

Plebiscite voting slow in early going

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Ballots continue to trickle in for Metro Vancouver's transportation plebiscite, with eight per cent of the region's 1.5 million registered voters so far saying yea or nay to a proposed 0.5 per cent sales tax increase to fund transportation.

Elections BC had received more than 125,000 votes as of Wednesday, all coming from the region's largest cities, including Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, Burnaby and Coquitlam.

None so far have come from the smaller suburbs, but Elections BC spokesman Don Main said this is likely because the ballot packages were mailed out in bulk by municipality with the highest number of voters, such as Vancouver and Surrey,

getting them first. He also noted the latest count represents only those ballots that have been screened so far, which includes sorting them by municipality and ensuring the certification envelopes have a signature and birthdate.

"These are the ones that have gone through our initial screening," Main said. "They'll be coming in more consistently now."

Registered voters have until May 29 to send in their ballots.

The tax, which is slated to generate \$250 million annually, is earmarked for more buses as well as projects such as a subway for Vancouver and light rail for Surrey over 10 years. Main said all the ballot packages were sent over a 10-day period from March 16 to 27. However, some residents in the Tri-Cities have complained that they have not yet received their ballots.

Jordan Bateman, spokesman for the No TransLink Tax campaign, said he expects the numbers will be much higher in the next few weeks, noting that because of the Easter long weekend, many ballots may not have been included in the latest count. Recent polls suggested that the No side holds a commanding lead in the transit plebiscite.

"Three or four weeks from today, we should have a much clearer picture of turnout," said Bateman.

"These early returns grossly under-report voters outside Vancouver, simply because other communities received their ballots later."

Elections B.C. plans to release the number of the ballots returned each week.

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