Subject: Peace Arch News Article - Need Accountable Translink...
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Direct accountability a must for TransLink

By Frank
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And Frankly...
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It was a spectacle to behold - six people who won't sit on next year's
TransLink board passing a host of tax increases that we'll all pay next year.
Four of those six, including chair Doug McCallum, are former mayors
defeated at the polls last month. Their successors have already been sworn in, but they still sit on the TransLink board.
The board met Wednesday in Langley, hosted by that city's former mayor Marlene Grinnell.
It decided not to reduce the mill rate for property taxation, despite a windfall last year based on high assessments.
That means TransLink property taxes will go up $19, and quite likely more.
It also decided to extend AirCare to 2011. AirCare, which conducts mandatory emission tests on most cars and light trucks, has been
challenged as ineffective and a cash cow by critics. Though tweaked, AirCare won't change that much.
Despite pleas from a number of citizens who came as delegations, the board did not address mounting concerns about overruns on the
RAV project, now known as the Canada line.
The entire procedure was a sham. It was far from democratic, and is an affont to taxpayers.
This is not to say TransLink itself isn't working. A regional approach to transit, road and bridge improvements is far better than the old
provincial agency,
Overall, TransLink is doing a pretty good job. Increased fares cover more than half the cost of operating the transit system - a figure
that is far higher than many U.S. transit systems. Community shuttle buses, far less costly to
operate, continue to be used in greater numbers.
Senior staff at TransLink, led by CEO Pat Jacobsen, are operating in a transparent fashion and it is relatively easy to find out how our
tax dollars are spent.
The one exception is the RAV line, being built by a public-private partnership and guarding information jealously.
However, TransLink's governance structure is broken. While TransLink is supposed to have 15 directors, the three from the province
have declined to sit, so in effect it is a 12-person board.
The 12 are appointed from Greater Vancouver Regional District board. As the new GVRD board hadn't met by Wednesday, the
existing TransLink board was empowered to deal with matters such as the 2006 budget, Golden   Ears Bridge and
other key issues.
It was clear from the number of delegations and issues before the meeting that TransLink has to be a separate body.
To roll all the matters directors deal with into a GVRD meeting would not work.
It is also good that municipal representatives are part of decision-making. Transportation is a local and regional issue best dealt with
by people who know the scene.
However, the indirect selection process (with GVRD directors, themselves appointed by their councils, choosing TransLink directors)
shows its weakness when six people who have no responsibility to anyone are making decisions about property taxes in 2006.
TransLink directors need to be elected directly by taxpayers.
The regional structure of the board is important, and it would probably be best if it were maintained more or less as is, with an ability
to adjust as populations shift.
With a direct election, Surrey and White Rock voters could select TransLink reps - who could also run for council or devote all their
energies to TransLink.
In order for direct elections to take place, an amendment to provincial legislation is needed. The provincial act should be amended
anyway to eliminate the provincial directors, so MLAs must also consider changing the act to allow for direct elections - and proper
accountability to taxpayers.

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