

# **Metro Vancouver mayors anticipate transit boost based on Trudeau promises**

**The main question now — how to fund TransLink's share of Surrey light rail, Broadway subway and Pattullo Bridge replacement**

By Kelly Sinoski and Rob Shaw, Vancouver Sun October 20, 2015

**Justin Trudeau says the Liberals overcame "negative and divisive politics" to win a majority in the federal election. Trudeau says he will lead a "positive and ambitious" government.**

Metro Vancouver mayors are hailing a Liberal majority government as “resounding win” for critical transit and infrastructure needs across the region.

Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson said he hopes the federal election will pave the way ahead for projects such as a subway for Vancouver’s Broadway corridor and light rail for Surrey, noting the prime minister designate, Justin Trudeau, promised \$20 billion in transportation infrastructure across the province in the next decade, including \$1.7 billion in spending in each of the first two years.

“The past decade was one of lost opportunities for cities with a Conservative government. They didn’t have a plan for affordable housing or transit,” Robertson said. “I’d like to think that having a prime minister who considers Vancouver as a second home will recognize the specific challenges we have here on the ground.”

In making the announcement in Vancouver in September, Trudeau cited the two rapid transit projects and increased SeaBus service as contenders for the transportation funding. Newly elected Liberal MPs, such as Ken Hardie of Fleetwood-Port Kells and Terry Beech of Burnaby North-Seymour, also announced their intentions this week to work with Surrey and North Vancouver to meet their transportation needs.

“The (prime minister designate) has basically said the money is there,” said Hardie. “We’ll just wait for Surrey to be ready and will make it happen.”

Transportation infrastructure generally requires one-third funding each from the federal and provincial governments and TransLink. TransLink is seeking new revenue sources after the public rejected a proposed 0.5 per cent sales tax increase in a plebiscite last spring. Mayors say they hope to come up with new funding sources before the end of the year.

“There’s some urgency with transit with the gridlock that we have,” Robertson said.

Peter Fassbender, the provincial minister for TransLink, said the province has already committed its share of funding for the Broadway subway, Surrey light rail and replacement of the Pattullo Bridge.

“What we need to do is sit down with the officials when the government takes office and starts to look at the commitments that they’ve made.”

Surrey Mayor Linda Hepner said while she’s optimistic the money is available, she would like to see how the Liberals break out the percentage-sharing formula. She’s already been in touch with John Aldag, the Liberal MP-elect for Cloverdale-Langley City, and hopes to connect with others such as Hardie, a former TransLink spokesman, to lobby for support.

“I know Ken is supportive and his experience with TransLink can only be beneficial,” Hepner said.

North Vancouver City Mayor Darrell Mussatto is also planning to work with Liberal MP-elect Jonathan Wilkinson to push for more bus and SeaBus service, noting it’s critical for the North Shore.

“Infrastructure funding was a big issue in that campaign. That was heard by a lot of people here on the North Shore,” Mussatto said. “I’m very hopeful. It was pretty clear the Conservatives were not that big into these infrastructure issues we have.”

Mussatto noted along with transit, he’s optimistic a Liberal government will also help with the new Lions Gate sewage treatment plant, which is expected to cost between \$500 and \$700 million. Metro Vancouver has been lobbying for three years to fund the plant, which is slated to be built by 2020, but hasn’t qualified for the federal government’s Build Canada Fund.

Port Coquitlam Greg Moore said Trudeau has made an effort over the past two years to speak with Metro mayors and understand their needs.

“With the Liberals coming in and talking about the importance of infrastructure, not just transportation, we’re hoping there’s a receptive ear there,” Moore said. “We really need to get a shovel in the ground this spring.”

Premier Christy Clark welcomed Trudeau's plans for billions of dollars in additional infrastructure spending on rapid transit projects, roads and bridges, saying it's one area where "we are in complete alignment.

"I believe in infrastructure spending as a way to create jobs, as a way to create economic growth, as a way to make sure our goods get to market overseas," Clark said. "I know that ... Trudeau agrees with that. And I think that's going to be something we're really going to be able to work productively on."

However, Clark brushed aside questions about why her government continues to tightly control spending to balance its budget, when federally voters have endorsed a Liberal government that intends to run deficits to fund increased programs and services. She said B.C. is no longer struggling but is projecting large surpluses, though critics note that her budgetary success has come, in part, by refusing extra money for Metro Vancouver transit projects, child welfare, social programs and other services in need of increased funds.

Transportation Minister Todd Stone said the provincial government will reach out to federal officials as soon as possible to define the infrastructure funding.

"We know the commitments were there and they were very clear in the campaign," Stone said. "Now it's up to British Columbia working with the federal government to make sure that those commitments are realized in the form of actual investments on the ground."

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