get to the point that the turbines are so extensive that they start blocking the flow," said Chris Garrett, a professor of ocean physics at the

University of Victoria.

Mathematical studies and computer models suggest that turbines operating at optimum capacity could reduce current flows by about 42 per cent.

"If you're talking about an isolated turbine you don't have to worry about these considerations," Garrett said. "But if you were to say, 'Hey look we've got these wonderful, tremendously strong currents in Seymour Narrows, let's put a bunch of turbines in there and get as much electricity as we can,' there you enter a different realm of having a significant effect on the currents and presumably other things, too."

In regards to safety concerns and gathering information for later use, Pearson College and the Race Rocks facility both have their eyes on developments concerning their tidal turbine.

"We don't expect any real effect on sea life or on the sea bed," Skilling said, explaining prior studies were completed accessing the likelihood of ecological harm and Pearson College students will continue monitoring environmental impacts.