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BALDREY: Four keys to a victory for the Yes side

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The general consensus seems to be that the “Yes” side in the upcoming transit plebiscite is the one fighting from behind, and has the much bigger proverbial boulder to push up the hill in this debate.

The No side, led by Jordan Bateman of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, has pretty much had the floor to itself since the Christmas break. He’s been all over the media, blasting TransLink for all kinds of reasons and sowing the seeds of mistrust and suspicion with prospective plebiscite voters.

But the Yes side can, miracle of miracles, pull off an upset victory if it can accomplish a number of tasks. It will be difficult, but it can be done. So, free of charge, I offer some advice on how to get the job done:

Turn the channel

As in, stop talking about TransLink (arguably the most unpopular organization in B.C.) and start hammering home talk about specific transit improvements. Bateman’s modus operandi has been to mention TransLink — and all its miscues, woeful tales of waste, bloated executive salaries, SkyTrain breakdowns etc. — in pretty well every one of his public utterances. Bateman is trying, understandably, to make the plebiscite a vote on TransLink’s performance. It’s nothing of the sort, of course, but I don’t blame Bateman for pushing that argument. After all, TransLink is the weakest link in the Yes side’s chain, so why not try to exploit that?

However, if people start hearing more and more about rapid transit lines in Surrey, more buses and a new Pattullo Bridge, that may get their aggravated minds (which come from being stuck in traffic) off of thinking of ways to punish TransLink and back onto how best to get out of their daily traffic nightmare.

Rotate your spokespeople

One of Bateman’s strengths is that he is good at obtaining media coverage. But over the course of the next few months, he may well turn into a liability for the No side because folks may simply become tired of seeing and hearing from him — and only him, on the No side — incessantly. But the Yes side has a bunch of mayors who just won re-election, which presumably means they are held in good regard by the people they are now going back to for support in another vote.

So, why not rotate folks like Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson, Surrey Mayor Linda Hepner, Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore and a few others when it comes to shaping the public face of the Yes side?

Push past the leaders and get to the masses

In other words, simply getting the support of the heads of the 70-plus organizations that make up the Yes side coalition is not enough. Getting the support of the members of those organizations is much more a key to any success. This is the classic problem perennially faced by the NDP during elections. Organized labour simply endorses the NDP, and then watches as members of their own unions vote for another party.

For the Yes side to win, it needs those organizations to deliver the votes of their members — not just passing motions of support at monthly meetings. A key player here may not be organized labour so much as the environmental movement, which backs the Yes side. Environmentalists will find it much easier to motivate their organizations’ members than organized labour has in past votes.

Time and organizational infrastructure on your side

The plebiscite ballots will start being mailed out in mid-March, and the ballots can be mailed back to Elections BC as late as May 29. That’s a generous 10-week period, which kind of turns things into a 10-week-long election day, as each side tries to GOTV (Get Out the Vote) every day during that period.

To get that vote out, presumably the Yes coalition will be able to tap into its member organizations for volunteers to help to participate in mail-out, phone banks and the like (again, I presume Elections BC will allow this, although you never know). I’m not sure the No Side, which seems to consist of the one-man band Bateman, can compete when it comes to that kind of organization. However, Bateman may end up not even needing much organization.

There is still a feeling of “I-pay-too-much” out there, and perhaps no amount of planning and reasoned arguments will overcome that. We’ll know in June, when results are revealed.

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How will you vote? Email your thoughts on the plebiscite to editor@nsnews.com.