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Mayors, province at ballot impasse

See also attached article from more than a year ago! - cjk

Two levels of government at odds over TransLink

[Brent Richter](#) / North Shore News

January 26, 2014 12:00 AM

The province and the Lower Mainland's mayors have reached an apparent stalemate on the future of the Lower Mainland's transit and how to pay for it.

Transportation and Infrastructure Minister Todd Stone held a press conference Thursday to say the province is committed to holding a referendum on future transit projects and funding, and that it will be up to the TransLink mayors' council to come up with a question. The statement followed news that the mayors' council had met and agreed to formally oppose the referendum plan.

"They are the mayors.

They have the responsibility to lead as a region. While the mayors have put numerous ideas out there in terms of what the priorities should be for each of their respective communities, to date, they have not agreed on a common vision, a total price tag for that vision or how to specifically pay for it," Stone said.

A Broadway SkyTrain line, light rail lines in Surrey as well as improved bridges, more bus capacity or more frequent service are all on mayors' wish lists, Stone noted.

Currently, mayors can only influence the amount of money TransLink raises from residential and commercial property taxes and passenger fares. Anything beyond that, like vehicle levies, road pricing or a new sales tax to be spent exclusively on transportation infrastructure would be up to the province. Stone said the referendum is meant to put that decisionmaking power in the hands of taxpayers.

Speaking at a North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce function on Thursday, both North Vancouver mayors expressed frustration at the province's intransigence on TransLink funding.

"Somebody has to have the guts to go to the public and talk about all the various sources of funding and do all of the groundwork," said North Vancouver District Mayor Richard Walton, also chairman of the mayors' council.

Without looking into any new sources of funding, they will have no choice but to raise residential and business property taxes to pay for the multibillion-dollar projects.

"Our view is that's not equitable. It's not the right way to move. It needs to be a relationship between how far and how frequently people travel and what they pay to subsidize the road system and the transit system," he said.

Gasoline taxes and fares already do this!!! - cjk

The road pricing model, Walton said, is "textbook" all over Europe.

Timing the referendum with November's municipal elections also creates an impractical deadline without giving the mayors any tools to educate and consult with the public on the options before them, Walton added. It took 32 months of consultation with Los Angeles residents before they approved a .5 per cent sales tax, which passed with 67 per cent support, Walton noted.

"It can't be done in nine months with a forced referendum date without a plan and without any leadership. It simply is poor planning. It doesn't matter whether you're in government or you're in business. It just isn't the right way to go about it. Simple as that," he said.

North Vancouver City Mayor Darrell Mussatto joined in, noting that the mayors have asked three successive premiers to introduce a vehicle levy to fund transit, and each turned down their request. "We come up with solutions and they won't let us implement them. That's not good governance and that has to change," Mussatto said.

Capacity ? Third seabus still not in use!!! - cjk

The SeaBus and Lonsdale Avenue busses are frequently full to capacity and are badly in need of reinvestment, Mussatto said.

Despite the impasse with no solution in sight, Stone stressed the importance of getting transit "right" for the Lower Mainland.

"There's a tremendous amount riding on this. We all can agree on the fact there's upwards of a million more people expected to be in the region over the next 20 or 30 years. We can all agree on the fact that from a livable communities perspective, getting transit and transportation expansion right is critically important to quality of life in all of our communities," he said, adding that the same goes for goods movement and growing the economy.

Asked what the referendum will be if the mayors don't come up with a unified vision and question, Stone's response clarified nothing.

"We'll cross, no pun intended, that bridge when we get to it," he said.

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Walton strives for end to transit impasse

[James Weldon](#) / North Shore News

January 17, 2013 02:00 AM



District of North Vancouver Mayor and TransLink board chair Richard Walton says his new term on the TransLink board will be spent trying to build cooperation between local governments to increase transit service in the Lower Mainland. Photograph by: North Shore News

District of North Vancouver Mayor and TransLink board chair Richard Walton says his new term on the TransLink board will be spent trying to build cooperation between local governments to increase transit service in the Lower Mainland. Photograph by: North Shore News

In his third term as chairman of the Mayors Council on regional transportation, Richard Walton's top priority will be gridlock, and not just the kind that plagues the morning commute.

The District of North Vancouver mayor, newly reappointed to the position by acclamation, wants to use his third year at the helm to end the political impasse that he says has prevented the Lower Mainlands transit system from growing to meet demand.

In the two years Ive been chairing it, weve been treading water, said Walton. We havent made any significant progress, except to continue to . . . work as well as we can within the existing governance structure.

While transit ridership has been growing by leaps and bounds, said Walton, the level of service hasnt been rising to match, leaving all parts of the region underserved, and some parts notably southern and eastern communities and the Broadway corridor to UBC hopelessly so.

Thats because TransLinks efforts to secure adequate funding over the long term have been derailed by what he sees as a broken governance structure, he said. Under the current system, the council of mayors, who represent the 21 municipalities served by the transit authority, essentially play an advisory role, said Walton, while TransLinks appointed board of directors sets the budget and calls the shots.

Those of us who are elected to steward the public purse dont have any say at all in the day-to-day operations of TransLink and what the priorities are, he said.

Walton estimated the fare box only pays for about 25 to 40 per cent of any given transit ride, meaning the bulk of the systems funding has to come from tax. TransLinks main revenue source property tax has been tapped out in his view, so the authority needs to find money elsewhere. Some form of distance pricing, whereby drivers pay a fee thats proportional to the burden they place on the road network, is popular with the mayors, but they lack the power to bring the idea to fruition. Already in place! - It's the gasoline tax...the more you drive the more taxes you pay. The bigger the vehicle...the more taxes you pay. - cjk

The current model . . . allows the province to step back and pass all the very difficult political decisions down to local government, said Walton. But it doesnt give us the funding levers to follow through.

The power structure also creates a critical disconnect between those who do the land planning at the municipal level, and those who shape the transit system, he said.

Youve got completely different silos for two functions that need to be considered together, said Walton.

The mayor doesnt want to see the governance model revert to the old system, where decisions lay entirely with municipal leaders; rather, he advocates for a kind of middle ground.

I (think) more of a hybrid board, where youve got industry experts and academics with provincial representatives and a good representation from elected local officials, can probably work very closely together and share the political risk, if you will, he said.

Whether or not change takes place may depend on whos in power after Mays provincial election, however.

I would suspect that the NDP government may be more inclined to look at it, but Im not politically naïve either, said Walton. Despite what promises and inclination might have been made . . . from a provincial perspective, its probably easier to sit in Victoria with the current system, when you control all the levers.

He vowed to work with whatever party gets elected, however.

I think, ultimately, it takes a lot of trust and a lot of patience to effect these changes, said Walton. Thats why Im back.

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