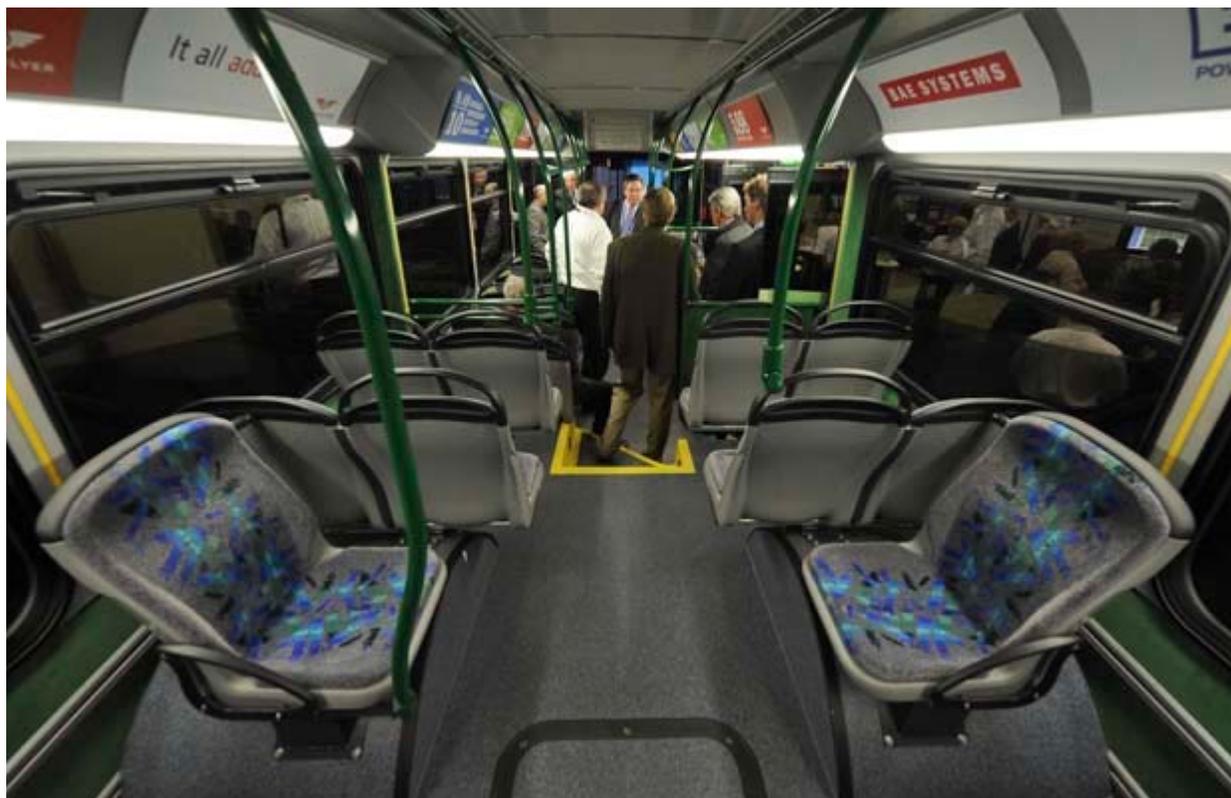


# Buses of the future unveiled at Vancouver convention

BY GERRY BELLETT, VANCOUVER SUN NOVEMBER 17, 2010 5:07 AM



New Flyer transit bus at Trans-Expo show in Vancouver on Tuesday.

**Photograph by:** Glenn Baglo, VANCOUVER SUN

VANCOUVER — It's billed as the largest annual bus and transit exhibition in North America and on Tuesday, more than a thousand people were at the Vancouver Convention Centre kicking tires at Trans-Expo 2010.

Some of the 15 models on display will likely be contenders to replace TransLink buses as they reach the end of their service life, TransLink public relations officer Drew Snider said.

"The next round of replacements will begin in 2012, when the 1999 buses will need replacing," Snider said.

However, that leaves two more years of bus technology development and TransLink will wait and see what transpires before picking a model, he said.

"There are some technologies that look great on paper but are gutless on the hills," Snider said, adding that TransLink operates in the most diverse terrain in Canada and needs buses that can operate across a spectrum of elevations.

Trans-Expo is a partnership of the Canadian Urban Transit Association, the Canadian Bus Association and Motor Coach Canada.

The Winnipeg-based New Flyer company, which supplies buses to most of the top 25 bus fleets in North America, brought its Xcelsior hybrid model to the show. It can carry 80 passengers and has a fuel consumption of 5.88 miles a gallon, an improvement on conventional diesel engine performance, which comes in at around three miles per gallon.

"This model was launched in 2008," New Flyer marketing director Amy Miller said. "We wanted to come up with a bus that matched passengers' needs and drivers' needs and transit systems' needs in terms of operating and maintenance costs."

This bus weighs 10 per cent less than standard models and that results in a seven-per-cent increase in fuel economy, she said.

Miller said 5.88 miles per gallon — about 40 litres per 100 kilometres — "is not really great for the family car, but excellent for a bus."

The bus has improved visibility for passengers, more forward-facing seats, extra headroom at the back, skylights to give more natural light, the first all-electronic instrument panel for drivers, widened door access for wheelchairs and an increase in the space needed for wheelchairs to turn, she said.

Wheelchair riders Heather McCain and Wendy St. Marie — both members of a TransLink advisory committee that advocates for handicapped passengers — came to the show to see the next generation of buses.

"It's good for us to know what's out there and also what changes are being made," McCain said.

"Oftentimes it's us that make suggestions and we're interested in seeing how much of our input actually gets used.

"For example, this new bus," she said, pointing to the Xcelsior. "They've widened the doorway and more room to turn in and that's a big thing, especially when more of the population are using scooters and wheelchairs are larger.

"Of course, a big frustration for many users is the fare box, which makes it difficult to get past," she said,

"So it's great if these buses are designed for persons with mobility impairment and for strollers."

Another wheelchair user attending the show was Community, Sport and Cultural Development Minister Stephanie Cadieux, who said the provincial government's 2008 transit plan called for an investment of \$14 billion between now and 2020 to find new and clean ways to move people quickly.

"We hope the results will double ridership to over 400 million trips a year and reduce greenhouse gases by 4.7 million tons," Cadieux said.

She said B.C.'s subsidy to transit is the highest per capita of any province in the country.

*gbellett@vancouver.sun.com*

