

# Transit referendum a waste of money, candidates say

BY KELLY SINOSKI, VANCOUVER SUN   APRIL 19, 2013

A B.C. Liberal proposal for a 2014 referendum asking municipal voters how they want to pay for transit is a waste of money, candidates from opposing parties said Thursday.

"We are elected to make decisions no matter how tough they are," NDP transportation critic Harry Bains told a public transportation dialogue at Simon Fraser University. "To put this decision to a referendum is shirking out responsibility and that shouldn't happen ... it's the south of the Fraser communities who are waiting to see if there's going to be expansion of transit in that area."

The idea was also dismissed by Duane Nickull, Conservative candidate in Vancouver-Point Grey and Green leader Jane Sterk, who argued a referendum was an imperfect way to gauge support and not the best way to address large-scale issues.

But Liberal Transportation Minister Mary Polak said the referendum would give people a choice as to what funding sources they would prefer to pay for transit. "There are many different options for funding sources for TransLink," she said. "You're probably not going to find one, there's going to be three or four options. What is your preferred one?" The debate came after Premier Christy Clark announced Monday that any potential transit revenue sources suggested by regional mayors, such as tolls on all roads and bridges, would be subject to a referendum to be held during the municipal elections in November 2014.

The four candidates, debating before a packed house at SFU Harbour Centre, were peppered with questions from the audience and Twitter feeds, which ranged from whether they would support road pricing and cycling and pedestrian safety to how they would restructure the Trans-Link board.

All candidates agreed that to change human behaviour would require a convenient alternative to driving.

Polak maintains there have long have been buses to get from Langley to the SkyTrain but nobody took them because they were infrequent and inconvenient. The new express bus, she said, was standing-room-only Thursday.

Nickull said the province should have built electric rail down the centre of Highway 1 rather than widening the highway.

How to fund transit, though, remains the question. The Liberals have already committed to working with the mayors' council on coming up with a long-term funding solution, which could include road pricing. The Greens also support measures such as pay-as-you-drive insurance but say any financial mechanisms must be done in parallel with improving the transit system. The B.C. Tories are opposed to road tolls unless there is no reasonable alternative, while the NDP would roll back tax breaks for corporations from the carbon tax and use that money for transit both in Metro and the rest of the province.

[ksinoski@vancouversun.com](mailto:ksinoski@vancouversun.com)

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