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LOCAL NEWS

## **Zeidler changes tune on hydrogen buses**

### **Lawmaker now confident replacement buses will be here if newfangled ones break down**

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The Whistler lawmaker who has been most critical of B.C. Transit's plan to undertake the world's largest trial of hydrogen fuel-cell-powered buses here during the 2010 Winter Olympics now says he has few concerns about the potential for problems and how they might affect passengers' ability to get around.

While Councillor Eckhard Zeidler on Monday (May 18) said he finds it "ironic" that the trial will likely begin with all of the hydrogen needed for the project being transported by diesel-powered trucks originating in Quebec, he added that he's a lot more comfortable with the project than he was two years ago.

The first of the 20 buses is scheduled to arrive in Whistler in the late summer, and all will be here by January, B.C. Transit spokesperson Joanna Morton said on Friday (May 15). Made possible by a \$45 million grant from the B.C. government, with help from the Government of Canada, the buses are being built by a consortium that includes Burnaby-based Ballard Power Systems, Winnipeg-based New Flyer Industries, California-based ISE Corp. and Calgary-based Dynateck.

The hydrogen is being processed and shipped from Air Liquide Canada Inc., which is based in Montreal.

After being showcased in Whistler during the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the buses will remain here as part of the regular Whistler Transit fleet until approximately 2017.

Two years ago, Zeidler said he was concerned about the "unproven" technology being used for the trial, adding that municipal officials had not yet received a guarantee that replacement buses would be available should any of the buses experience problems. He said he would prefer to see buses that use green but more "proven" technology, such as buses that run on natural gas, used here.

On Monday, though, Zeidler said he's now confident that B.C. Transit will supply replacement buses should the hydrogen-powered electric ones experience problems.

"I have no concerns whatsoever," Zeidler said. "If for some crazy reason the hydrogen buses do not work in Whistler, B.C. Transit will take them elsewhere and provide us with ones that work.

"Since (2007), I've had the opportunity to meet with transit officials on a number of occasions and better understand how they operate, and I'm not concerned that they would be incapable of supplying us with replacement buses. I just have more information than I had back then."

The buses, which will be stored, maintained and fuelled at the new transit yard that's under construction just north of Nesters, will make B.C. Transit the "first in the world to operate a fleet of this size in a

single location, so it's going to be a very good project in the sense that we'll be able to demonstrate the viability of this on a whole-fleet basis," Morton said.

They will look very much like other buses, except for the fact that the hydrogen fuel will be stored in cylinders above the passengers, Morton said. Because there are currently no large facilities for storing this type of hydrogen fuel in B.C., the fuel itself will be trucked across the country from Montreal, she said. She said efforts are being made to establish such a fuel storage facility in B.C., but declined to provide a timeline for its completion.

"We're a member of the Hydrogen Highway project, and this concerted effort to promote this technology and bring it here to the West Coast is important to us. This short-term situation is something we want to rectify," Morton said.

The buses' tailpipe emissions will be zero. Even with the need to use fossil fuels to transport the hydrogen fuel across the country is factored in, the buses' per-kilometre greenhouse gas savings, compared to conventional fossil-fuel-powered buses, is 62 per cent, Morton said.

Zeidler said the necessity of using fossil fuels to transport the hydrogen "is ironic and it makes the project vulnerable to some criticism, but again, let's remember that this is trial, not some kind of permanent solution."

Morton said a prototype of the buses to be used here has been tested on three separate locations: In Victoria, where B.C. Transit is based, in Whistler and at a trial that's ongoing in Ottawa.

The one-day trial in Whistler last October was a success, Morton said. During the road test, officials placed jugs of water aboard the bus to mimic the weight of a fully loaded, 60-passenger bus, she said.

Since the trial, rumours have been swirling around town that the bus that was tested here had difficulty making it up some of Whistler's steeper hills. Morton said that wasn't true, but added that since the trial, engineers working on the project have augmented the power train somewhat.

Those conducting the test "were able to drive it from Victoria to Whistler, and drive it around town, and back, on one tank of gas, so it did very well, and it had some fuel to spare at the end," she said.

"They were quite pleased with it, and I asked them specifically about (the rumour about the hills) and there weren't any problems with any of the hills, but they'll be upgrading the battery pack to give it additional power."

Zeidler said it's important to remember that electric trolley buses have been around for more than a century and have held up well in a variety of situations, adding that the only thing new here is that the electricity is being supplied by hydrogen fuel cells.

He said that after reading a number of reports on the topic, and speaking to those involved in the industry, he's convinced that the hydrogen fuel cell isn't a replacement for fossil-fuel-powered private vehicles. But it might just be a solution in larger vehicles used for public transit.

"I think there's definitely a place for fuel cells in power generation, and there may well be a place for fuel cells in transit applications, but I don't think either you and I or our children will ever drive around in practical, hydrogen-powered vehicles," he said.

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