

Yes side starts out ahead in transit vote

Survey shows slim majority would vote for regional PST hike

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VANCOUVER SUN

A new poll shows a slim majority in favour of the Yes side in the upcoming transit referendum, but respondents

on both sides of the funding question have serious reservations about TransLink's transparency and ability to oversee the growth of its system. Just over half of respondents (52 per cent) would vote for a regional 0.5-per-cent increase

How would you vote if a transit referendum were held tomorrow?



*Includes those who said they would or probably would vote this way
** One per cent said they would not vote
Source: Insights West

in the provincial sales tax to fund transit expansion, while 39 per cent said they would

vote No, according to an online Insights West survey conducted after the proposal was

announced last Thursday. "We're just coming off the (municipal elections), there is a lot of people who are engaged and they listened to the mayors talk about this, albeit in a very offhanded fashion, during the campaign — so that helps," said Mario Canseco of Insights.

"But what's really fascinating to me is that when you look at the 'definitely' crowd, there's one in four who are saying 'I am

definitely going to vote No.' "More than anything they seem to be motivated by the fact that they don't trust TransLink." Of those planning to vote No, 71 per cent said they don't have the confidence that TransLink can do "a good job to ensure that these transportation projects are implemented properly."

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ARLEN REDEKOP/PNG FILES

Evergreen Line construction on Northern Road on the Burnaby-Coquitlam border, where TransLink's latest addition of SKyTrain joins the existing Millennium Line

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Another 68 per cent said they want TransLink to "explain how funds are spent" before any vote on more taxes.

Just over half (54 per cent) of those respondents planning to vote Yes said one reason for their decision was the annual independent audits and public reporting tools laid out in the referendum that would make TransLink more transparent. Most said the overriding reason for supporting the referendum was because it "addresses the traffic, services and roads problems we have in the Lower Mainland."

The online survey of 601 Metro Vancouver residents was conducted between Dec. 12 and Dec. 14.

Max Cameron, a political-science professor at the U.C., said Metro Vancouver's mayors face a steep challenge in explaining to a somewhat confused citizenry why this tax is essential for the long-term health of the growing region's transportation infrastructure.

"They're going to the public and saying, 'You need to support us so that we can get TransLink to do these projects,'" Cameron said. "The people are probably saying, 'We don't even know what we're paying for. You're asking us for our tax dollars when we're already feeling pinched. We don't want to see taxes go up and we don't know for sure that we're specifically going to benefit from this.'"

To Canseco, the poll indicates that "you still have a lot of people saying, 'Well, I guess it's in the best interests of the area,' but they're not wholeheartedly supporting what the mayors are saying."

On Thursday, Jordan Bateman of the Canadian Taxpayer's Federation said he had formed an opposition group to the tax. He argues that TransLink has not shown itself to be

Question: What is the best option to fund transit in Metro?

0.5% PST increase	30%
Vehicle levy	16%
Increased gas taxes	7%
Increase property taxes	8%
Not sure	9%

Source: Insights West

an efficient regulator of the money it already receives.

Meanwhile, the head of a broad-based coalition of 30 businesses, unions and environmental groups said it will immediately begin campaigning for a Yes vote in the mail-in referendum expected in March. The coalition spokesman, Vancouver Board of Trade president Iain Black, told The Sun last week that the referendum is a chance for people to "pick your poison" of the tax hike, which will be affordable and a net benefit to society "if everybody is nibbling off a small piece."

When asked the best way to fund TransLink, 30 per cent of respondents to the Insights survey picked the regional 0.5-per-cent increase in the provincial sales tax, while 16 per cent chose a vehicle levy and about one in 10 chose either an increase in property or gas taxes.

More than a third of respondents (39 per cent) said they had no clue how to fund transit expansion.

"What's interesting is: when you pick your own poison people don't know what to do," Canseco said.

The survey's margin of error is plus or minus 4 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

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