



Politicians need to show leadership on TransLink

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The B.C. government last week took its first tentative step toward skulking away from its plan to hold a referendum on transit funding.

On Jan. 27, Christy Clark said she's willing to delay the project beyond the initial November date.

It always was a bad idea, born of desperation, an attempt to raise extra cash from a Vancouver population that's financially pressed, pinched and pummelled.

"Stop wasting money, you scum sucking pigs, also known as Trans-Link," Zale Lawton snarled recently on a Postmedia website gathering comment on the referendum.

"First, get rid of the excessive level of (TransLink) executives, then come to the taxpayers if needed," counselled reader Al Dinis.

"Just as long as I have a 'none of the above' option," warned John Dueckman, "you can do whatever you want with that referendum.

"It is way past time all bureaucrats learned to live within their existing revenue streams before coming to ask me for more."

Alas, it doesn't help any referendum that salaries of four top execs at TransLink have been published, all of whom receive \$300,000-plus annually.

Indeed, CEO Len Jarvis earns \$438,700 when pension and benefits are added to his \$394,730 salary. The Toronto Transit System's GM gets \$282,700.

Heck, more than a third of Vancouver's 166 Transit police earns more than \$100,000.

In any referendum debate, these factoids would be blown out of proportion and just one more reason to vote into oblivion the idea of more taxpayer cash.

Further, people generally don't like to raise taxes on themselves. That's why B.C.'s HST went down in flames in 2011.

And so, **it is up to politicians to lead**, to set appropriate policy and raise revenues, and to keep faith with their constituents by bringing them onside, convincing them of the validity and necessity of their plans.

The only reason, in this instance, that a referendum is being proposed is because the region's mayors are unable to craft a plan, among themselves and with the province, for transit resources and funding options.

But the truth is, **this job belongs to those players**. Quite simply - apart from the futility of asking taxpayers to endorse higher fees and levies, the options are too complicated to outline in a concise referendum question.

For example, responsibilities for maintaining the Massey Tunnel are provincial but TransLink would run a Millenium Line to the University of B.C. And how could one clear referendum question address the spaghetti-bowl of TransLink and/or bridge projects that would need funding? What if voters favoured some projects but not others? This same dog's breakfast of options would be the on the table in terms of new revenue sources - do citizens want bridge tolls? A vehicle levy? Or both. Or neither. Maybe they'd favour a hike in PST or property tax? Or both. Or neither.

The referendum question would have to be 20 pages long to give anyone a substantive say.

It's also worth noting, bridge tolls would be excessively onerous in Vancouver where the area is sliced and diced by bridges, courtesy of the Fraser River.

But perhaps the most compelling reason to ditch the referendum - itself to cost many millions of dollars - is the almost-certain prospect of a "No" vote.

That would then stall spending on any transportation projects for an indeterminate period, to the region's serious detriment.

Politicians need to step up to the plate, reach consensus among themselves, then promise to find at least a portion of needed revenue from belt tightening.

Then, they **need to convince Vancouver residents of the merits of their case**, and proceed to get the job done.

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