

Asia-Pacific Foundation

Before Parliament recessed for the summer, it passed, in a single day, legislation setting up the Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada. The Foundation is expected to serve as a bridge between Canada and Asia, especially the Pacific Rim region comprising Japan, China, Korea and Hong Kong.

Its mandate is set out in Clause 3 of the legislation: "The purpose of the Foundation is to develop closer ties between the peoples and institutions of Canada and the peoples and institutions of the Asia-Pacific region by:

"(a) promoting mutual awareness and understanding of the cultures, histories, religions, philosophies, languages, life styles and aspirations in the Asia-Pacific region and Canada and their effects on each other's societies;

"(b) supporting development co-operation between organizations, institutions and associations in Canada and in the Asia-Pacific region;

"(c) promoting collaboration among organizations, institutions and associations in private and public sectors in Canada and in the Asia-Pacific region;

"(d) promoting closer economic and commercial ties between Canada and the Asia-Pacific region;

"(e) promoting in Canada scholarship and expertise on economic, cultural, social and other subjects relating to the Asia-Pacific region, and in the Asia-Pacific region, scholarship and expertise on economic, cultural, social and other subjects relating to Canada; and

"(f) collecting information and ideas relating to Canada and the Asia-Pacific region and disseminating such information and ideas within Canada and the Asia-Pacific region."

The government will appoint the chairman and nine other members of the Foundation's board of directors. The board will then appoint a further 20 directors, drawing them from the business sector, labour, the universities. Headquarters of the Foundation will be in Vancouver.

The federal government will provide \$5 million during the first five years of the Foundation's life. Other funding will be provided by the provinces and the business community.

During the past decade, Canadians have experienced a growing awareness of the importance of the Pacific Rim — and beyond that, all Asian countries — to Canada's economy and to the evolving Canadian society.

Tough little bus for wheelchair passengers

Ontario Bus Industries Inc. (OBI) of Mississauga, Ontario, has introduced the *Orion II*, a small bus that appears to be the answer to wheelchair passengers' prayers.

Promising to be a tough vehicle with many transit applications, it features front wheel drive, a low floor, and integral construction.

For wheelchair passengers lucky enough to ride the *Orion II*, it means the end of waiting to be hoisted the 60 centimetres and more from the sidewalk to the vehicle floor, and to the "musical chairs" game of being shuffled out because the person behind cannot pass by.

One reason for these innovations is that Don Sheardown, Ontario Bus Industries' president, had prior experience with disabled people. He operated a vehicle fleet for the disabled in the Toronto area, before buying OBI in 1980 from the estate of its founder, Arnold Wollschlaeger. Sheardown knew from his operating days that there was room for a more suitable vehicle. Furthermore, a recent study for the Canadian Urban Transit Assoc. and Transport Canada's Transportation Development Centre found the modified vans and small school buses that carry the disabled "fell short of both user and operator requirements".

Two years ago a crew of seven engineers and six ship personnel began the detailed design and assembling of OBI's new vehicle. There were at least 12 features which were either new to small buses or the industry in general. One was a new



A "kneeling" system means the bus can be lowered for wheelchair passengers.

approach to frame construction which made the low floor possible. The *Orion II*'s frame is hung like a bridge with the self-supporting backbone in the roof, instead of under the floor.

High floor

The *Orion*'s 25.5 centimetre clearance over the road is normal for a vehicle of that size, but the big difference is that the floor is only 2.5 centimetres higher. No space is lost to accommodate a driveshaft and supporting frame. A kneeling system, in which the bus can be lowered to take on and let off passengers, brings the side door to within 5 centimetres of the curb and the rear end door, lower still, to within 10 centimeters of the road. Ramp loading is nearly level.

Interior space is maximized by having front wheel drive, which dispenses with an underfloor drive shaft, and independently suspended rear wheels, which do away with the rear axle and reduce wheel-well protrusion.

Power train feature

Adoption of front wheel drive allowed the engineers to incorporate another unique feature. The power train module (which contains the engine, transmission, cooling system, front wheel drive assembly, suspension and steering) can be completely separated from the vehicle in about an hour. A spare power module can be snapped into place while the first one is being serviced, which keeps the vehicle on the road and saves on operating costs.

The *Orion II* is available in 6.3 metre and 7.5 metre lengths. The larger model can accommodate 26 transit seats, 20 airporter seats (perimeter arrangement) or seven "random access" wheelchairs (the ability of a wheelchair-user to enter or leave the vehicle without forcing other passengers, seated or in wheelchairs, to move or be moved).

Passengers enter through doors on the right side or back, using ramps which fold in when not in use. The driver can usually operate the ramps from the driving position.

According to Harry Valentine, a bus specialist who has done studies for the Science Council of Canada, the *Orion II* is "the most sensible new bus to come out in North America since the 40-foot highway coach in the 1950s". He sees it as the ideal small bus for Canada, tough enough to withstand some 12 hours of daily service for a decade or more, and comfortable.

(Article from *Transpo/84*.)