

Metro Vancouver directors appeal to province to abandon transportation referendum

It's not in the best interests of residents or businesses, directors say in a letter to the minister

BY KELLY SINOSKI, VANCOUVER SUN DECEMBER 10, 2014



Metro's letter to the province says, 'Congestion cannot be solved by increasing transportation supply only.'

Photograph by: Gerry Kahrmann, PNG

Metro Vancouver directors are making a last-ditch appeal to the B.C. government to reverse its decision for a transportation referendum, saying if it fails, it will undermine the region's growth strategy.

The request, included in a letter to be sent to Transportation Minister Todd Stone as part of a consultation process on B.C.'s 10-year transportation plan, "strongly urges the province to reverse its requirement for a referendum on the regional transportation plan," saying it's not in the best interests of residents or businesses.

The move comes as the mayors' council on regional transportation, led by North Vancouver District Mayor Richard Walton, strives to come up with a referendum question by Dec. 11. The referendum, ordered by the province, is slated to be held sometime next spring and will ask the public to support new funding sources, such a vehicle levy, regional carbon tax or sales tax, to expand transit opportunities, including more buses, a subway in Vancouver and light rail in Surrey.

Metro Vancouver chairman Greg Moore said the board doesn't expect the province to switch gears at

this point, but thought it was important to make its position known as part of the province's consultations.

"It's just reiterating the position the mayors have had from Day 1 on the referendum," Moore said. "It's an important time to once again suggest the referendum isn't the best way to go about it."

The Metro Vancouver letter, approved by the board Friday, suggests the region's 30-year vision, including its plans for mobility pricing, should be incorporated as part of the province's overall plan. It notes the region has been working to create developments around transit and the momentum could be lost if the referendum is rejected. It also calls on the provincial government to give local government more control over TransLink, the region's transportation authority.

Moore noted the province's plan cites highways 14 times compared with five mentions for transit despite a desperate need for expanded buses, trains and other transit across the region. The letter also notes one out of every three working households pays one-half or more of its wages for housing and transportation,

"We recognize that the significant growth in population and jobs will inevitably lead to rising congestion on the region's roads, buses and trains," said the letter. "Congestion cannot be solved by increasing transportation supply only."

Burnaby Mayor Derek Corrigan opposed sending the letter Friday, saying the mayors' council's vision is not realistic and the ambitious wish list of projects shouldn't be offered up to the province. He also added he's disappointed by the provincial government's "high-handed and cavalier" approach to dealing with transportation in Metro Vancouver.

"It's easy to make a plan that is a wish list what everybody wants ... but there's a history of us having said what we think is the right decision before other decisions are made," he said. "It's virtually impossible for us to do what we promised to do and that's to reward growth with transit services."

Corrigan added the referendum concept is flawed and is "something that will be incredibly divisive in the Lower Mainland. It is to me ironic that after having said absolutely we were opposed to a referendum we're out lobbying support and trying to find ways to engage the public to support that referendum."

The Burnaby council has also refused to respond to the province's consultation, saying there was no point.

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