

# GREEN SCENE

## Why I voted YES in transit referendum

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After recently returning from a three-week trip to Ecuador, it was a pleasure to complete the last few kilometres of our trip from the airport on Metro Vancouver's relatively clean and efficient transit system.

The places we visited in Ecuador, for the most part, lacked good public transit and, as a result, the air on incredibly noisy streets was badly polluted from far too much traffic on congested roads.

This was a poignant reminder to me of the great value in funding a good public transit system that not only allows people to travel to work and other destinations but also helps keep our region livable and the air we breathe relatively free of toxic contaminants.

Because people usually object to paying more taxes, holding a referendum is rarely a good way to implement a new tax. While funding approximately a third of Metro Vancouver's new transportation plan through a 0.5% increase in the local sales tax may not be the ideal way to build a better transit system, the reality is that the provincial government has not provided us with an alternative; this is a take-it or leave-it decision for voters in Metro Vancouver.

I firmly believe the proposed new investments to improve transportation in Metro Vancouver are needed. It's crucial we continue to build a good public transit system because we cannot become a truly sustainable region without such improvements.

The \$7.5 billion that is expected to be raised over a 10-year period through this tax increase will provide major upgrades and improvements to the light rail network, support 11 new B-line bus routes, provide a 25% increase in overall bus service, including additional services for people with disabilities and a much-needed doubling of night bus service for those who work night shifts. We will also get new light rail lines in Surrey plus a new rapid transit line in Vancouver along the presently congested Broadway corridor. New bike routes are also included as part of the package.

While I am somewhat less enthusiastic about the \$1.5 billion portion to go towards a new Pattullo Bridge and road improvements, there is something in this balanced plan that even committed drivers should be able to support.

It is also important to spread the benefits equitably throughout the region. Residents in the Tri-Cities will benefit from the new Evergreen Line when it is completed next year but we should not ignore other areas such as rapidly-developing Surrey and Langley, which also deserve improved transit services.

For me, one of the most important attributes of this new transportation plan is that it will significantly reduce future greenhouse gas emissions in the Lower Mainland. Transportation alone in Metro Vancouver is responsible for 53% of the region's total greenhouse gas emissions. Of this, almost 60% comes from private vehicle use.

A single city bus, even if it runs on fossil fuel, takes 40 cars off the road. Overall, TransLink buses contribute only a little more than 1% to our total transportation emissions. Better still, the SkyTrain system and trolley buses are powered by electricity from BC Hydro, of which 93% is generated from renewable resources.

We would do future generations a great disservice if we fail to take advantage of this opportunity to make such a huge reduction in future greenhouse gas emissions. It's also important to keep in mind that pollution from cars is not only carbon-dioxide; our vehicles' tailpipes also emit soot, carbon-monoxide, sulphur, metals and nitrogen oxides, all of which contaminate the air we breathe.

Health Canada estimates air pollution, which exacerbates asthma, contributes to 680 deaths per year in Metro Vancouver.

While people grumble about the non-elected board members who govern TransLink, the reality is it was the provincial government that imposed an unelected board on TransLink in 2008. Similarly, the province has forced TransLink to switch to the problem-plagued Compass Card system in order to reduce the number of fare-evaders among transit users. Finally, the provincial government decided to build the expensive Port Mann Bridge and has announced the construction of a new bridge to replace the Massey Tunnel. All these decisions have been forced on taxpayers without the benefit of a referendum.

This time around, people have been given a choice. I have already made mine: I voted in favour of a small tax increase to support a vastly improved transit system.