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B.C. Transit tests security cameras on Victoria buses

Three vehicles get cameras for security and to record traffic incidents in year-long trial

BY BILL CLEVERLEY, TIMESCOLONIST.COM APRIL 5, 2011



Stephen Anderson, Senior Manager Corporate Safety and Security for B.C. Transit, points a closed circuit television camera installed on the bus as part of a year-long trial. Photograph by: Adrian Lam, Timescolonist.com

B.C. Transit is using Victoria as a testing ground for security cameras on its buses.

Closed circuit television cameras have been installed on three vehicles as part of a year-long trial. In addition to monitoring security, they will also record traffic incidents.

Information gathered will help charter policy on the use of security cameras in B.C. Transit properties throughout the province, said Transit spokeswoman Joanna Linsangan.

"It won't just impact Victoria itself but also province-wide," she said. "We are a provincial fleet. We have 50 communities and 1,000 buses so it will certainly have an impact all across province. What we learn here will affect places like Cranbrook, Kamloops, Kelowna."

The trial will show how well the system performs, where cameras can be best placed and how they affect operations. It will also identify any support or infrastructure needs.

"Every camera has audio," said Stephen Anderson, B.C. Transit senior manager corporate safety and security.

"We can isolate audio from every camera and understand what happened — what communications happened between the driver and the member of the public during and after an incident."

Notices on each bus inform passengers of the video surveillance. Information is stored on a hard drive for one week before being over-written. It will only be accessed if an incident is reported, Anderson said. The Information and Privacy Commissioner's Office has been consulted on the plan.

"The system has a recording system that stays on the bus," Anderson said. "The information records onto a hard drive. The hard drive is only accessible by going to the bus."

"The system that we are trying here in Victoria is here so we can understand its capability and suitability for the B.C. Transit fleet."

None of the information obtained by the cameras will be used for disciplinary reasons.

Two double-decker buses and one single deck vehicle are being used for the trial. The surveillance equipment cost \$25,000. One of the double deckers has 10 cameras, including exterior side cameras that would record collisions. The other double decker has eight cameras while the single deck bus has six.

The system can record factors such as the speed of the bus during an incident and whether or not a turn signal was activated.

Incidents of assault are not uncommon on B.C. Transit buses. In Victoria, there were 52 reported incidents of assault involving passengers, drivers or transit supervisors in 2009/10, and 54 in 2010/11, Anderson said.

Cameras on transit buses have long been in use in Britain. In Vancouver, Translink has been using CCTV on its buses since 2007.

bcleverley@timescolonist.com

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