

Shelley Fralic: Why I voted Yes on transit

Haven't voted yet?: Here are five reasons not to say No

BY SHELLEY FRALIC, VANCOUVER SUN COLUMNIST APRIL 1, 2015



Among the reasons columnist Shelley Fralic voted Yes: a transit plan that includes adding more SkyTrain cars.

Photograph by: RICHARD LAM, Vancouver Sun

The envelope arrived several days ago and had been sitting on the dining room table, demanding attention. VOTING PACKAGE it said, in big red letters.

My 2015 Metro Vancouver Transportation and Transit Plebiscite almost got lost in the junk mail shuffle when it came through the mail slot, but today the sealed grey Secrecy Envelope is on its way back to Elections BC, a confident check mark beside the Yes circle next to the question: Do you support a new 0.5% Metro Vancouver Congestion Improvement Tax, to be dedicated to the Mayors' Council transportation and transit plan?

Like many of you, I have closely followed the debate on the transit plebiscite these past few months, absorbing all the newspaper columns and radio banter, the entreaties from the quiet Yes and the cranky No campaigns and, of course, this being the age of rudeness, the endless sniping, misinformation and anti-TransLink vitriol.

And while it's forecast that No may well take the day, my choice is not to join the derailment cabal.

Here are five reasons why:

1. The political jousting that has overtaken the issue is a red herring. This isn't about sending a message to Victoria. This isn't about TransLink's reputation for poor management of its finances (such as its managerial musical chairs) or of the system itself (why are we still waiting for gates and fare enforcement?). As my colleague Pete McMartin and others have pointed out, TransLink comports itself rather well as a business and system glitches are rare by industry comparison.

What does a No vote get us, except more years of inaction and bickering?

2. **There is no question the proposal is flawed.** Communities that desperately need transit, like those south of the Fraser, will be ill-served. Rapid transit down Broadway to UBC is a silly notion when other regional needs are so much greater. But this plan gets us a new Pattullo Bridge between Surrey and New Westminster. It will mean more SkyTrain cars, and increased service for the SeaBus, West Coast Express and HandyDart. Four hundred buses will be added to the system and there will be new B-Line rapid routes. Upgrades will be done to major roads, and pedestrian and cycling connections will be improved.

What does a No vote get us, except nothing?

3. If you already commute, whether by car, transit or bicycle, more than a few miles in and out of your neighbourhood, you know what a gridlocked mess Metro Vancouver is. That's because the car is king, and no amount of nagging or wishful thinking or Suzuki guilt is changing that any time soon. And experts predict another one million people will migrate to Metro Vancouver by 2040, along with their 600,000 vehicles.

What does a No vote get us, except more gridlock, vehicle exhaust and road rage?

4. **Yes, we already pay our fair share of taxes.** Welcome to modern big city expectations. Schools, highways, hospitals, parks, social programs — it takes a lot of cash to keep this place livable. It's why Metro Vancouver is considered one of the best places to live on the planet, but staying that way and keeping people moving easily around the region doesn't come cheap. Through a 0.5 per cent increase in the PST, a Yes vote will raise \$7.5 billion over 10 years for the proposed transit plan. Which is about 35 cents a day for the average household. Peanuts, especially if you remember the many financial debacles that we've paid for and got diddly-squat in return, like the \$460-million fast ferries fiasco and a \$182-million government computer system that doesn't work.

What does a No vote get us, except licence for continued complaint?

5. B.C. is run on the backs of taxpayers, and yet we are seldom involved in how our money is spent, outside of voting in political elections. Instead, we elect a government that we think/hope/pray will represent us as promised, will spend our money wisely and will have the future of not just the citizenry, but of the physical environment, top of mind when decisions are made.

So, when we are given the chance to weigh in on a singular significant decision, when we are given an opportunity to improve an ailing and inadequate infrastructure such as regional transit for the good of the many, what does a No vote get us except mean-spirited self-gratification?

I voted Yes because, as a citizen of this region, it's the right thing to do.

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