

## Proposed accountability panel for transit tax modelled after those in U.S. cities

Mayors' council says it has been working on the plan since December

BY KELLY SINOSKI, VANCOUVER SUN    MARCH 6, 2015



Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore (left, with Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson) said, 'What we're trying to achieve with the oversight is that there's a group with credentials at arm's length from the mayors and TransLink to provide accountability to the public.'

**Photograph by:** Arlen Redekop, PNG

METRO VANCOUVER -- The Metro Vancouver mayors' council will model a proposed accountability panel, headed by B.C. billionaire Jim Pattison, on those already in place in U.S. cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore said the idea of having such a panel first arose after visits to Los Angeles last September, in which officials suggested it was necessary to have such measures in place, especially when asking the public to approve a sales tax hike through a referendum.

When the mayors' released their transportation plebiscite ballot last December, Moore said, they wanted to ensure there was language on the ballot that the funds would be audited annually and reported to the public.

However, while the mayors' council said at the time they were "contemplating taxpayer protection measures to provide assurance that funds raised will be dedicated to improvements in the mayors' plan," it wasn't until this week that they announced the public accountability panel that would be chaired by Pattison. The mayors' council maintains they were working out what type of committee structure they wanted to establish and the terms of reference for the committee.

The finer details, such as who will sit on the committee, have yet to be determined and will depend on

whether there is a Yes vote in the upcoming transportation plebiscite. Ballots are expected to be mailed to Metro Vancouver residents in the next week, asking if they will support a 0.5-per-cent sales tax increase — dubbed the congestion improvement tax — to help fund transportation expansion across the region. If it goes ahead, Pattison's committee will then oversee the funds collected from the tax to ensure they go toward specific projects in the mayors' transportation plan, such as more buses, a subway for Vancouver and light rail for Surrey.

Residents have between March 16 and May 29 to vote in the mail-in ballots.

"It was an important aspect to the ballots in L.A.," Moore said. "We heard loud and clear from people that it was important that it was someone outside TransLink and the mayors' council to oversee things. What we're trying to achieve with the oversight is that there's a group with credentials at arm's length from the mayors and TransLink to provide accountability to the public."

If the sales tax passes, the mayors' council would have to first approve the proposed 10-year strategy so it becomes an official plan, Moore said. The money from the tax, along with fares and other revenue such as tolls from the new Pattullo Bridge, would then go into a provincial fund, where it would be audited by a professional body — separate from the annual audit of TransLink — and overseen by Pattison's committee to ensure it is spent only on the priorities in the transportation plan.

Moore said while no details have been confirmed, the committee would likely involve three people, including Pattison, similar to those in place in the U.S. All the members would be volunteers and appointed by the mayors' council and Pattison, likely for "multi-year" terms, he added.

Under the terms of reference, the committee would work with the mayors' council to establish a financial review process for the funds collected from the tax, review the projected spending for projects at the beginning of each fiscal year, ensure the money is only spent only on projects outlined in the plan and report to the public annually on the monitoring of the implementation of the mayors' plan.

The committee would then report annually to the public, likely through a public meeting at TransLink and the mayors' council, as to whether the goals were met.

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