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Transit supporters seek to kickstart ‘Yes’ campaign 2

Advocates of the “Yes” campaign in the upcoming transportation referendum in Metro Vancouver are rallying supporters to come to TransLink’s defence to help the vote succeed.

Peter Ladner, a former Vancouver city councillor, told participants in a webinar Wednesday that the “No” side “is basically attacking TransLink” and it is up to supporters to defend it.

The call comes two weeks ahead of the mayors’ council’s proposed launch of the “Yes” side’s official campaign. A coalition backing the “Yes” vote, comprised of business, labour, environmental and student groups, is expected to announce today or Friday its campaign and who will head it.

Residents are expected to receive mail-in ballots mid-March. They are being asked to vote before May 29 on a 0.5 per cent increase to the provincial sales tax to fund transportation projects across the region.

But some say the “Yes” side may be leaving it too late, especially if advocates have to go into defensive mode.

Max Cameron, a political-science professor at the University of B.C., said while the “Yes” side does still have time to make its case, there is a risk that it has “allowed the other side to define the issues,” specifically regarding troubles at TransLink.

The “No” side, led by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation’s Jordan Bateman, has argued TransLink cannot be trusted with any more public money because of high executive salaries, Compass card delays, and a series of breakdowns on SkyTrain last summer.

“They shouldn’t even be talking about TransLink,” said Cameron.

Ladner agrees the battle shouldn’t be about TransLink, which he said has seen many successes over the years.

“This is not a vote about TransLink,” Ladner said. “You can’t solve (TransLink’s) problems by voting no.”

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