

Editorial: Transit will be funded regardless of vote results

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Gregor Robertson said last week that Greater Vancouver could miss out on federal help from a new, \$1-billion-a-year transportation infrastructure fund if people vote No in the transit plebiscite.

Photograph by: Arlen Redekop, Vancouver Sun

Gregor Robertson said last week that Greater Vancouver could miss out on federal help from a new, \$1-billion-a-year transportation infrastructure fund if people vote No in the transit plebiscite. Such a claim is misleading and, with just a month until voting on the plebiscite concludes, Vancouver's mayor is leaving himself open to charges that he is scaremongering and panicking.

The transportation fund was announced as part of last week's federal budget. The fund will launch with \$250 million in 2017-2018 and ultimately grow to \$1 billion a year by 2019-2020. It was welcomed by mayors across Canada.

They were not put off by the fact that the fund will not launch for several years because, as they point out, projects they envision are not yet shovel-ready. This, by the way, raises a question of why a 0.5-per-cent sales tax increase that Lower Mainlanders are now voting on would be collected starting in 2016 or thereabouts.

Robertson's suggestion that the region would lose out on the benefits from the federal fund if voters do not approve the new sales tax — "If we do not have a Yes vote from the referendum, we don't have funding locally to match the provincial and federal funds that are being promised" — was quickly refuted by federal Industry Minister James Moore, who said the region would definitely get its fair share.

Robertson's statement relates to the fact that federal funding will be contingent on matching funds from municipalities.

But there is no specific federal requirement for municipal funding to derive from a sales tax hike. Only that there be municipal money brought to the table.

While the Mayors' Council was negligent in not outlining any Plan B alternative to voting Yes, logic dictates that if voters reject the sales tax increase, other means of finding necessary monies will be pursued.

Polls show a majority of No voters want municipal governments to find that money by reallocating existing revenues. Local mayors may not like that option but it doesn't mean it cannot be done, if it comes to that.

Surely, if the transportation plan is crucial, as mayors contend, citizens will expect them to find the resources to provide essential services and infrastructure.

Whenever politicians are unwilling or unable to do that, voters have a habit of turfing them from office, in favour of politicians who can do the job.

Scaring voters into voting Yes is not a good strategy for the mayors. Nor should it be necessary given the mayors have had an overwhelming advantage in the plebiscite campaign, with \$7 million of taxpayers' money to spend, compared to the \$40,000 raised and being spent by the No forces.

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