



## North Shore News Column.

### Older & Wiser

By Tom Carney

## Taxi Saver advocates crash AGM

By Tom Carney, Special to North Shore News June 10, 2012

MOST of the time, it's more fun to watch an annual general meeting than to run one.

Those who organized the TransLink AGM last month would probably agree with me. Approximately 200 people showed up for the meeting and all they wanted to talk about was the Taxi Saver Program. (I wrote about the program in my last column, May 27).

Now when a group this large shows up at your door you're no longer in control of the meeting - they are.

TransLink decided to turn the microphone over to the audience at the start of the meeting. Smart. For more than an hour the executive team at TransLink heard directly from those individuals and organizations most affected by the decision to eliminate the Taxi Saver service.

Lesson learned: The Taxi Saver program is a lifeline for a large demographic in our community. Most of the damage to TransLink's credibility here was selfinflicted. A comment by the CEO of TransLink, that the cancellation of the Taxi Saver program was not a financial decision, prompted the response that if it was (the Taxi Saver service is the most economical and costefficient part of the custom transit service) the program wouldn't be cancelled in the first place. A spokesperson for the HandyDART drivers - one of TransLink's own - called the cancellation of the program a mistake.

A TransLink press release stated that the users advisory committee, an internal committee of TransLink, was consulted about and agreed to the cancellation of the program. That was wrong on both counts. TransLink's friends abandoned them on this one too. Both the Vancouver School Board and the City of Vancouver oppose the cancellation of the service. And before the meeting ended some pesky member from the audience got up and grilled the chair of TransLink on the issue of performance bonuses that were awarded to the executives at TransLink in the past year. Note to TransLink: The last group of executives that received performance bonuses while cutting services to frail and vulnerable clients were from the Community Living board and we all know how that turned out.

There were some lighter moments. One young man had questions about fares and schedules for the West Coast Express commuter train.

He was at the right meeting - it was just the wrong day to ask the question. And the comment from TransLink that cancelling the Taxi Saver service wasn't wrong but they may not have gotten it right sounds an awful lot like the, "I may not always be right but I am never wrong," remark made famous by the legendary American film

producer Sam Goldwyn.

One thing struck me as odd - given that it was their AGM, and that everyone wanted to talk about the Taxi Saver issue, TransLink chose not to make or offer any comment on their reasons for cancelling the Taxi Saver program. I don't take any pleasure in reporting on TransLink's shortcomings.

They deliver more than one million rides a day and their model for integrated service delivery is envied around the world, but they have to do better than this.

Following the meeting, staff from TransLink's access transit department met with some of those in attendance to talk more about the Taxi Saver program.

I get calls every day from worried seniors who want to know if TransLink will reverse their decision to eliminate the Taxi Saver program.

Here's what we know: The cancellation of the Taxi Saver program is now on hold. TransLink will conduct a consultation with the community and then they will revisit their decision.

Let's hope TransLink reverses their decision. If they don't, they are in for the fight of their lives.

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