

Metro Vancouver mayors seek more control over federal gas tax cash

BY MIKE HAGER, VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 14, 2013



Mayors say they, and not the appointed directors of TransLink, should decide how taxpayers dollars are spent.

Photograph by: Mark van Manen, PROVINCE

Metro Vancouver wants to spend money it gets from the federal gasoline tax on priority projects like water and sewer system upgrades and not just on TransLink.

The federal tax, which came into effect in 2005, is a 10-cent-a-litre fuel tax collected by Ottawa and transferred to provinces based on their populations. The federal government transfers about \$260 million a year in federal gas tax revenue to B.C. to help fund transit infrastructure, with \$120 million going to TransLink.

"What the Metro board has said is: you need to look at what the regional priorities are, and that's everything from TransLink to utility service, water, sewer and so on," said board chair and Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore. "Right now it can only be used for transit services.

"We think there needs to be greater flexibility in how that fund can be used."

The board voted last Friday to send a letter saying as much to Bill Bennett, the provincial minister in charge of representing Metro Vancouver's interests in renegotiating with the federal government on the gas tax, which is set to end 2015.

When the tax came into effect, Metro Vancouver's mayors decided to allot the money to TransLink, which was then run by elected local officials, Moore said. Now TransLink is a provincial agency run principally by an appointed board.

"A lot of us at Metro Vancouver have the same feeling that taxpayer money should be governed by people that are elected and ultimately held responsible by the public for their decisions," Moore said.

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