

## Proposed referendum on TransLink funding will delay projects, mayors argue

But Clark says public should also have a say in infrastructure decisions such as tolls

BY KELLY SINOSKI, VANCOUVER SUN    APRIL 18, 2013



Surrey Mayor Dianne Watts says a TransLink funding referendum will have a negative effect on her city.

**Photograph by:** Wayne Leidenfrost, PNG, Vancouver Sun

The B.C. Liberals' proposed referendum on the future of TransLink funding is being met with opposition by regional mayors, who say waiting for a vote 18 months from now could delay much-needed transit projects, especially south of the Fraser.

Premier Christy Clark announced Monday that any potential revenue sources suggested by the mayors, such as tolls on all roads and bridges, would be subject to a referendum during the municipal elections in November 2014.

The move, she said, would allow people to have the chance to decide how much transit they want to pay for. But mayors argue the issue is too complex for a referendum, and is another ploy by government to avoid the issue.

"My concern is that by coming up with a referendum because it saves money is very clearly a deflection of the province's responsibility and risk," said Richard Walton, chairman of the mayors' council on regional transportation.

The announcement comes nearly three years after the province signed a memorandum of understanding with the mayors to identify potential funding sources. The province last week also said it was committed to finding short-term funding sources and will come up with legislation next spring.

Mayors have suggested options such as a regional sales tax, vehicle levy, carbon tax or road pricing to replace existing sources such as property or fuel taxes that are now used to generate revenue.

Walton said any new funding model has to involve all levels of government and have broad support if it is to be successful.

Surrey Mayor Dianne Watts noted a referendum could have a devastating effect on her city, which has helped pay for projects like the West Coast Express and the Canada and Millennium SkyTrain lines, but may not get the support from other cities in the region for its own priorities.

"I can pretty much guarantee residents in other parts of the region aren't going to want to pay for infrastructure south of the Fraser where they don't live," she said. "Does that get us any closer to our goal of getting them out of their cars and taking transit?"

Both Watts and Walton said this is the first time the issue has been raised, despite meetings between four provincial transportation ministers and the mayors' council on finding funding sources for transit.

Watts noted that since the province has legislated the tools available to TransLink to generate revenue, the issue should be subject to a provincial referendum. A vote also should have been held on the Port Mann Bridge, the Golden Ears Bridge and the Evergreen Line, she said.

"We're trying to build a city. We know the region south of the Fraser is a high-growth area," she said. "To delay this even further is something I know our residents are not happy about."

Richmond Mayor Malcolm Brodie agreed the move is "one more abdication of the leadership we've seen. To put this kind of question out for referendum is a recipe for failure."

But Langley Mayor Peter Fassbender, who is running as a Liberal candidate in Surrey-Fleetwood, argued the Liberals' commitment to provide legislation next spring is a "hard deadline" to get funding sources in place, and urged the mayors to continue working toward potential sources.

"It's making sure people in this region understand the vision for the future," he said. "It does have to be fair and equitable. The last thing the referendum should do is pit south of the Fraser against the Broadway corridor or the North Shore or Lion's Bay."

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