

north shore news

JAMES: Stumbling towards a transit referendum

[Elizabeth James](#) / North Shore News

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"Somebody has to have the guts to go to the public and talk about all the various sources of (TransLink) funding and do all of the groundwork." North Shore News Jan. 26, 2014

- North Vancouver District Mayor Richard Walton (from a Jan. 26 news story)

Speaking at a recent Chamber of Commerce lunch, District of North Vancouver Mayor Richard Walton expressed his frustration with the confusion over the proposed TransLink referendum.

Walton, who continues as mayors' council chair for 2014, echoed the council's opinion that the province owns the referendum and is responsible for wording the question and for educating the public as to possible funding options.

The same day, Transportation and Infrastructure Minister Todd Stone told reporters the mayors have each "put numerous ideas out there" about the transportation priorities for "their respective communities" without saying how the projects can be funded.

Mayors promoting the needs of their communities? Isn't that what they were elected to do? People are often accused of demanding services they're not willing to pay for - the accusation grates every time I hear it. People are not against paying for improved and efficient services; they are sick of pouring their dollars down black holes of provincially driven political decisions that fail to deliver anything close to a region-wide transportation system.

The mayors are overdue to dig in their heels. Indeed many believe they should dump TransLink in the lap of the current premier who has done nothing to rectify the mess she inherited from a succession of previous governments dating back to the Glen Clark era.

Instead, mere hours after Stone's comments, she pulled the rug out from under him by backing away from the government's "committed" position that the referendum would be held alongside November's municipal elections.

That's reminiscent of a long-ago remark by former CKNW talk-show host Rafe Mair who said, "People are mistaken if they think anyone in power knows what the hell they are doing."

Now, under the guise of giving people a voice, the province plans to offload its responsibility by forcing you, the voters, to decide how you want your ox gored for who knows what "priorities" they want to ram through.

Recently, I received **two documents pertinent to this discussion**. One came from longtime North Van District council-watcher, Corrie Kost; the other was a transit presentation made to authorities in Dundee, Scotland.

Too lengthy to analyze here, they add a wider dimension to the transportation investments you are being asked to make.

Kost referred me to a **2012 referendum held in Atlanta**, Ga. where area residents were asked to approve a Transportation Special-Purpose Local-Option Sales Tax.

In brief, the referendum failed by a vote of 417,593 to 257,942, despite the fact that proponents spent US\$6.5 million to the US\$14,000 "and shoe leather" spent by opponents.

<http://www.southernspaces.org/2013/well-tied-knot-atlantas-mobility-crisis-and-2012-t-splotted-debate>

If you search for "A well-tied knot: Atlanta's Mobility Crisis," authored by Edward A. Hatfield of Emory University, you can read [the longer story online](#). Although Hatfield says Atlanta's transportation issues were complicated by disturbing racial overtones, some of his comments sound eerily familiar: "... it wasn't altogether clear that area leaders could even agree on a slate of projects, much less persuade voters to foot the bill."

And, "... some ninetyone percent of the voters opposing the referendum were motivated by a profound lack of faith in government..." To be fair, Hatfield said 49 of 62 initiatives put forward by the U.S. nonpartisan Center for Transportation Excellence did succeed.

Another issue Hatfield touched on was that of development: "The project list as a whole was not paired with thoroughgoing changes in land-use regulations."

You be the judge as to whether our "regional transportation (is) still chasing development rather than shaping it."

The [second report](#) was a presentation by Jim Harkins, FC ILT and David Cockle of Leewood Projects Ltd. on the [Dundee Waterfront Circular Tram](#). Both members of the U.K.'s LRTA Light Rail Development Group, they do lean toward light rail. Nonetheless, their presentation models the co-ordinated information so desperately needed in this region. Affordability, connectivity, university needs, reduction of car use, pedestrian walkways and much more was covered.

Cockle regularly visits family in Chilliwack and so I asked him about the dynamics of producing such a report for Metro Vancouver. He said circulators could, indeed,

feed into the current transit network. Routes to consider: Waterfront-Gastown-Robson; Waterfront-Robson-West End; Robson-West End-Yaletown; Burnaby, Richmond.

[Cockle also said that if commissioned, separate reports by Harkins et al for the North Shore and for the Broadway corridor to UBC route would take from four to six weeks to complete.](#)

I hope to discuss the specifics with Mayor Walton and tell you more in an upcoming column.

The cost of those expert independent reports would likely pale in comparison to the costs of a stumbling referendum which would guarantee little but more TransLink grief.

All that's needed is someone with "the guts" to commission them.

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