

# Mayors, province haggle over transit funding

## Federal government has already committed \$370 million to the plan

Metro Vancouver mayors say they don't understand why the B.C. Liberals have refused to pledge financial support to the region's 10-year, \$7.8-billion transportation plan, saying the move threatens to derail the entire project.

**Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore**, spokesman for the mayors' council, said the federal government has already committed \$370 million to the plan — which includes more buses and SeaBus service hours, as well as light rail for Surrey and a subway for Vancouver — while the mayors are willing to boost taxes and transit fares to help come up with TransLink's contribution.

But while the province said last week it will commit \$246 million to the transportation plan, Trans-Link Minister Peter Fassbender insisted that money is only for the first phase and the province needs more details before it will fund the remainder.

This has the mayors worried they could lose the federal money to other Canadian cities like Toronto and Montreal, which have all their funding on the table. The mayors insist the province had said it would fund one-third of the entire transportation plan, but Fassbender now says the commitment was only for the light rail and subway lines.

**"Regardless of whether they promised it or not, they should be bringing one-third (of funding) to the table," Moore said. "I don't know why a rail project in Surrey or a subway in Vancouver is more important than a SeaBus on the North Shore or more buses for the northeast sector."**

Fassbender maintains the province is still committed to the rapid transit projects, but won't commit to the 10-year plan until it sees what money the federal government is putting on the table. "I'm not going to sign a blank cheque without knowing what the funding parameters are," he said, noting the funding announced last week is a "sign of good faith and we will work with the region and the federal government on Phase 2 (of the plan)."

The mayors have haggled with the provincial government for years over how to fund transportation across Metro Vancouver, suggesting measures such as a vehicle levy or regional carbon tax to generate dollars to expand the beleaguered system. A proposed sales tax was defeated by the public in a plebiscite last spring.

**The mayors maintain they have made huge concessions by agreeing to raise taxes and transit fares. Other measures in the mayors' plan include selling surplus TransLink properties, seeking city land for the proposed Vancouver subway and Surrey light rail lines, taking a larger share of the federal gas tax and charging developers a regional fee for building around transit hubs.** The mayors have also asked the province to return control of TransLink to the mayors by the end of this year and redirect \$50 million annually from a regional carbon tax for transit projects, but **Fassbender said "the carbon tax will not be dedicated to transportation in this region."**

Moore noted the province didn't require more information before approving a new Massey Bridge to replace the tunnel, and even approved it before the business case was done. "These things evolve," he said. "There's no reason why conceptually they can't say, 'We see the plan has been funded and we're in.' It's the principle of being a contributor to the transit and transportation plan for this region."

Surrey Mayor Linda Hepner said she is anxious to get the provincial government to commit in writing to the full plan, noting that the required design work and analysis will cost tens of millions of dollars.

"We need the commitment in writing before the year is out or we can't stand in front of the national stage," she said. "If the ministry has already had that discussion up at the federal level this region needs to see that."