

North Shore Mayors reject buck-a-bridge tolling plan

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Traffic lines up for the Lions Gate Bridge. The North Shore's three mayors are rejecting a plan to charge drivers \$1 per crossing. file photo Cindy Goodman, North Shore News

The North Shore's three mayors are roundly rejecting a south-of-the-Fraser plan to put a \$1-per trip toll on the Lions Gate Bridge and Ironworkers Memorial Second Narrows Crossing.

Delta Mayor Lois Jackson made the suggestion of tolling all the Lower Mainland's major bridges, saying it would be a fair and easily understood way of bringing in \$378 million annually to fund transportation infrastructure. Her community is set to receive a new 10-lane, \$3.5-billion bridge to replace the Massey Tunnel.

But, the north-of-Burrard-Inlet mayors say the buck-a-bridge plan is arbitrary, punitive and not an equitable way to fund transportation.

"A dollar a bridge, to me, just doesn't cut it. There's just no logic behind it," said District of North Vancouver Mayor Richard Walton.

The plan would raise money from people who commute to Vancouver in a north-south direction while collecting nothing from the people who drive east-west, despite the province spending billions upgrading Highway 1 east of Vancouver, he said.

"Everyone along that corridor benefits from it at no cost. Why would you then charge somebody to go over a 75- or 80-year-old bridge? It just doesn't make any sense," he said.

According to the province, the average annual daily traffic on the Lions Gate is 60,700 vehicles while the Ironworkers takes 117,800.

City of North Vancouver Mayor Darrell Mussatto agreed the idea wouldn't

fly here.

"You line up to get over the Second Narrows Bridge for 20 minutes and pay a dollar?" he asked.

West Vancouver Mayor Mike Smith said he understood Jackson's perspective, given that four of the five existing or soon-to-be-built bridges over the Fraser River will be tolled. But he said he couldn't support North Shore commuters paying any more while our transportation needs aren't been met.

"We're the only area in the metro region that's had no new bridges and no rapid transit for 60 or 70 years. Our traffic issues are getting worse all the time," he said.

Smith, Mussatto and Walton all said any new system of tolling would have to be more along the lines of road or distance pricing for all users, as other modern cities are beginning to do.

"It has to be part of a regional congestion strategy. That, we'd be happy to talk about, but just tolling our bridges, which we've already paid for through tolls, is not something we have an appetite for," Smith said.

That is an even larger and more complicated task suitable for the medium or long term, Mussatto said.

"It has to be well thought through. It has to be discussed with the public extensively. We need to consult. That takes years. It doesn't take weeks or months," he said. "Right now, we need to invest in public transit in a big way."

Mussatto said the province is showing a lack of leadership by letting congestion worsen while telling the mayors it's up to them to pay for their share of any transportation system improvements with property taxes.

"I can tell you one thing: I am definitely, definitely opposed to raising property taxes to pay more for TransLink," he said.

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