RECOMMENDATION

That the Board support BC Transit replacing the existing 15 ARBOC light duty buses with 15 Blue Bird light duty buses.

SUMMARY

BC Transit, is replacing the existing RDN handyDART fleet. Currently, the handyDART fleet is comprised of 15 light-duty, diesel, Chevrolet ARBOC buses that range in years from 2012 – 2015. The 15 new replacement buses are light-duty, gas-powered buses that are manufactured by Blue Bird. The buses are estimated to arrive in May and June of 2020.

BACKGROUND

In concurrence with the Annual Operating Agreement (AOA) between BC Transit and the RDN; the RDN leases its handyDART fleet vehicles from BC Transit. The annual lease fee for each current handyDART bus is approximately $18,500 and is amortized over 7 years. As the vehicles age and depending on their usage, the vehicles start to incur higher maintenance costs and are in need of replacing. Typically, this time period ranges from 5 – 7 years.

The fuel source for the existing handyDART fleet is diesel. However, BC Transit wants to change the fuel source for their light-duty buses. Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) or ‘green’ light-duty buses are currently not an option; therefore the new handyDART fleet will be gas-powered.

In addition to high maintenance costs, the existing handyDART fleet is comprised of low-floor buses that utilize a ramp for loading and unloading passengers with mobility aids. Pushing passengers up and down a ramp is a safety hazard for our operators. Passengers have also had difficulty due to the seating configuration. In order to load wheel chairs, ambulatory passengers at the front would have to get off the bus or move.

The new handyDART fleet utilizes a rear side lift that allows passengers with mobility aids to access the bus with much greater ease. This is a safer and more convenient option for our operators when they are loading and unloading passengers with mobility aids on and off the bus. Custom Transit systems across North America have moved toward rear side lift light duty buses. More benefits on the new handyDART fleet include:
• Allows for better access for passengers travelling in manual wheelchairs
• Better access for ambulatory passengers is obtained by separating wheelchair space from ambulatory access. (no tripping hazard presented by trying to escort mobility challenged ambulatory passengers between wheelchairs)
• It is easier to rear-load wheelchairs than having to turn them 180° when front-loading (again, reduces operator injuries)
• High floor buses offer a better ride due to conventional suspension design, no air bag suspension
• Lower purchase and maintenance costs, and increased reliability

The specifications for the new buses are still under development, however some of the main features are:

**Model:** Micro Bird G5  
**Fuel:** Gasoline  
**Wheelbase:** 191”  
**Front Door Entry:** Manual Flip-out Extra Step  
**Seating Capacity:** 20  
**Wheelchair Capacity:** 4  
**Rear Lift Capacity:** 1,000 lb

Since BC Transit owns the buses, the RDN does not get to decide which buses to purchase however BC Transit did work with operators across the Province to determine the specification of bus shown above.

**ALTERNATIVES**

1. That the Board support BC Transit replacing the existing 15 ARBOC light duty buses with 15 Blue Bird light duty buses.

2. That alternate direction be provided.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

At the time of this report, there are no financial details for the expense of the new handyDART buses, however costs are projected to be lower than the current RDN annual lease fee of $18,500 per bus/year. Buses are leased for 7 years to the Regional District of Nanaimo and are cost-shared with BC Transit at a rate of 46.69% BC Transit, 53.31% RDN.
STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Transportation and Transit - Provide opportunities for residents to move effectively through and around the Region.

Brandon Miller
bmiller@rdn.bc.ca
December 30, 2019

Reviewed by:
- D. Marshall, Manager, Transit Operations
- D. Pearce, General Manager,
- P. Carlyle, Chief Administrative Officer