

# Push for regional transport authority riles some mayors

In a move that is angering some local politicians, Capital Regional District staff are recommending going to counter petition for approval to create a new \$2-million regional transportation authority.

Under a counter petition, an initiative is approved unless at least 10 per cent of electors sign a petition against it.

## ***article continues below***

Langford Mayor Stew Young called the proposal an “underhanded” attempt by the CRD to create what he sees as an unnecessary new service.

“I don’t need the CRD to tell me that we need to fix the road into town or figure out the E&N [rail corridor],” Young said, adding that his municipality shouldn’t be forced to participate in a CRD service if it doesn’t want to.

“My taxpayers are fed up with the CRD costs. They’re fed up with new programs at the CRD and no accountability. Here’s another example of why the public is getting pissed off with the CRD.”

The proposed new service will only duplicate services already being provided by the province and municipalities, Young said, noting that Transportation Minister Claire Trevena has already said the province will be looking at Island highways from a regional perspective.

“So this is just another waste of taxpayers’ money right now,” he said.

View Royal Mayor David Screech, vice-chairman of the CRD board and a strong supporter of a transportation service, said the new service would not require new money to be spent. Instead, it would be funded by reallocating existing funds already budgeted for things like regional trails and planning.

Screech said the new transportation service is needed “to send a clear signal to the province that we’re serious about transportation issues and [to] give us a collective voice with which to sit down and have discussions with the province.”

But municipalities like Langford and Colwood are concerned that their local transportation issues might take a back seat those of the core municipalities. The two municipalities, which are facing double digit CRD property tax increases this year (largely to pay for the sewage treatment megaproject), also worry that a small initial budget will do nothing but grow.

“Do we need somebody to co-ordinate and look at transportation in a holistic way? Absolutely,” said Colwood Mayor Carol Hamilton, who voiced concerns about increasing costs. “Is this the right place to land it? I’m not convinced.”

In order to create any new service, the CRD must gain approval through a referendum or an alternate approval process such as a counter petition, or by getting the approval of all municipal councils and conducting an alternate approval process in the electoral areas.

CRD staff said a counter petition would take between three and five months and would cost about \$12,000, while a referendum would take four to six months and would likely cost more than \$200,000.

Running a referendum in conjunction with October local government elections is not likely to save much, staff said. The CRD cannot require municipalities to participate nor can it be assured that the same question would be asked throughout the region.

Screech has no problem with a counter petition.

“To me the answer is so glaringly obvious I just don’t see what a referendum would gain. I think it would pass overwhelmingly,” Screech said.

“I think everybody in the region is aware that we need to do transportation better and this is a start. So I think the counter petition is a fair process to go through.”

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