

Hold your nose, vote 'yes'

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Any day now you'll find the referendum ballot in your mail box and you'll finally have your say.

Now before you angrily mark a 'no' on your ballot, please reflect on what it is that you're voting on.

I must admit, I'm just as mad as anyone who doesn't agree with the way this whole thing has been set up. But I do feel that the only right thing to do for Metro Vancouver – including Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge – is to seriously start investing in transit, walking and cycling to work towards a better, more sustainable transportation system that works for all, and a more livable region for future generations. Therefore I can only vote 'yes', while cursing under my breath.

We're not being asked if we're okay with the excessive salaries of TransLink executives, or if we have a problem with the governance structure of TransLink (set up by the provincial government, by the way).

Maybe you want to vote 'no' because you feel that there's not enough in it for Maple Ridge or Pitt Meadows, or you just don't trust TransLink to deliver on its promises.

TransLink is not enquiring if we're angry about the cost over-runs and continuing delays of the Compass Card (a system mandated by the provincial government, by the way).

There are many possible reasons why people might consider voting 'no'.

It is totally understandable that Maple Ridge Mayor Nicole Read intends to vote 'no'.

As a mayor, she has the responsibility, but lacks the authority. The flawed governance structure of TransLink will need to be addressed.

Here's the referendum question: "Do you support a one half percentage point (0.5 per cent) increase in the provincial sales tax in Metro Vancouver, dedicated to the Mayors' Transportation and Transit Plan, with independent audits and public reporting?"

What it basically comes down to, is that with our vote we will be giving a message as to the direction that we want the region as a whole to take. How do we want to live?

Consider the likely consequences of a 'no' vote. No level of government would have any appetite to touch this subject in the next five to 10 years. The proposed infrastructure improvements will be put on hold, while more people and cars move to the region and communities continue to sprawl out.

We can continue to complain about the inefficient bureaucracies, and, as some of us would have it, get to kick out a bunch of inefficient bureaucrats, only to replace them with another bunch of bureaucrats.

A 'yes' vote means that we're all going to contribute to the promised improvements by paying more taxes. More people will be able to choose transit, cycling or walking more often.

It will also mean less congestion than without the improvements.

If we vote yes, TransLink promises that we will finally be getting our long awaited B-line bus in three to five years, and there will be expansion of service to Albion and Silver Valley. We could get increased West Coast Express service.

Improved transit would help support and encourage the needed densification in our downtown and along transportation corridors.

With a 'yes' vote, the investments in cycling by TransLink would increase from the current \$1.55 million to \$12 million a year, which will put the region on track to implement the Regional Cycling Strategy within the 20-year time frame.

Cycling improvements in Maple Ridge would consist of various cycling projects listed in the Maple Ridge Transportation Plan, approved by the previous council.

Does the good outweigh the bad? The lesser of two evils tells me to hold my nose and vote 'yes.'

Jackie Chow, Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows chapter of HUB.