

Mayors revive funding pleas

Pressure on to find transit project cash

Nearly a year after the public killed a proposed sales tax to fund transportation in Metro Vancouver, the region's mayors are making a renewed pitch to use the carbon tax or a vehicle levy to underwrite their \$7.5-billion plan.



ARLEN

REDEKOP FILES Burnaby Mayor Derek Corrigan says the carbon tax as a funding source for transport projects is the 'most attractive' option 'to people wanting to improve transportation.'

Mayors say the funding sources are among suggestions in a plan sent to TransLink Minister Peter Fassbender, who has been asked to either approve them or come up with alternatives to help pay for projects including more buses and rapid transit expansions in Surrey and Vancouver. Surrey Mayor Linda Hepner also said earlier this month that mayors are looking at ways to capture development cost charges around SkyTrain stations.

The pressure comes as the regional mayors' council seeks to cash in on money from the federal government, which has offered to provide 50 per cent of funding for transportation projects if the province and TransLink cover the rest. The province has typically provided a third of funding for capital projects. That means TransLink and the regional mayors would have to come up with 17 per cent to cover their share of the projects' cost.

Currently, TransLink can only increase gasoline taxes, property taxes and fares to generate more money for transit.

Mayors have refused to raise property taxes any further, saying homeowners are already being squeezed to provide other municipal services.

"Time has become crunch critical. We have to be in a solid position to be in line for that funding," Hepner said, referring to tapping into the federal dollars. "We need to come up with other avenues available to us."

The push for new funding sources comes nearly a year after a transportation plebiscite, in which the public rejected a proposed regional sales tax of 0.5 per cent, expected to yield about \$250 million annually. In 2013, the mayors' council had also said an annual vehicle registration fee, based on vehicle emissions or engine size, could reap \$50 million, while a \$5-a-tonne regional carbon tax could potentially generate \$90 million a year.

A technical analysis also suggested land capture — leveraging the value of lands around SkyTrain station development — would generate about \$30 million annually. Earlier this month, Hepner and Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson acknowledged the mayors are investigating development cost charges as a way to generate revenue around the high-density development that is typically allowed near transit hubs.

Burnaby Mayor Derek Corrigan said the mayors are pitching the same sources, such as the carbon tax, because they “are trying to advance a realistic idea of what options are available for funding.”

“They’re still pushing to see if there is any appetite for that from the provincial government,” he said.

“All of the mayors have a belief there should be synergy between the carbon tax and transportation. It’s the option, I think, that’s most attractive to people wanting to improve transportation.”

However, the province has consistently refused to allow the carbon tax to be used for transportation, saying it is carbon neutral. Successive governments have also rejected a vehicle levy, even though it has long been allowed in B.C. law. Premier Christy Clark deflected the mayors’ requests last time by calling for a transportation plebiscite.

“We’re at an impasse because the province always says ‘there’s the property tax,’ ” Corrigan said. “Do I think this is going to break the impasse? No. But the mayors want to take every opportunity they can to take another kick at the can.”

The proposed funding would be used to pay for projects in the short term, while mayors consider mobility pricing — tolling all bridges or charging drivers a fee per distance travelled — as a longer-term funding solution. Fassbender is expected to respond to the mayors’ proposal within 10 days.

Meanwhile, Delta Mayor Lois Jackson said she has become disillusioned with the mayors’ council. She said she suggested the mayors’ council charge a \$1 toll on every bridge, but that was shot down, while none of the other mayors are supporting plans for a new Massey bridge to replace the tunnel.

14 Comment(s)

[Brent Carson](#)

13 May 2016

04:54

The mayors don't want to be the ones increasing taxes, nor does the province. I say, let the mayors squirm until they agree to fund 50% of the cost through budget cuts - then pony up some gas tax money through lower mainland pumps.



[Ricketty Rabbit](#)

13 May 2016

06:54

" let the mayors squirm until they agree to fund 50% of the cost through budget cuts"

I've snipped part of the original post because it misread Brent's comment. Thanks, Vanisle, for correcting my mistake. Sorry, Brent, for misreading your good suggestion.

The better and more realistic solution to Transit cost woes is to scale back the COSTS of the system Translink has on the drawing board. And a precursor to that is to tell Metro Vancouver voters what it really costs to run SkyTrain. What is the actual cost per ride, including the capital costs? I'm betting its astronomical - likely upwards of \$20 per ride.

I've suggested a far less expensive solution than Gregor's Broadway tunnel Skytrain Extension. Put more buses on the route - double if necessary. Eliminate parking along Broadway in the area where transit speedup and capacity increases are needed and put dedicated bus-only lanes at the curb. Then, there'd be no need for buses to turn out into the traffic - they'd stay in the curb lane. Synchronize the lights during rush hours in particular to allow buses to move quickly along that route. And move the bus stops a little farther apart.

This would save probably 75% of the \$2B Gregor wants Translink to spend in Vancouver. It's not perfect, and it's inferior to a subway in every way except one - IT WOULD BE FAR LESS EXPENSIVE.

It would also buy time as the next iterations of personal transportation are developed - computer driven cars. We don't yet know precisely what they'll do to traffic patterns and people's interest in driving, but it's a fairly safe bet that they'll have unimagined consequences, positive and negative, that will change thinking about transit.



[GMan](#)

13 May 2016

07:00

"Mayors have refused to raise property taxes any further, saying homeowners are already being squeezed to provide other municipal services."

This has nothing to do with squeezing homeowners. Even renters pay property taxes through their rent, so no one is being "squeezed" more than anyone else.

The reason the Mayors don't want to use property tax increases to fund transit is because then the increase can be traced directly back to them. With a .5% sales tax, gas tax or carbon tax they can blame their poor budgeting and overspending on other levels of government.

Why can't Mayors provide the services that were provided by Mayors in the 60's and 70's without extra taxes? Theoretically all costs and revenues should have gone up at the same rate. Increased citizen's salaries should match increased property tax collection. Increased need for services due to a larger population should match increased taxed collected from the larger population.

The thing that has changed is pandering councils have been elected on promises to provide services that are outside their original mandate. Things like day care, needle exchange, bike lanes, homeless shelters, affordable housing and many other programs were not offered in the past. The bottom line is Mayors have bribed us with these extra programs and they want us to pay for their bribery.

If the Mayors want to increase the taxes to pay for the road services that have been in the original contract for decades then they should take the blame for the cost of the taxes being raised. The only tax that should be considered for providing municipal services is the municipal services tax, better known as the property tax.



[VanIsle](#)

13 May 2016

07:03

RR, Brent didn't say local governments should cut their budgets by 50%. He said they should find enough room in their budgets to fund 50% of the cost of the transit improvements they want. Big difference. It may well be that if they all found 5 - 10% room in their budgets, they might be able to approach the 50%.



[Art Iskandid](#)

13 May 2016

08:13

I don't know the economics of Skytrain. I know it is the Cadillac of Transit, and that it was politically attractive to Mulroney, and because of Expo, BC, and Vancouver bought in. The existing capital invested - is a *sunk* cost. But what are the *operating* costs? They will be the chief determinant of economy in the future. As long as operating costs are equal to, or below the costs of bus transit, Skytrain is viable. The economics of transit - go beyond the cost of a ride. The Cambie corridor, and New Westminster have seen enormous investment, due to Skytrain. This was a foreseeable consequence of the development of Skytrain. If government was so lacking in foresight, we can see why it missed the opportunity to offset the capital costs - by buying land prior to construction.

[smile](#)

13 May 2016

08:57

GMan, I fully agree with your view that *Councils have been elected on promises to provide services that are outside their original mandate.*

[comomark](#)

13 May 2016

09:08

Without the Province taking the lead the Mayors wallow in the mire. The province dabbles with bridges and tolls. Step up! Take some risk. Lead. Its what we elected you for. If we don't like it we'll vote you out. Oops. I guess you had better cower behind the mayors.

[Just wondering?](#)

13 May 2016

09:59

"carbon neutral"? maybe mean revenue neutral.



[Den -](#)

13 May 2016

10:05

Raise the fares. Eliminate all zones. Toll all bridges. Quit pussyfooting around. Those that go out of their way to avoid tolls are part of the problem. They use more gas, cause gridlock, cause extra pollution. Do what is right. No need to raise further funds



[Stryder](#)

13 May 2016

12:40

I'm glad Vancouver is providing programs like needle exchanges, bike lanes, that have enhanced the livability of Vancouver, and improved health and quality of life for many people.

The province isn't willing to fund these things, yet lives off the economic engines that are our cities.

Clark screwed everything when she insisted on a referendumb instead of doing what she was elected to do ,which is make decisions for the good of BC.

No, to tolls, increased fares etc.



[RHW](#)

13 May 2016

12:55

I wouldn't mind taxes so much if they were spent wisely. Like moonbeams tunnel, there are viable alternatives, a few suggested in this forum that would work and be a lot cheaper.



[Stryder](#)

13 May 2016

14:22

cheaper and more effective? Solutions lasting well into the future?

Maybe sunshine and his advisors have it right.



[RHW](#)

13 May 2016

17:24

You just keep voting for him then. I am sure your pension increments will cover any property tax increase.



[Stryder](#)

13 May 2016

17:53

RHW, can you make a comment w/o taking a side swipe. It only encourages me to call you out as a bully. I paid for my pension. Did you pay for yours?