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Calling the question

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Yesterday, the Mayors' Council on transportation found itself in the awkward position of voting to ask the public to approve a tax hike.

It certainly wasn't the first choice of municipal leaders, who've spent much of the last three years lobbying the province for a new funding source for transportation improvements. No dice, said the province - recognizing a politically unpopular move - unless voters agree. Which is how we arrived at Thursday, with municipal leaders wedged between a proverbial SeaBus and a SkyTrain.

TransLink is not beloved by voters. Criticisms of it as wasteful and unaccountable have merit. So does Derek Corrigan's description of it as "a beast that eats money."

But transit capital projects are expensive and require a lot of cash.

The decision of the Mayors' Council to ask for a small increase to the Provincial Sales Tax is a savvy one under the circumstances. It spreads the pain out over a wide group, ensuring no disproportionate hit for any particular constituency.

Is it a perfect solution? No. But that's no reason to reject it out of hand. The presence of heavyhitter business groups joining forces with labour and environmentalists to promote a yes vote shows how important reasonably funded transit is to both the livability of the region, and the economy.

Life is sure to get a whole lot tougher if we relegate transportation improvements to bridges to the suburbs and schedule public transit upgrades based on when we feel like it.

Let's not blow it.

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