



Aerial transit in Barcelona, Spain.

Burnaby Mountain Link: Transformative, Sustainable Transit

It would be faster, more comfortable, more reliable and would more than pay for itself compared to current transit service. It would cut automobile traffic and reduce Burnaby Mountain greenhouse gas emissions by more than 7,000 tonnes a year – and it would free up diesel buses to provide 57,000 hours of annual service in other parts of Metro Vancouver.

“It” is an aerial link between Burnaby Mountain and the Production Way SkyTrain station. As reported in *Burnaby Now*, SFU President Andrew Petter recently told the Burnaby Board of Trade that university officials will be sharing the case for the gondola with all three levels of government over the coming months.

This is great news for the Metro Vancouver region and the residents of UniverCity—a third of whom rely on public transit. TransLink has been studying the potential for an aerial link for more than five years, with positive results. In a 2011 business case, updated this year, engineering consultants CH2M estimated capital costs of an all-electric system at \$130

million, with annual operating costs at \$3.14 million. CH2M estimated a life-cycle, cost-benefit ratio of 3.6: meaning that the system would deliver value three-and-a-half times its cost in the first 25 years. As SFU urban studies professor Anthony Perl recently told SFU’s student paper *The Peak*, the cost “might seem a lot to students ... but it’s a fraction of the cost of the Evergreen Line.” The Burnaby Mountain Link, Perl said, “is a real value deal.”

Not surprisingly, the public supports the idea: provided with environmental, reliability and cost-benefit information, 80% of Burnaby residents and 88% of student transit users favour the Burnaby Mountain Link as a vital connection in the region’s transit and transportation network.

Certainly, the service would be a boon to the 5,000 people already living in UniverCity, as well as for students, faculty and staff at SFU; 56% of all commuters to and from Burnaby Mountain use transit (compared to 39% in Downtown Vancouver and just 12% in the region overall).

But using transit can be challenging. More than 12,600 daily transit riders funnel through a single, overcrowded bus route; people pouring off the SkyTrain at Production Way must often wait 20 minutes or longer for space on the #145. And given that those buses must climb more than 300 vertical metres, winter conditions interrupt or cancel service altogether as many as 10 days a year. By 2021 the total ridership could exceed the capacity of frequent bus service.

A cable-propelled transit system would resolve all of these issues. Universally accessible 35-person gondola cabins would take seven minutes – less than half the 15+ minute bus trip on and off the mountain.

SFU Community Trust CEO Gordon Harris said recently that “the Burnaby Mountain Link would extend UniverCity’s international record for urban innovation and environmental leadership.” This would be the first urban aerial transit link in Canada, Harris said, calling it “a transformative and sustainable transportation alternative.”