

OPINION

10 reasons for a **No vote** in transit referendum



Barbara Yaffe

Balloting begins next week on whether to support a new Metro Vancouver transportation tax, making this an ideal time to consider 10 good reasons to vote No

1 Taxation needs limits. A consensus exists that we are sufficiently taxed. Moreover, B.C. has a couple of levies unique to this province, such as a carbon tax and Medical Services Premiums. And Vancouverites have higher living costs than other Canadians. If the mayors' council listens closely, it will hear a cry of "Uncle."

2 Many in the region, even if they were to hand over extra tax money, would not choose to give it to the mayors, presiding over municipalities that have been criticized of overspending, or to TransLink, castigated for its cavalier expenditures.

3 Budgeting aside, TransLink does not have a terrific record when it comes to providing service, particularly where bus transport is concerned. Signage reading "Sorry, Not In Service" — especially during downpours — comes to mind. Throwing former CEO Ian Jarvis (pictured) under the bus, in a desperate gesture weeks before the balloting, hardly inspired confidence.

4 A Yes vote could set a dangerous precedent for more revenue-raising-by-plebiscite in future. Politicians should govern, standing or falling on their decisions. They should not continually canvass citizens on tax increases in order to pre-empt political blowback.

5 Questions remain unanswered about how revenues and spending associated with the mayors' plan would be overseen, regardless of the appointment of Jim Pattison (pictured). For example, if annual tax revenues exceed the \$250 million to be raised, would surplus funds be returned to taxpayers? Importantly, would the new tax remain once road pricing and more tolls are introduced?



6 The cart is being put before the horse, with the holding of a \$5-million referendum before taxpayers know whether B.C. and Ottawa are kicking in their anticipated share of required revenues. If they refuse, the referendum will have been for naught.

7 Higher PST will make purchases more costly. A 12 per cent GST/PST already inhibits some shoppers, not a good thing for retailers. Indeed, a small business survey released earlier this month showed 69 per cent believe it would be bad for business. Also, retailers who were inconvenienced when the HST was axed in 2012 would again be inconvenienced. Plus, businesses — to cover 45 per cent of the \$250 million to be raised — would pass that cost to consumers, boosting prices of everything further. And remember, this tax would hike new home prices, not a good thing in Vancouver.

8 Mayors in Montreal and Toronto — now planning the same sort of transportation infrastructure spending — are not proposing to raise taxes to do so. Here's a recent quote from Toronto Mayor John Tory, asked whether his city should raise taxes for transportation infrastructure: "I start from this premise: Are people paying enough taxes? In many cases, you could argue, they can't afford to pay any more. We should be looking at total amounts paid to all three levels of government and how that is being allocated." Well said.

9 It is infuriating to some Vancouverites that the mayors did not include in their budgeting plans even a small amount of the needed revenue from their own current spending. Nor did they deign to give voters a realistic alternative to the tax that they could vote for. Plan B was depicted as simple catastrophe. Thus taxpayers, 99 per cent of whom recognize new transportation resources are needed, lack viable options to choose from.

10 The campaign has not been fought fairly. Normally, when such a referendum is held, the two competing sides receive the same amount of funding to lobby. This time, the Yes side had the advantage of plentiful municipal public resources, and spent some \$6 million. The No side got nothing in that regard, spending \$40,000. I could go on, but have run out of space. Vote No, with your head held high.

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