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Mayor seeks TransLink change

TransLink's governance has been a key plank in the No side's campaign, which has urged Metro Vancouver residents to reject a proposed 0.5-per-cent sales tax, dubbed the "congestion improvement tax" for transportation expansion, because of mismanagement and overspending by the transportation authority. TransLink's decision to remove its CEO Ian Jarvis to restore public confidence, but keep him on the payroll until 2016, also seems to have solidified the No campaign.

Recent polls by Insights West, for instance, found 82 per cent of No voters lack confidence in TransLink doing a good job to ensure the proposed projects go ahead. And even Yes voters are wavering: While most believe the plebiscite is the best way to deal with the region's transit problems, the poll found 70 per cent of Yes voters were not satisfied with TransLink's performance.

Drivers, residents over 55, people who don't commute during the week, and residents south of the Fraser River are among the strongest No supporters.

Robertson insists that while the plebiscite is "not about TransLink," such views are hurting the Yes campaign, which seeks to use the sales tax to generate \$250 million annually to help fund a raft of projects, including more buses, a subway for Vancouver, light rail for Surrey and improved SeaBus, SkyTrain and West Coast Express services over 10 years. About \$36 million is also earmarked for road maintenance and upgrades.

The mayors' council has not directly approached the premier about the request to restructure TransLink during the plebiscite campaign, Robertson added, but noted it repeatedly asked for changes many times.

In 2013, the mayors' council hired former regional planner Ken Cameron to research cities — such as Brisbane, Vienna, London and Stockholm — with more "accountable and transparent" transit systems to find a new governance model for



ARLEN REDEKOP/PNG FILES

Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore disagrees with Vancouver Mayor Greg Robertson over the urgency for TransLink governance changes.

TransLink.

The B.C. government responded to the request last year by changing legislation to give the regional mayors more control over TransLink's plans and priorities but not its budget and operations.

Neither Clark nor Transportation Minister Todd Stone were available for comment Thursday, but the ministry said in an emailed statement that "the provincial government has no plans to change the current structure" and cited the changes already made as part of the 2013 review.

Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore, spokesman for the mayors' council, said he is not sure such a request "would help the campaign right now."

"My focus is on the benefits of the plan and to focus on congestion," Moore said following the editorial board meeting. "All of the other discussions are distracting from the needs in front of us."

Jordnn Bateman, spokesman for the Canadian Taxpayers

Federation, agreed a last-minute governance shift would not "immediately restore public confidence" in TransLink.

"TransLink needs to rebuild its social licence with the public," Bateman said in an email to The Vancouver Sun. "Our elected leaders have promised so many things with TransLink over the years and, given their record, they need to prove they have changed the organizational culture there. That takes time to prove out."

Bateman added, while he isn't opposed to better transit, he believes the mayors' plan can be affected by earmarking a small portion of future regional revenue growth.

Ballots for the plebiscite should start arriving in 1.5 million Metro Vancouver mailboxes on Monday. Residents have until May 29 to mail in their vote.

Those who aren't registered can do so by contacting Elections BC.

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