

Region's transportation woes require desperate measures, politicians suggest

In what the Colwood mayor calls a “strong-arm” tactic, two Capital Regional District directors are recommending going to a counter-petition if that’s what it takes to create a regional transportation service.

View Royal Mayor David Screech and Victoria Coun. Ben Isitt have introduced a motion calling for CRD staff to take all necessary measures — including going to counter-petition, if necessary — over the next six months to create a regional transportation authority.

Under a counter-petition approval process, a new regional transportation service would be created — with funding and participation from all 13 local municipalities — unless 10 per cent of eligible voters in the region signed a petition against it.

Screech said he knows a counter-petition “is not going to be popular with some,” but the need for a unified voice on regional transportation issues is too great to delay any longer.

“I think it’s just so crucial that we get the service established that we go to the counter-petition process,” he said. Another option would be a regional referendum, but he said that would be “overkill.”

Screech said the fact that there’s a new provincial government adds urgency to the issue because there is currently “no cohesive way of dealing with them.”

Efforts to establish a transportation service have been underway for about four years. They have essentially hit a roadblock as at least three

municipalities — Sooke, Langford and Colwood — have said they don't want to participate, in part over concerns of loss of control over local infrastructure and worries that the power base of a regional authority would be in the core.

“For me, it's about the unknowns in the plan,” said Colwood Mayor Carol Hamilton, who doesn't like the idea of a counter-petition on a service that is still ill-defined and not fully costed. She called it “a strong-arm approach that doesn't show collaboration.”

Langford Mayor Stew Young said the only reason to go to counter-petition instead of, for example, a referendum is because counter-petition issues typically pass.

Young said adding a layer of CRD bureaucracy to the transportation file “might look good politically, but it's not going fix anything.”

The major transportation issue in the West Shore is well known: congestion on the Trans-Canada during rush hours. That is a provincial responsibility, Young said, and it's the municipality's responsibility to work with the province to find solutions.

“You start now in stuffing the CRD into it and I feel that's just going to be another layer of government in action wasting money on studies and all this other crap.

“I don't need a study to tell me what I want,” Young said, adding that the highway should be widened and a dedicated high-occupancy vehicle/bus lane built. “I don't need the CRD to go spend a whole bunch of my tax dollars. Put the money, instead of studies, into actually fixing the No. 1 problem I don't want them doing anything else than actually fixing the traffic going in and out of town.”

Screech said he does not envision a CRD transportation service overriding

local government authority, but rather “working collectively with them.” He hopes the counter-petition won’t be necessary and that instead there is voluntary buy-in within the next six months.

The motion is slated to be debated by the CRD board today, but comes at the end of a heavy agenda.

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