

Tolls, fees on the table

Mayors want \$50 million a year to pay for transportation

Metro Vancouver drivers will likely face some form of mobility pricing, such as tolls on every bridge, within five years as regional mayors look to generate \$50 million annually to expand the beleaguered transportation system.



DARRYL DYCK/THE CANADIAN PRESS/FILES The Metro Vancouver mayors council wants to bring in a mobility pricing concept to raise transportation funding, but how their proposed system will work is still unclear.

Mobility pricing — a concept defined as charging a cost to use the road to reduce traffic congestion — is a key driver in funding the mayors' 10-year, \$7.5-billion transportation plan, following a failed plebiscite last year.

The specific type of pricing has yet to be determined, but options range from tolling every bridge and tunnel in Metro Vancouver — similar to what's done in Sweden — to charging drivers a fee per kilometre driven, as is seen in Oregon.

The mayors say such a move is feasible, but more time will be needed to come up with the right approach and convince the public to buy into the plan. They've asked the B.C. government to appoint a third-party commissioner to help define the appropriate tolls, road pricing and distance-based options for the region while they investigate what's in place in other cities.

Oregon, for instance, spent seven years consulting with the public before going ahead with its pilot project, which began with 5,000 drivers agreeing to pay 1.5 cents per mile in exchange for a fuel tax credit. The program, operational in 2015, uses a mileage reporting device that calculates the distance travelled without disclosing specific routes. Drivers can choose from three different agencies, which then track and charge them for the miles driven.

“We want to see a very clear step to ensure we’re on track to implementing mobility pricing,” Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson said. “There’s a lot of ideas, but we need a blue-ribbon panel to do the analysis. We’ll need that source of revenue in five years, so we have to get cracking on it,” said Robertson, who is also chairman of the mayors council.

Mayors have considered mobility pricing for years as an alternative way to generate funding while seeing a decline in revenues from fuel taxes — one of the region’s main sources of transportation funding. The concept is already at work around the world: San Diego, for instance, has a highway tolling scheme that enables drivers to avoid gridlock by paying extra to travel in a fast lane, while cities such as London, Singapore and Stockholm charge drivers areabased tolls to enter cordoned-off downtown business areas.

Siena, Italy, meanwhile, charges zonal fees that allow drivers to travel freely in their home communities but pay a fee to cross into neighbouring areas. A Surrey driver, for instance, wouldn’t pay anything to travel around that city but could be charged to go into New Westminster, while drivers from North Vancouver might have to pay to go into downtown Vancouver.

Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore said the mayors are investigating the best option for Metro, but they would like to see something in place by 2022 to capture traffic on the new George Massey and Pattullo bridges. If road pricing goes ahead, the mayors would consider reducing fees, such as gas taxes.

“There are so many options to mobility pricing, it’s going to take years,” Moore said. “If you’re going to bring on two new bridges, it would be an ideal time to switch up the tolling policy.”

A study by Canada’s Ecofiscal Commission, released last November, suggests Metro, which has 21 bridges and one tunnel, should consider tolling all those crossings based on a time-of-day basis — say, a higher fee for the morning and evening rush hours and lower fees during the rest of the day — noting the water crossings would intercept a large portion of traffic.

Robin Lindsey, an economics professor at UBC’s Sauder School of Business, said the move would be somewhat similar to what’s done in Stockholm, which has 18 access points into the city and charges the same toll for all entrances.

He said Metro would require cameras and decals to count traffic, but the system could be rolled into existing infrastructure on the Port Mann and Golden Ears bridges, while unlike Stockholm, Metro could have varying tolls depending on where the highest congestion occurs.

The Port Mann Bridge, for instance, has a lot of capacity, so there could be higher tolls on other bridges that are more heavily congested.

“The bridges tend to be the pinch point, so that’s where congestion is worse,” Lindsey said. “The danger is if you impose a higher toll on one link, you get traffic diversion.”

Lindsey said it doesn’t make sense — and wouldn’t be fair — to cordon off and toll downtown Vancouver, but agreed with the Ecofiscal study that Metro could look at distance-based pricing, which is seen as the most equitable form of mobility pricing because each driver pays for the time and use on the roads no matter where they live. He estimated this would cost upward of \$1 billion to put into place, and said it would take time to get the public to accept it.

“There’s going to be public opposition to that. We’ve seen it over the decades,” Lindsey said. “But where it’s been implemented, people’s attitudes change.”

TransLink CEO Kevin Desmond said last month that Metro would have to ensure there are strong privacy protections in place if they went ahead with distance-based pricing, although Moore argued within five years there could be autonomous vehicles on the road, which would negate the issue.

Still, Desmond said something has to be done, because right now all bridges south of the Fraser are tolled, putting undue hardship on those residents.

“Mobility pricing is critical to deal equitably with transit,” he said. “It has the power to shift behaviour. But for that to happen we need to ensure the pricing of our roadways is fair and equitable, not only for residents but also to businesses in the region.”

Peter Fassbender, the minister responsible for TransLink, said the province is prepared to discuss a mobility pricing strategy for Metro, but would not say whether it would have to go to referendum.

“We are prepared to sit down with the mayors and look at what they mean by mobility pricing,” he said. “It’s not as simple as saying we’re going to put tolls on everything.”

26 Comment(s)



[Ricketty Rabbit](#)

02 June 2016

06:13

If mobility is priced rationally and fairly, I will have no objection. But I have serious doubts about this being done rationally and fairly. I'll have to wait to see what the proposals are.

That only covers the price of mobility. It leaves out the critical question - what will the revenue collected be used for? We need a rational transportation plan that includes roads, bridges, tunnels and public transit. They're interrelated and can't be planned in isolation.

The usage of roadways is particularly important. Roads - particularly city roads in congested areas - are precious and expensive resources. Using them for dedicated bicycle lanes and for parking is nonsensical. Each lane of roadway should be used to move as many passengers as possible, especially at peak usage periods. Parking doesn't do that, nor do dedicated bicycle lanes. Fast buses with longer spacing between stops, dedicated lanes in congested areas, and traffic lights activated by approaching buses would go a long way to increasing the passenger capacity of our roads.

So too would eliminating left turns in congested areas and creating more one-way streets in these areas. Both would benefit from more off-street parking, which could be accommodated by changing building codes to require new buildings to provide parking that was previously accommodated in very expensive and scarce roadway lanes.

These ideas are in use in many parts of the world, and have proven to be quite successful. Metro Vancouver's failure to think about roads in this way is a colossal failure of imagination and informed thinking. Let's get with the program here, folks. Pressure your municipality to start using imaginative, rational planning aimed at maximizing passenger flow on our very expensive and scarce traffic lanes.

[Oxfrdal](#)

02 June 2016

06:18

Raising fuel tax would equate to the same as monitoring distance traveled. The process is already in position and the only downside is the embarrassment of seeing how much transit actually costs and that drivers will cross to the states to fill up. Are they really considering wasting up to a \$billion in monitoring infrastructure to keep the gas tax down. There are no personal exemptions for cross border day travel. Ask every driver if they bought gas. Bog down the tank-fillers with paperwork and charge them with smuggling if they don't declare a fill-up. Have the odd high profile vehicle confiscation just to remind people.

[BigG3522](#)

02 June 2016

06:22

don't be fooled into thinking that if we buy into this, that they will reduce gas taxes, or anything else.

Why would they when their goal is to increase revenue, especially when they funds they are lying about cutting are the ones they need to increase? Distance based pricing is completely unfair to those who moved to areas that aren't congested. Why should I pay a distance fee to go to Kamloops, or Merritt, or Princeton, or further? Big cities around the world have congestion. It's a consequence of living near heavily populated area's. Deal with it. No reform to TransLink, or additional funding avenues will fix that.



[G.A.](#)

02 June 2016

06:40

Off the topic...have any of you been having problems with the Sun and its new format as well as with the Province? Last night it started acting up and this morning this is the only page I can get, nothing on the Province at all. This new look of the Sun is terrible, instead of a copy like we used to get here where one could see the whole page mine now is about the size of the printed issue...



[Ricketty Rabbit](#)

02 June 2016

06:43

I don't have that problem, GA. But it is very slow to load today. I have to click to turn the page and go read something else for a while in order to advance through the paper.



[Mr Tux](#)

02 June 2016

06:45

The reader is both slow and malfunctioning. Only get a few pages and the rest are either blank or repeats of previously viewed pages.

[Wig53](#)

02 June 2016

07:03

My ePaper loaded quickly w/o problems

The present tax base is huge. I suggest the municipalities have grown to be large and inefficient. What need to be done is to boot out the bums in the mayors chairs and vote for people who will run a cost effective and efficient operation. The present bunch burn through the cash placating unions, building

bike lanes, and spending in areas that should be prov/federal...ie luxury condos for the homeless and public daycare.

[Ricky boy](#)

02 June 2016

07:35

Back on the topic, I wonder if the Mayors have considered resignation as a way to cut costs.

But yes the Sun is on go-slow



[J Q Public](#)

02 June 2016

07:46

Since the format change it takes 3 to 5 minutes to download an issue, whereas it used to take under 30 seconds. Is each issue that much larger?

The only benefit is the postings are easier and more reliable - my tablet used to always freeze for viewing or submitting comments.

[Willy P Johnson](#)

02 June 2016

08:02

JQ, One persons benefit is another's bane.



[Nanny Ogg](#)

02 June 2016

08:16

The only way a transportation system will work in Metro is to have massive, efficient capacity, and provide adequate parking at a reasonable cost and with good security at every station outside the downtown core. THEN people may abandon their cars for transit. Taxing them to death is not the answer.

GA I haven't had any problems today - maybe because I'm on later?

[DER000](#)

02 June 2016

08:31

How much of an impact has the zoning change had on buses??

02 June 2016

08:44

On my iPad I cannot start a comment but I can add to a previously started comment list. Also I have to tap on an exact spot to open the comments. While I can resize the text of the articles, I can't resize the comments.

[Neil Brazier](#)

02 June 2016

08:48

If mass transit is such a good thing, why don't the mayors consider the user pay approach? I will tell you why, they are afraid of protests by left wing radicals. But based on the last referendum which they spent millions of public dollars to support and lost badly, they should realize motorists are not going to take it forever. The spendthrift mayors should also consider better use of the tax dollars they already have and should be aware that practices as per highly socialist Europe are not going to work here.

[tug](#)

02 June 2016

08:55

If the mayor's want money for transit the solution is obvious, charge the user.



[Ricketty Rabbit](#)

02 June 2016

09:03

Neil, are they really afraid of protests? Or is there just a complete absence of successful user-pay mass transit outside of extremely densified cities of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taipei, Osaka and Tokyo? As far as I know, they're the only ones in the world.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farebox_recovery_ratio

Please also note that this is recovery of OPERATING EXPENSES, which do not include the cost of building the systems.



[Northern Eagle](#)

02 June 2016

09:48

Left wing radical..is that Dave Schultz on a bad day?

[street wisdom1](#)

02 June 2016

10:23

The Mayors are crusaders only because they want a larger empire to meddle with rather than doing their designated work in authorized pursuits such mundane areas as garbage staffing municipal services and handling zoning requests

In their search for the perfect world they mess with areas outside their jurisdiction because the fall out from their failures does not stick to their political future

If taxpayers are to commit huge financial resources to remaking the Metro area they need the federal and provincial governments to take the lead and then our small minded civic politicians can cooperate with the grand schemes senior governments can reasonably fund to completion

[Westcoast](#)

02 June 2016

10:33

Gas tax is dropping as people drive less and use less gas, now we want another funding source based on the use of automobiles which will be a declining source of revenue as well. And, of course, anybody notice that electric cars are not paying any road tax? Sooner or later transit will have to be self funding and fares will need to go up at least at the rate of inflation. Right now we see cars as a sin (other than electric which get a free ride) but as we move to a larger transit system we will have to deal with the

decline of the gas fueled car as a revenue source, and then we will have to see fares rise.



[G.A.](#)

02 June 2016

10:35

Does not matter which Government is involved, it is all tax payers dollars that is used. So if the Federal and Provincial Governments have to get involved why do we have municipal Governments wasting our tax dollars?

Pam of BCLA - Coquitlam Public Library (CDN)(PQ)

02 June 2016

11:44

Electric cars should not be given a free ride. Think of the environmental costs and greenhouse gases involved in making and recycling all those batteries, not to mention the cost of building site C, which should not be treated differently than the cost of building skytrain etc.



[Stryder](#)

02 June 2016

14:19

Oxfrdal, I'm with you. What will it cost to decide on a system?

What will it cost to implement it?

What will it cost to run it?

A drawback of using an increased gas tax is that it won't affect congestion, but then neither will a mobility tax. However, one would hope that with the improvements in transit, few cars will be on the roads.

RR, lengthening stops between uses will perhaps dampen the use of buses. People will only walk so far to catch a bus or walk home from a bus. This may also negatively affect businesses around bus stops. May also be a hardship for those who are mobility challenged.

Be aware of unintended consequences.

vplreader of VPL Library

02 June 2016

16:12

nanny... re:

>The only way a transportation system will work in Metro is to have massive, efficient capacity, and provide adequate parking at a reasonable cost and with good security at every station outside the downtown core. THEN people may abandon their cars for transit. Taxing them to death is not the answer.

Where's the money going to come from Nanny?

[George T Cunningham Library - CTZ](#)

03 June 2016

09:03

Vancouver is hardly a big city - more like a big city wannabe. Before bringing anything new in, the CoV needs to: 1. Stop closing roads, 2. Stop closing lanes on major arterials, 3. Consider using more one way streets, 4. Adjust the automated street lights to provide a reasonable amount of time for pedestrians to cross AFTER WHICH, they'll be fined for clogging up right turn lanes, 5. Adjust signals or install more advance left turns. They could also consider removing street parking from clogged roads and installing shared bus/bike lanes like in Paris and partner with private companies to build strategically located off-street parking. More money for Translink is easy but will likely fix very little. Where is the leadership?

[George T Cunningham Library - CTZ](#)

03 June 2016

09:08

Completely correct as far as it goes. What is also true however is that much of our congestion has been manufactured by poorly thought out policies. Moonbeam goes on and on about Vancouver's Green & Clean branding but his vision doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Hardly "Green" to force cars to wait in traffic idling away (in Vancouver's "idle-free" zones!) because you have a hard-on for bikes. Putting green paint on the pavement is about the only "greening" this light-thinking mayor has accomplished.