



Transit commission proposal is on right track

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An independent commission to oversee Calgary Transit? Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart has a brilliant idea!

Colley-Urquhart has suggested we need an independent panel "that examines complaints and looks at how compliant we are with meeting those issues that citizens raise." That's exactly what we need. As letters editor here at the Herald, over the years, I've noticed that people write in with the same complaints about Calgary Transit, and that their frustration grows because the events that spurred their complaint just keep happening.

Some complaints centre around the frequency of train breakdowns during rush hour and subsequent delays, which seem to be more prevalent, or maybe they're just more intolerable, in winter. Then, for example, Calgary Transit will come out with an apologetic statement about switches freezing. Winter after winter. Instead of apologizing, would Calgary Transit please inform us what they are doing about it, and whether they are using, have used, or intend to use a preparation like Kilfrost - a railroad track de-icer that, according to the manufacturer, keeps trains running smoothly when temperatures dip below -25 C?

And I think, as a Calgary Transit rider, other citizens must feel as I do, that we exist in some parallel universe where we are aware that things aren't right, and we have a vague sense that there must exist solutions for them somewhere, but those things just continue happening anyway. Like hordes of buses going out of service during rush hour, just when the greatest number of people need them.

This sense of being in a parallel universe with different realities is summed up in hilarious fashion by Charles Bukowski, in his 1971 novel, *Post Office*. The protagonist, Hank Chinaski, is a mail carrier and on one of his routes, a man stands in his yard, gesticulating wildly, refusing to let Chinaski put his mail into the mailbox. Day after day, he is out there, insisting Chinaski deliver the mail directly into his hands, and becoming distraught if he thinks Chinaski is heading for the mailbox instead. Finally, Chinaski, unable to figure out why the man is doing this, asks some fellow mail carriers who had the route before him: What's with the man who stands in his yard every day waving his arms, frantic about having mail handed to him?

The others respond by asking him, basically, "What man standing in his yard, waving his arms?"

So Chinaski just lets it go. Once, a few years ago, I was on a C-Train that didn't stop from Brentwood all the way to 6th Street. The driver announced as we sailed past University station that the brakes had failed and he was going to try to let the train coast to a stop by the time we got downtown. Thankfully, he succeeded, although it was a scary ride. But when I called Calgary Transit later to get more information on just what had happened, I was told that the brakes don't fail on trains, they are checked constantly, and that no such incident had happened that morning. It must have been something else and I was confused, I was told. Welcome to the Bukowski universe.

An independent commission, staffed by members of the public, would be less concerned

with trying to spin unpleasant incidents to preserve Calgary Transit's image, and more concerned with responding to riders' questions and complaints.

Tuesday was the deadline to apply to be a member of Calgary Transit's new customer advisory board. The mandate "is to look at broad issues related to customer service. It will not focus on issues related to scheduling, operations, service supply or route planning," according to Calgary Transit.

Hmm. What exactly are "broad issues" if not scheduling, operations, service supply or route planning?

What else is there? Those are the categories that cause a tremendous amount of frustration. This board will be unable to deal, for example, with scheduling so that fewer buses go out of service during rush hour. And I'm sure plenty of riders have excellent suggestions for better route planning, but the board can't deal with that, either.

Colley-Urquhart has a great idea. Council should move ahead on it.

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