

ADVICE TO MINISTER

CONFIDENTIAL ISSUES NOTE

Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
Date: Updated May 5, 2015
Minister Responsible: Todd Stone

TransLink – Plebiscite Regulations and Spending on Yes and No Campaigns

ADVICE AND RECOMMENDED RESPONSE:

Campaign spending:

- We can confirm that Provincial funds have not been provided for either proponent or opponent groups.
- The mayors and the various organizations on either side of the plebiscite are responsible for funding their individual campaigns.
- These groups have developed websites and other marketing materials to try and appeal to the voters of Metro Vancouver.
- The BC government is not setting any spending limits for either proponent or opponent groups.
- The government will cover the costs for Elections BC to conduct the plebiscite.
- Government is committed to acting on the results of the vote.

Plebiscite regulations:

- The mail-in plebiscite started on March 16 and will end on May 29.
- Government passed regulations to clarify how the plebiscite will be conducted.
- This is an administrative regulation and included direction on the question, eligible voters, voting packages and how to count the ballots.
- These kinds of regulations are required for all votes of this type.
- Postage-paid return envelopes for ballots have been provided to each registered voter in the region.

KEY FACTS REGARDING THE ISSUE:

There were several media calls to communications over January and February 2015, asking the ministry to clarify the rules/ restrictions/ spending limits, etc for the plebiscite, regarding the “yes” and “no” sides and their campaigns. The reporters also wanted to know if the government was funding the “yes” side.

To clarify, the BC government has not provided any funding to either the yes or the no campaigns. The mayors and the various organizations mobilizing on either side of the plebiscite are responsible for funding their individual campaigns.

The government has committed only to covering the costs incurred by Elections B.C. in conducting the

plebiscite, which was originally estimated at approximately \$6 million. In a recent report to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Service, Elections BC has indicated that the estimate has been revised downwards and that the estimated cost for administering the plebiscite is \$5.7 million. This is approximately \$450,000 less than the original estimate.

The BC government has not set any spending limits/ caps for either the “yes” side or the “no” side groups and their campaign spending. The transportation and transit vote is being held under the Election Act, which does not establish spending limits for proponent or opponent groups in a plebiscite voting process. No monitoring of or reporting on spending to support or oppose a particular vote outcome will be undertaken for the plebiscite. This is consistent with the HST referendum, which did not establish third party advertising limits.

Government does not regularly monitor individual spending of local governments. Local governments are required to provide audited financial statements annually and to make the statements publically available

People are encouraged to do their own research about campaign websites, in order to authenticate their legitimacy and protect themselves against any fraudulent practices, before donating money. If people believe there may be a criminal or fraudulent activity taking place they should contact police.

Government approved regulations on Feb 11, 2015 that provide direction on the conduct of the plebiscite. The regulation was deposited as of Feb 13, 2015. The regulation is similar to those used for past referenda, and is largely administrative in nature. Content includes direction to the chief election officer to conduct a plebiscite, the plebiscite question, voter eligibility, voting rules and how to count the ballots.

2011 HST Debate – BC government spending

In spring 2011, when the debate was underway over potentially adopting the HST verses returning to the PST/ GST, the BC government spent \$500,000 to fund the proponent and opponent groups in the debate. The money was spent equally on both sides of the debate, with \$250,000 going to the “yes” side and \$250,000 to the “no” side.

At that time, the BC government also spent \$500,000 on setting up a Public Dialogues Fund, which was managed by the province’s public universities, colleges and institutes to hold informative public dialogues in advance of the referendum. Government also spent \$700,000 to send a comprehensive voter’s guide to every home in B.C. with information on the referendum, including statements provided by the main “yes” and “no” groups and a summary of the independent panel report on the HST. In total, the BC government spent \$1.7 million in funding to ensure the public was well informed on the HST referendum.

On August 26, 2011, the voting results of the 2011 HST referendum were submitted to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and publicly released. The referendum question was: Are you in favour of extinguishing the HST (Harmonized Sales Tax) and reinstating the PST (Provincial Sales Tax) in conjunction with the GST (Goods and Services Tax)? Yes/No. The final voting results were 55 percent Yes, and 45 percent No.

Program: Jessica Brooks, Kevin Volk

Minister's Office	Program Area	ADM	Comm. Dir
	JB/ KV	JD	TR