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No more blood in this stone

BY ELIZABETH JAMES, SPECIAL TO NORTH SHORE NEWS JULY 20, 2011

"The Mayors' Council and the province have agreed on a funding formula for the plan that includes a 2 cent per litre increase in motor vehicle taxes in April 2012 plus, by 2013, either a property tax increase averaging about \$23 per year for the average Metro Vancouver residential property, or a new long-term source of funding."

July 6 TransLink

media release

HOW SWEET IS THAT?

Five days after the latest carbon tax increase, West Vancouver Mayor Pam Goldsmith-Jones announced the decision of the Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation as to how TransLink will fund the region's share of costs for its updated Moving Forward plan - one of two options it first presented in November 2010.

Not a word about regional inequity or value for dollars.

No hint of walking the talk on last year's complaint by City of North Vancouver Mayor Darrell Mussatto to News reporter Benjamin Alldritt that TransLink proposed to build "a Lamborghini" on the Evergreen route "when a Chevy will do."

At the time, North Shore mayors said they opposed the proposals "unequivocally" because both options were based on the premise that funding would come from increased property taxes, and because, as Mussatto told Alldritt, the way the province had structured TransLink was "an absolute disaster."

Sad to say time and the beguiling nature of B.C.

Transportation Minister Blair Lekstrom found a way to cure regional intransigence. So much so that, following council's July 6 announcement, Lekstrom said he wanted "to thank all of the people involved - the Mayors' Council and in particular the chair, Mayor Richard Walton, and vice-chair Mayor Pamela Goldsmith-Jones for all of their efforts."

How nice; the triumvirate must have been bowled over by all that talk of Moving Forward with the increased SeaBus service promised in the more expensive of the two proposals.

I've lost count: How many times have we heard that?

Does anyone really believe that once property taxes have been raided, or vehicle levies are imposed to fund decisions of the disastrous structure, they will ever be rescinded? If so, I have a few - tolled - bridges to sell.

Talking of tolls: If ever TransLink decides to run with the latest chatter and tolls every bridge in the

region, any North Shore resident who works beyond the Port Mann Bridge will pay two tolls, each way.

In the first three weeks of this month we have been hit with the HST referendum package, the latest carbon-tax hike and increased Hydro rates.

Fortis BC wants more out of our pockets, and BC Ferries CEO David Hahn and two members of his board of directors think it's OK to ding us nearly \$750,000 a year for their pensions.

Small comfort to hear that the me-too ICBC folks are "working hard" to avoid the rate increases it is asking the B.C. Utilities Commission to approve; because we know how that story will end.

Goldsmith-Jones and her Mayors' Council colleagues would do well to heed the public sentiment behind the premier's on-again support for the gas-tax increase, and tell Minister Lekstrom there is no more blood in the stone.

The council should then hire an unbiased transportation consultant to figure out how the longpromised Evergreen Line can be built with the "money we have on the table," to quote an off-again-on-again former city mayor.

If the council and/or TransLink will not do it, North Shore residents might consider mimicking their Fraser Valley neighbours and pool some resources to hire their own apolitical transportation consultant to cost out the transit alternatives. My \$100 is on the table to get the ball rolling.

Given the will, a report could be ready before Christmas.

As for funding:

If drivers left their vehicles at home TransLink would collapse. It has insufficient rolling stock to cope with the influx of passengers and without gas-tax revenues, TransLink and the province would drown in red ink.

Update:

News came down last Friday that some Metro directors are standing up to the TransLink board. Annoyed at having their agenda and property-tax ability slammed against the wall by a 62-page report they received only 24 hours before the meeting, Metro chairwoman, Delta Mayor Lois Jackson, led the charge by asking for more time to consider the report.

TransLink CEO Ian Jarvis refused, saying the document had to be presented to the TransLink commissioner by July 31.

So who is in charge - the elected politicians who tax us, or dictatorial provincial appointees?

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