

Metro mayors to debate public input on referendum question

BY KELLY SINOSKI, VANCOUVER SUN JANUARY 25, 2014



Delta mayor Lois Jackson says the province is continuing to drag its heels on the referendum question.

Photograph by: Nick Procylo, PNG Files, Vancouver Sun

Metro Vancouver mayors will debate the idea of surveying the region's residents to come up with their own referendum question on transportation funding.

Delta Mayor Lois Jackson proposed the motion Friday to the Metro Vancouver board, noting that the mayors should take action since the province continues to drag its heels on the referendum question, which will be included on the ballot as part of the Nov. 14 municipal elections.

The motion, which will be debated at the Feb. 28 board meeting, suggests that chief administrative officers from the 21 municipalities work together with the Metro mayors' committee to design a survey, which can then be analyzed to determine a referendum question.

Jackson estimates the survey would cost about \$30,000.

"We've got to try harder," she said after the meeting. "We know this business has been decreed and we're going to have a referendum. We really need to put our politics aside because the people in the region need us to do this."

But many mayors are already balking at the idea, saying while transportation funding is critical for the

region, they don't support the provincially mandated referendum because it will likely fail.

The opposition includes the region's largest cities - Surrey, Vancouver, Burnaby and Richmond - which have the most votes on the Metro board. Their mayors argue successful referendums take years to plan, and noted complex and contentious issues - tend to fail because the public is usually angry about them.

"TransLink is the object of a lot of anger," Richmond Mayor Malcolm Brodie said.

"I believe the referendum is a provincial initiative and the province should go forth and take the steps they need to take. The mayors, or elected people, have done everything they've been asked or mandated to do to come up with funding sources.

"The referendum is a very negative idea and should be rethought before it goes any further because I think the region will pay for the consequences."

The B.C. government plans to introduce legislation this spring to hold the referendum during the municipal elections. Transportation Minister Todd Stone maintains the civic elections are the best time for a referendum, saying it will save costs and, he hopes, boost voter turnout.

But mayors have argued the referendum will likely pit cities against each other during the election campaign and say the province should be focusing on changing the governance structure at TransLink to give the regional directors more control over spending and transit priorities.

Stone said he plans to come out with proposed changes to TransLink's governance in the next few days, but this will likely only tweak the existing model. TransLink is now run by a board of appointed directors who make decisions in secret and are overseen by the province.

Jackson maintains that if the mayors want to take more control of Trans-Link, they should start by trying to come uP with a referendum question. She said it might be difficult to come up with a simple yes-no referendum question and suggested it could be broken into two.

"We've been asked to put it together because we're on the ground. Certainly we have a lot of opinions on what we should be doing," Jackson said. "Let's put our best people on the job."

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