

The So-Called Transit Referendum: Don't Be Duped!

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By

Emily Griffiths

The Transit referendum “Yes” campaign has been asserting itself all over Facebook, Twitter, neighbourhood news boxes, and I can’t help but ask myself, *Since when is increasing a flat tax a leftist thing to do?*

Oh! The word “transit” has been attached to the newest proposed consumer flat tax increase, therefore rendering it “left” and “sustainable”. Have we forgotten that the poorest members of our community are already shelling out \$91-\$170/ month just to be able to ride a crowded bus to work and back without risk of being detained by over zealous transit police (the only armed transit police in Canada)?

These transit thugs in bullet proof vests just love detaining non-white Lower Mainlanders, corroborating with Border Patrol, and imprisoning suspected immigrants. Heaven forbid one try to save some grocery money by risking the month without a bus pass. A lost profit of \$2.75 for Translink can result in a \$173 fine for the already struggling rider. Heaven forbid you speak English with an accent, for your fate could be much worse. ([Read about Lucia Vega Jimenez](#)).

In all this talk of “transit” improvements, where is the case for free transit? Instead, fellow “leftists” on our Twitter feeds are regurgitating Mayor’s Council propaganda to achieve an ongoing increase of our provincial sales tax. I’m not sure about every “leftist”, but I myself am not one to support Gregor Robertson and developer funded city council. Why would I trust the gash-grab excuses of the same folks who are destroying the DTES, China Town, and Grandview-Woodlands for unaffordable condo development?

Why would I trust that the Provincial Government, run by Christy Clark and made up of conservative “Liberals”, will funnel their new citizen-approved revenue stream into the promised area? I have heard more than my fair share of broken election promises. What makes the transit tax different? After all, there

are no legal stipulations that this additional government income must indeed be invested in transit.

The “Yes” campaign rhetoric assures me that this cash will improve Skytrain infrastructure and increase bus service. Are we honestly expected to believe that the money Translink rakes in equals a benefit to transit riders? What about [the \\$200+ million](#) wasted on fare gates and Compass cards, an infrastructure that was [already proven a failure in Chicago](#)?

What about the salaries of transit cops? [The minimum annual salary for a Transit Police officer is \\$75,000, with more than one third making over \\$100,000.](#) What about the mere existence of transit cops? What about the salaries of Translink Officials? Translink CEO Ian Jarvis raked in \$468,015 in 2013. Sure, this salary may be on par with other multimillion dollar corporation CEO's, but should PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION really be rendered into a for-profit company?

I am confused as to why we are being asked to pay more money for transit. We already pay 12% provincial and general sales tax. What is this covering, if not basic infrastructure like transit, roads, and bikeways? I know some of it must go to other essentials like health care and education, but then why is our health system resorting to corporate sponsorship (#BellLetsTalk) or emotionally manipulative attempts at securing private donations (those tear jerker bus ads for Children's Hospital), and why are schools being consistently underfunded, with ever increasing class sizes, less support for children with special needs, and teachers being bled dry when they try to stand up for their collective rights? If our tax money isn't going to healthcare, education and infrastructure, where is it going? Perhaps it's not more money our governments need, but better priorities.

And if it really is more money that our local and provincial governments need, why not lay off on all those corporate tax cuts (HootSuite, property developers) and we can get a little more money out of the multimillion dollar companies benefiting from the same infrastructural improvements that we residents will be. Doesn't Telus need their employees to get to work? Doesn't HootSuite want better bike lanes, to move employees and to enhance their green hipster branding? Won't property developers be thrilled when new Skytrain stations pop up in Surrey, Guildford, Newton and Langley, providing perfect sites for new clusters of expensive glass high rises?

Our big corporate neighbours are all too keen on showing their sense of “community” and scoring the big tax breaks on their public philanthropy. What better way to show your dedication to the community than pay more taxes? Sadly, corporations don't want to put their cash towards anything they can't put their name on. Would Vancouver World of Science sound anywhere as good as Telus World of Science?

And what about income tax? There are residents of the lower mainland bringing in huge skrilla each year. Why can't these folks contribute a little more towards the infrastructure that helps them get rich? A 0.5% increase of flat taxes hurts those earning \$8,000/year a lot more than those earning upwards of \$500,000. This is an old argument. It strikes me as incredibly odd that this criticism isn't popping up more. Is Tax the Rich such an absurd slogan that no self-respecting politician will even mention it? What about any self-respecting “leftist”?

Emily Griffiths is a writer, performer, and child care worker, living on unceded Coast Salish Territories. Stay tuned for her upcoming book, Disney Dream Machine.