

TO: Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation

FROM: Mike Buda, Executive Director

DATE: July 24, 2024

SUBJECT: **LATE ITEM 6.1 – Report on Mayors' Council Provincial Election Strategy**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation:

1. Ask the Chair to send the *Open Letter to Leaders of British Columbia's Political Parties Ahead of the 2024 Provincial Election*, attached as Annex 1, to the leaders of the four major provincial parties and all candidates in Metro Vancouver; and,
 2. Receive this report.
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PURPOSE:

To consider a draft *Open Letter to Leaders of British Columbia's Political Parties Ahead of the 2024 Provincial Election* (see Annex A) that contains the Mayors' Council's asks of all parties to commit to deliver the Access for Everyone Plan should they form government following the election.

BACKGROUND:

In past federal and [provincial](#) elections, the Mayors' Council has sent letters to parties and candidates, asking them to commit support and funding for transit and transportation priorities in Metro Vancouver.

The Mayors' Council launched a public engagement campaign in May 2023 to begin to build public awareness of and support for the Access for Everyone Plan (AFE) in advance of 2024 federal and provincial budgets and the 2024 provincial election. This campaign included a "call-to-action" component in January – March 2024 that resulted in more than 11,000 emails sent by over 5500 residents to Ministers, MPs and MLAs in support of AFE.

At its June 27, 2024 meeting, the Mayors' Council approved the outline and key elements of the Mayors' Council Provincial election "platform" and asked the Public Affairs and Governance Committee to complete work on the remaining elements of the election platform prior to its release in mid-July 2024.

DISCUSSION

The outline and key elements of the Mayors' Council Provincial election "platform" approved at the June 27, 2024 meeting of the Mayors' Council, with adjustments made based on staff analysis provided to the July 12, 2024 meeting of the Public Affairs and Governance Committee, has been integrated into the *Open Letter to Leaders of British Columbia's Political Parties Ahead of the 2024 Provincial Election* (see Annex A below) in a format that can be shared with political parties and the public.

Open Letter to Leaders and Candidates of British Columbia's Political Parties Ahead of the 2024 Provincial Election July 25, 2024

BC Party Leaders and Candidates,

On behalf of the Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation, I am writing to share our priorities for working in partnership with the next Government of British Columbia and to seek your party's commitment to **Save Transit in Metro Vancouver**.

Drastic cuts to public transit service in Metro Vancouver are coming if the next provincial government isn't ready to work with us starting on Day 1 in office to fix TransLink's broken funding model. As you know, TransLink is facing an average annual funding gap of around \$600 million. Under the current funding model, TransLink has been able to run existing services – which has resulted in ridership growth outpacing all other major metro areas in the US and Canada – thanks to emergency relief funding from the Provincial government. However, this funding is set to run out by the end of 2025.

Without new sustainable funding, as we learned in a [report from TransLink presented to us today](#), we are facing the prospect of severe impacts to our region starting in 2026...

- Ending many transit services at 8pm, which would leave essential workers stranded with no way to get home from their jobs.
- Slashing bus service in some smaller communities to just one bus route, or no bus service at all.
- Forcing thousands of commuters back into their cars, which would bring traffic to a standstill on many of our most congested roads.
- Adding more air pollution, more GHG emissions at a time when our region is seeing devastating impacts from climate change.

Cutting transit service in this region is unacceptable. Our region is growing at record pace at the same time as facing an affordability crisis, both of which require more, and not less, transit. We are on the brink of a crisis that would impact every single person in Metro Vancouver. The Mayors' Council has been warning provincial and federal leaders that this crisis was coming, and without new funding solutions in place by April 2025 TransLink will not be able to maintain current services past January 2026.

As Mayors and provincial leaders, we cannot stand by and let this happen. As mayors, we are ready to do our part, but this work is too large for just one level of government to do on its own. We need the next provincial government, as well as the federal government, to work with us to ensure these cuts to transit services never happen, and to begin expanding our system rapidly in line with the growing needs of our region.

The Access for Everyone Plan

In 2022, the region's mayors unanimously approved the [Access for Everyone Plan](#) (AFE Plan), designed to expand our regional transportation network to support record-setting population growth, improve affordability, create and support local jobs, and serve as the foundation for ambitious provincial GHG emission reductions targets. The AFE Plan will:

- More than double bus service over 2022 levels.
- Add up to nine new traffic-separated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines, including the first three of these lines by 2028 in White Rock-Langley-Surrey, Maple Ridge-Langley, and North Shore-Burnaby.
- Build the Burnaby Mountain Gondola to Simon Fraser University and extend the SkyTrain to the University of British Columbia.
- Increase HandyDART service for people with disabilities by 60 per cent and provide 24-hour service.
- Increase SeaBus service start and end times to match SkyTrain's service hours.
- Expand cycling and pedestrian infrastructure and make improvements to the region's major road network.

The Access for Everyone Plan requires new capital expenditures, and an increase of almost 50% to our annual operating budget over the next decade. TransLink's existing revenue sources will need to increase to deliver existing service and to fund some of this new plan, but these sources are limited, regressive and do not grow with the economy. A new funding model, designed with the next government, is required.

Saving Transit in Metro Vancouver:

We hope that the next provincial government will continue to be a good partner to us. We need to hear from all political parties about how they plan to support and fund our transit system if they form government. Ahead of the election, the Mayors' Council is calling on all parties to commit to the following actions to **Save Transit in Metro Vancouver**:

Action 1:

Commit to begin increasing transit service immediately to address overcrowding and record-setting population growth in Metro Vancouver, by funding the first phase of the AFE Plan in April 2025, in partnership with the Mayors' Council and TransLink.

Provincial leadership is needed to help ensure the transit in the region can catch up with population growth, address growing crowding on transit and congestion on the roads, support transit-oriented housing legislation, meet 2030 climate target and make life better and more affordable for residents and businesses.

Action 2:

Create a permanent, **\$3.4-billion per year *Access for Everyone Fund***, indexed to population growth and inflation, to deliver the Access for Everyone Plan over the next decade that will:

- Identify **\$500 million per year** in new, sustainable operating revenues for TransLink to operate current service levels and the new transit proposed in the AFE Plan;
- Invest **\$2.9-billion per year** in senior government contributions to the capital projects in the AFE Plan (this amount includes working with the Mayors' Council to seek an acceleration and expansion of the Canada Public Transit Fund or other federal funding);
- Create a provincial program to provide transit fare discounts or exemptions for low-income youth, adults and seniors in BC as a targeted measure to improve affordability and equity for those most dependent on transit.
- Review TransLink's governance structure to ensure that elected regional mayors are accountable to the public for decision-making at the agency commensurate with its growing responsibilities and revenues.

The proposed \$3.4 billion per year ***Access for Everyone Fund*** reflects what is necessary to continue delivering the transit services our region needs and avoid severe overcrowding amidst surging population growth. This amount is realistic and consistent with the level of investment by other provincial governments into their public transit systems and by the BC government into other essential services such as hydro-electricity and healthcare. For example, the Government of Ontario recently committed \$61 billion over the next decade for new subways, LRTs and commuter rail in the Greater Toronto area. Here in BC, the Provincial government recently announced \$36 billion over ten years for BC Hydro, \$2.3 billion for the Highway 1 expansion project, and \$13 billion in infrastructure funding for healthcare projects such as the new cancer care center in Surrey and the redevelopment of St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver. Public transit is an essential public utility that must expand, similar to other provincial services, as our population surges.

The time for action is now. TransLink cannot meet the needs of our region without the help of the next provincial government. This election is our chance to secure a sustainable future for Metro Vancouver's transit system. **We urge all parties and candidates to commit to saving transit and preventing these catastrophic service cuts – and encourage all voters to make an informed decision at the ballot box this October.**

2024 Provincial Election Questionnaire:

When Metro Vancouver residents cast their ballots in the B.C. general election on October 19th, we believe they need to know what each of the provincial parties will do to **Save Transit in Metro Vancouver**. We invite all parties to respond to the questions included below, and we will share these with Mayors' Council members and with the public on our website, mayorscouncil.ca.

The Mayors' Council is asking all parties to respond to the following questions:

1. Do you agree that public transit is an essential service in B.C.'s urban regions, that all levels of government must continue to invest in, so we can keep people and goods moving, improve affordability, unlock new housing, and reduce GHGs?
2. Do you support beginning to build the **Access for Everyone Plan** starting in 2025?
3. Will your government create a new, long-term **\$3.4 billion Access for Everyone Fund** that identifies **\$500 million annually** in new operating revenues for TransLink and invests **\$2.9 billion annually**, on average – including from federal funding programs like the Canada Public Transit Fund – towards the new capital projects in the Access for Everyone Plan?
4. Do you support working with the Mayors' Council to review and improve the TransLink governance model to ensure that elected regional mayors are accountable to the public for decision-making at the agency commensurate with its growing responsibilities and revenues.

There is a lot at stake in this election. As mayors and community leaders responsible for setting priorities for what the region needs from the transit and transportation system, we are asking political parties aspiring to form the next Provincial Government to clarify their commitments to saving public transit in Metro Vancouver. Please submit your response to the above questions to Mike Buda, Executive Director of the Mayors' Council, at mayorscouncil@translink.ca by **Monday, September 23 at 4:00PM**.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Sincerely,

Mayor Brad West
Chair

cc: Members of the Mayors' Council and TransLink Board of Directors
UBCM President Councillor Trish Mandewo

Background on the Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation

The Mayors' Council is the collective voice of Metro Vancouver residents on transit and transportation. Our members include representatives from each of the 21 municipalities in TransLink's service area, as well as the Tsawwassen First Nation and Electoral Area 'A'. We are responsible for approving TransLink's transportation plans, identifying local funding and working with other levels of government to make those plans a reality.