

**Puzzling, powering, and the transit funding gap:
Learning from the 2015 Metro Vancouver
Transportation and Transit Plebiscite**

**by
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Abstract

The 2015 Metro Vancouver Transportation and Transit Plebiscite was the first direct democratic vote on public transit funding held in a Canadian city-region. Using qualitative methods and a conceptual framework based on orders of policy learning, this research investigates the learning of TransLink's Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation in the five years following the 2015 Plebiscite. The findings are that the Mayors' Council engaged in second and third-order policy learning, enabling them to creatively utilize their limited political, organizational, and relational resources to achieve multi-level funding agreements with senior government partners on significant parts of the plan left unfunded in 2015. Their learning led them from a stance of puzzling out policy options to a phase of powering, building leverage which they had lacked during the 2015 Plebiscite through a campaign communicating the political possibility of higher senior government contributions to regional transportation investments.

Keywords: direct democracy; policy learning; transit financing; multilevel governance; politicization; TransLink

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1. Research question

The question I attempt to answer through this research is: how did the “No” result of the 2015 Metro Vancouver Transportation and Transit Plebiscite influence policy learning by the Mayors’ Council for Regional Transportation?

1.2. Significance of the research

The 2015 Metro Vancouver Transportation and Transit Plebiscite was the first local/regional transit funding package put to a referendum or plebiscite in a Canadian metropolitan area. There is an extensive literature analysing the responses of policy actors to the results of such votes in U.S. cities, but no opportunity existed before 2015 to examine policy learning resulting from the exercise of direct democracy on transit funding decision-making in a Canadian context. Nevertheless, besides the work of Legacy and Stone (2019), there has been little scholarly research examining the 2015 Plebiscite itself, and Legacy and Stone's article focuses primarily on the role of the Vancouver region's consensus planning tradition in assembling a broad coalition supporting the "Yes" side, rather than on the policy responses of members of this coalition to the actual failure of the Plebiscite. The impact of the 2015 Plebiscite on subsequent transportation planning and policy in the Lower Mainland, and the lessons its result may hold for future efforts to finance local/regional transportation investments in Vancouver and other Canadian cities, are therefore ripe for examination.

Further, the numerous existing studies of American direct democratic transit funding votes have predominantly focused on advising policy makers on how to enable similar votes to succeed in the future, without much consideration of other kinds of policy learning that might take place in light of such votes. Broadening this focus in the context of a Canadian case study would be significant for several reasons. First, the Canadian multi-level governance context differs from that of the United States, with the actions of local transportation governance actors generally restricted to those permitted by

enabling legislation from provincial governments (Tindal et al., 2017), making provincial involvement and approval necessary at multiple stages in the process of holding local/regional direct democratic votes. Second, the involvement of senior government in Metro Vancouver's case called public attention to the pre-existing funding formulas for sharing of transit capital and operating expenses between different levels of government in Canada, precedents which themselves proved open to negotiation after the Plebiscite failed. This raises the possibility that TransLink governance actors were able to learn not only potential strategies for securing regional funding sources for transit, but also more effective ways of gaining access to sources of funding from other levels of government. At the same time, the 2015 Plebiscite invites further analysis of how local and regional debates on transit funding have influenced the approach of Canadian senior government partners in contributing to transit investments.

One potential advantage of such an investigation thus lies in its potential to illuminate the evolving role of local policy-makers in building relationships with senior government officials that can steer provincial and federal resources to address pressing urban needs. While such attempts may have proved relatively fruitless in the recent past, national green infrastructure and job creation programs are now on the agenda, or already passed, in several countries as a response to the concurrent COVID-19 and climate crises, and the possibility of similar initiatives remains open in Canada. While COVID-19 temporarily shattered pre-existing multi-level funding arrangements for transit in Canada due to the impact of the pandemic on ridership and fare revenues (CUTA / ACTU, Jan. 2021), it has also opened the door for even greater investment opportunities in Canadian urban transit systems as part of a green recovery, as evidenced already in the Safe Restart funding for transit agencies provided by the federal government in 2020 and in the more recent announcement of a permanent transit fund for Canadian cities set to take effect in 2026 (Jones, Feb. 10, 2021). What role can mayors—in this case, the Mayors' Council for Regional Transportation—play in national discussions on charting the path forward after COVID-19? This may depend in part on what they have learned from past interactions with senior government with respect to transportation funding in their region. The 2015 Metro Vancouver Transportation and Transit Plebiscite, and the directions taken by TransLink governance actors in its aftermath, provide a field of evidence that may, or may not, illustrate such learning.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Investigating the learning of a regional governance body from a direct democratic vote on transit funding will require the utilization of several related bodies of literature. First, a survey of the literature on direct democratic votes on regional transit financing provides an overview of how policy learning has been either identified or encouraged by scholars of transit finance in North America, and Hall's (1993) framework for understanding policy learning and policy paradigms lays a foundation for answering my research question. Second, the literature on multi-level governance, public sector corporatization, and fiscal federalism in Canadian cities are reviewed to generate an understanding of the organizational and financial constraints under which governance actors leading Canadian transit agencies must work. Finally, I explore two concepts that offer high utility for describing the actions and motivations of policymakers working within multi-level governance dynamics: politicization and blame avoidance. By examining the relationships between these concepts and Hall's typology of policy learning orders, Hall's framework is rendered more applicable to the study of policy learning among local/regional transit policymakers such as the Mayors' Council.

2.1. Policy learning

The most fundamental concept in my study is that of policy learning, which Hecló (1974) originally defined as "a form of collective puzzling on society's behalf." Most scholars today define policy learning more broadly as a dynamic that involves multiple governance actors, including members of the public, participating in an iterative process through which both the goals and means of past policy-making may be evaluated in order to improve outcomes (Howlett et al., 2009, p. 179-181). For the purposes of this study, I will be examining the participation of the Mayors' Council for Regional Transportation in a policy learning process encompassing both the means (e.g. financing tools) and the goals of Metro Vancouver's 10-Year Investment Plan for regional transit and transportation.

2.1.1. Scholarly learning from direct democratic votes on regional transit financing

There is a relationship between mechanisms of direct democracy, such as plebiscites and referenda, and policy learning. On the one hand, a plebiscite or referendum usually functions as a locus of public deliberation on a given policy, and although the quality of deliberation surrounding such votes is often poor (LeDuc, 2015) there is still an opportunity for the public to learn more about how the policy issue can be addressed through debate and dialogue. On the other hand, mechanisms of direct democracy give the public the opportunity, through their votes, to influence the policy-making cycle itself by impacting the actions and the learning of policy makers (Ibid.). This is most obvious in the decision-making stage (especially in the case of binding referenda), but plebiscites and referenda also provide the public with the opportunity to participate in policy evaluation and to influence, through discussion of policy narratives and policy solutions, the learning of policymakers (Parkinson, 2020, p. 13). This study examines whether, and in what ways, the learning process of the Mayors' Council for Regional Transportation was in fact impacted by the 2015 Plebiscite and its outcome.

The urban studies literature analyzing direct democratic votes on financing tools for public transit is also concerned with contributing to the policy learning process of local/regional policymakers. Typically, however, researchers have limited their focus to providing guidance on how local/regional transportation decision-makers can learn from the experience of past plebiscites or ballot measures in order to eventually achieve "Yes" results in votes for new sales taxes or other funding mechanisms. Studies in the 1990's and early 2000's concentrated on surveying the range of factors affecting success or failure of ballot measures (Beale et al., 1996; Haas et al., 2000; Goldman and Wachs, 2003; Hannay and Wachs, 2007), while later studies tend to focus on the impact on referendum/plebiscite voters of particular factors, such as the timing and design of sales tax mechanisms (Martin et al., 2019), attitudinal and self-interest factors of voters (Green et al., 2013; Manville and Cummins, 2015; Yusuf et al., 2015; Fang and Thigpen, 2017; Palm and Handy, 2018), or equity concerns (Lederman et al., 2020). Very few of these studies challenge the assumption that it will continue to be the responsibility of local/regional governance actors to gain direct democratic approval for transit funding mechanisms, and few challenge the overarching policy goals of regional actors or draw lessons that would suggest substantial strategic changes to the policy

means (i.e. financing tools for transportation investments) under consideration in most such votes.

A smaller number of studies (Paget-Seekins, 2013; Karner and Duckworth, 2019; Legacy and Stone, 2019) argue for the value of socially and economically diverse advocacy coalitions assembled by proponents of sales taxes for regional transportation, pointing to the possibility that these coalitions will continue to exist after voting concludes and contribute to the ongoing policy learning processes of regional transportation policy stakeholders. However, although they argue that it may be necessary to form these coalitions to "win" transit funding plebiscites or referenda, none of these authors focus their attention on what could be (or has been) learned when even well-organized, highly diverse advocacy coalitions, such as that assembled in Metro Vancouver before the 2015 Plebiscite, fail to win enough support from the public to approve new transportation investment plans and funding mechanisms.

To take an example that applies directly to this research, in one of the only scholarly studies to date that directly addresses the empirical context of Metro Vancouver's 2015 Plebiscite, Legacy and Stone (2019) point out strategic errors and time constraints affecting TransLink's performance in the Plebiscite campaign period itself, but without providing guidance as to how lessons learned from the experience of the Plebiscite might assist TransLink governance actors in making substantive improvements to TransLink's reputation or financial outlook going forward. While their argument for the necessity of strong regional consensus-building supporting what they call "progressive mobility" is convincing, and their focus on the ultimate responsibility of B.C.'s provincial government for the failure of the Plebiscite helps greatly in making sense of the result, Legacy and Stone's approach to advising local/regional policy makers puts forward only a limited range of tactical and strategic policy learning outputs. While this modesty is understandable given a regional transportation policy context that continues to be dominated by the prerogatives of the provincial government (as shall be explored below), my research takes as its starting point the hypothesis that more can be and may have been learned from the 2015 Plebiscite, even though the campaign for transit expansion funding was undermined rather than supported by senior government partners. The following section outlines a more specific understanding of policy learning which I will use, building on Legacy and Stone's narrative, to analyze the Mayors' Council's learning and actions in the five years following the Plebiscite.

2.1.2. Policy paradigms

Moving beyond the limitations of scholarship on direct democratic votes on regional transportation financing requires a more robust conception of policy learning that takes into account a wider variety of changes in policy tools, as well as changes in policy goals, that policy learning can produce. To this end, Peter A. Hall's seminal discussion of the concept of "policy paradigms" is especially helpful. Hall (1993) distinguishes between three different levels or "orders" of policy learning through which policy ideas are developed and employed. First-order policy learning is "routinized", "analytical" development of policy solutions in a manner "insulated from pluralist pressures" and largely internal to state bureaucratic actors, who learn lessons from the outcomes of their own past decisions of a limited scope within a predetermined set of instruments and an unchallenged wider policy paradigm. Second-order policy learning, on the other hand, leads to alteration of policy instruments themselves, sometimes major ones, but without necessarily challenging wider policy goals or the regnant policy paradigm setting the terms of the debate in a given policy context. This type of policy learning, according to Hall, is primarily internal in that it responds more to the effects of past policies than to outside events or influences, although the scope of change is larger than in first-order policy learning since it goes beyond routine tweaking of pre-existing instruments.

Taking Kuhn's (1962) discussion of scientific paradigms as his point of departure, Hall defines a policy paradigm as "a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kinds of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing." (1993, p. 279) By definition, a policy paradigm is "embedded in the very terminology through which policymakers communicate," and is not normally subject to criticism because of its largely invisible and assumed nature. Nevertheless, policy paradigms are also subject to "paradigm shifts," especially in exceptional circumstances that disrupt and permanently change the over-arching interpretive framework, or narrative, within which policy makers in a particular policy subsystem are accustomed to working. As a type of learning that coincides with a shift in policy paradigms, third-order policy learning therefore differs from both first and second-order learning in that it is a response to external developments that compromise the integrity of the reigning narrative(s) governing the policy subsystem. According to Hall, this change in what is accepted as common sense

often necessitates the formation of new or revised policy goals, which depend in large part on the ideas held by state actors with the power to reframe the problems being faced as well as the policy instruments used to solve them (Ibid.). Table 2 below summarizes Hall's taxonomy of policy learning characteristics.

Order of policy learning	Source	Intensity of change	Policy elements affected	Type of analysis
<i>First-order</i>	Internal policy adjustment	Minor, routinized	Policy instrument settings	Technical
<i>Second-order</i>	Internal policy review	Major	Policy instruments	Strategic, Scientific
<i>Third-order</i>	External events, crises, policy failures, shift in locus of authority	Radical, paradigmatic	Policy goals, frames, narratives	Narrative, Discursive, Political

Table 1: Hall's typology of orders of policy learning

Source: Adapted from Hall (1993).

Hall's policy learning framework offers a way of discussing the 2015 Plebiscite which does not assume that the only likely (or desirable) outcome of policy learning on the part of the Mayors' Council would be to enable future votes along similar lines to succeed, an assumption that would allow only for a limited understanding of routinized ("first-order" or possibly "second-order") policy learning to be applied to the data. That is, his categories allow me to investigate both the instances of first- and second-order policy learning which did take place after the 2015 Plebiscite, and also whether non-routine third-order policy learning, in which policy goals or even overarching normative assumptions about public transit financing are substantially revised, was undertaken by the Mayors' Council in response to the failure of the 2015 Plebiscite. Given the usual sources of third-order policy change Hall lists, including shifts in locus of authority and policy failures, such a hypothesis appears likely, but requires verification.

However, Hall's framework does not provide a complete set of analytical tools for this research, since it is oriented towards describing national state policy-making where the capacity to make policy decisions and shape policy narratives is not impacted by the influence of higher levels of government. My study, on the contrary, focuses on the policy learning of local/regional governance actors who are subject to multiple constraints intrinsic to their positioning in a multi-level governance context. Connecting the concepts of policy learning and policy paradigms to the literature on multi-level

governance will therefore be necessary in order to accurately discern the features of the Mayors' Council's policy learning.

2.2. Multi-level governance of public transit

This study relies on the concept of urban governance, which refers to the exercise of political authority and decision-making power on the part of state, business, and civil society actors over an urban region. Urban 'governance' is distinguishable from urban 'government' in that its meaning includes the collaboration and sharing of authority between all of these groups, rather than merely the formal and institutionalized powers of state actors (Tindal et al., 2017). Multi-level governance expands the concept of governance by explicitly taking into account the complex connections, interactions, and hierarchies of authority between multiple levels of government (Giersig, 2008). Multi-level considerations are especially salient when examining governance of public transit, which in Canada's largest urban areas of Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver is carried out primarily through regional special purpose bodies that owe their existence, structure, and features to provincial legislation (Slack et al., 2006; Krawchenko, 2012). The dynamics that exist between local government actors, representatives of these special purpose bodies, and provincial and federal politicians strongly influence the direction that transit planning takes in each region.

Like municipalities, regional special purpose bodies such as TransLink have no independent status under the Canadian constitution, which considers all matters of local concern, local works (with some exceptions falling partially under federal jurisdiction), and municipal institutions to be the responsibility of provincial governments (Constitution Act, 1867, VI.92). In this study, when I refer to TransLink's "governance framework", I am therefore referring to provincial legislation setting out who is responsible for its various decision-making and leadership functions and the relationship of these actors to each other. One consequence of the exclusive power over local matters held by provincial governments is that regional governance bodies can be changed in their organization or even dissolved at any time if the provincial government so decides (Lightbody, 1997); another is that they have no authority to generate revenue from taxation or other financing tools without enabling legislation from the provincial government, which has meant that they must rely on provincial and federal cost-sharing to operate and/or expand service (Linteau, 1991; Tweed, 2012). Leaders of regional

transit authorities must therefore determine not only what transportation policies are most effective but how to implement those policies within the structural and financial parameters defined by senior governments, especially provincial governments. Examining the policy learning environment of regional governance actors therefore requires an understanding of the major policy ideas guiding provincial governments in their ongoing reshaping of regional governance structures, as well as the precedents previously set for multi-level government cost-sharing of public transit investments.

2.2.1. Institutional reform and corporatization

The primary purpose of regional special purpose bodies for public transit has been to address the fragmentation of transit service across municipal boundaries, combining broad geographical scope with narrow policy expertise in transportation to further the “regional good” (Foster, 2001). However, regional special purpose bodies take on a variety of characteristics depending on the actors creating, modifying, and leading them. In Canada, regional transit authorities have been implemented mostly through top-down interventions in the governance of Canadian city-regions rather than by agreements and collaboration between municipalities themselves, not only because of the constitutional provisions described above but because compared to American senior governments “Canadian provincial legislatures have been much more likely to change local structures of government without first attaining local consent.” (Sancton, 2001). The move to regional special purpose bodies in Canada represents an example of top-down institutional reform of local government (Krawchenko, 2012), and the policy ideas guiding this reform in recent decades shed light on the constraints regional transit governance actors face as a result of their multi-level governance context.

Over the last several decades, some of the most influential ideas related to institutional reform of local and regional government fall under the movement in public administration known as New Public Management (NPM). Hood (1991) lists several core tenets of NPM, including granting greater “freedom to manage” to externally hired public service executives, the removal of government service delivery to semi-privatized operating companies, output-based rather than process-based performance incentives, a focus on competition-based contracts for hiring as well as project tendering, and an emphasis on financial discipline and resistance to the demands of organized labour. Taken together, these features point to an overarching goal of making government

“leaner” and more efficient through corporatization of government structures, and are broadly consistent with the neoliberal project of reducing the role of government while furthering welfare state retrenchment through cutbacks of social services (Pollitt, 1990).

While the actual efficiency and cost-savings benefits of NPM are not universally agreed upon (Tindal et al., 2017), critics of NPM have frequently pointed out its adverse effects on democratic representation and public accountability. In terms of democratic representation, NPM-style governance reforms have often resulted in the complete or partial removal of elected politicians from policymaking roles with replacements coming from corporate management positions in the private sector (Bovens, 2005; Vibert, 2007). Through municipal amalgamations ostensibly aimed at reducing costs, the number of elected representatives in local government *per capita* has also been intentionally reduced, for example by provincial governments in Quebec and Ontario, although this seems to have also had the effect of increasing the number of municipal employees (Sancton, 2001; Keil, 2002). Public accountability is impacted either on a project-by-project basis in the case of public-private partnerships promoted under NPM, where the specific details of bids are not revealed to the public until after private contractors are selected (Siemiatycki, 2006; Cohn, 2008), or from the disruption of clear lines of hierarchical accountability through increased horizontal linkages to business and civil society partners and the partial removal of elected officials from policymaking positions (Bovens, 2005). These accountability and representation impacts are especially pronounced in the case of special purpose bodies as opposed to amalgamations, as very few such bodies are set up to be governed by directly elected officials (with Portland Metro and Transport for London forming key exceptions). Instead, the intent of NPM reforms has often been to “de-politicize” public service delivery, implying that elected representation inherently hinders rather than augments efficient planning and service delivery (Self, 1977; Smith, 2009).

One possible result of NPM reforms to municipalities and public sector organizations is the creation of “corporatist” relations between government actors and local/regional interest groups. Under corporatism, democratic representation of individual voters is supplanted, at least in part, by “functional” representation wherein representatives of broader interest groups decide on policy agendas and make policy decisions through close coordination and collaboration with elected state officials

(Simmie, 1981). As opposed systems in which democratic representation of individual citizens predominates, corporatism has been defined as

a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of...functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports. (Schmitter, 1974, p. 93, quoted in Lee and Haque, 2008)

Like policy learning, the theory of corporatism has traditionally been applied to analysis of nation states, but it is possible to see the same phenomenon taking place on a local or city-regional scale (Grant, 1985; Cawson, 1986), and in fact the limited examples of corporatism in Canada are usually expressed on this scale (Haddow, 2002). In recent decades, the concept of corporatism has been applied to the governance of city-states such as Hong Kong, where functional constituencies serve to include primarily business interests alongside geographically-based elected representatives in the legislature (Ma, 2009a; 2009b), and Singapore where the interests of state-defined ethnic groups are balanced by functional representation (Vasu, 2012). In both regions, top-down implementation of NPM reforms has meant that corporate representation is also strong in the governance structures of the fully or semi-privatized special purpose bodies providing the majority of social, health, and transportation services (Lee and Haque, 2006). Corporatism institutionalized along the lines of New Public Management could be characterized as business-led or neoliberal corporatism, in contrast to traditional “tripartite” corporatism which includes representation for organized labour. Chapter 4 utilizes the concept of neoliberal corporatism to describe changes to TransLink’s governance structure in 2007.

NPM ideas have influenced the governance frameworks of regional special purpose bodies for public transportation in Canada, as evidenced by the prevalence of corporate boards and external hiring of senior staff among Canada’s regional transit authorities including TransLink in Vancouver and Metrolinx in Toronto (Krawchenko, 2012). However, NPM policy ideas have not been universally held among provincial governments, and not all institutional reform of regional governance institutions has been undertaken with the motivation of implementing NPM ideas. In Metro Vancouver, a tradition of regional governance based on consensus-building has emerged drawing on

a philosophy of deliberative democracy and planning (Dryzek, 2011; Legacy, 2012), and TransLink's first governance framework created in 1999 was intentionally built on such a multi-level consensus-based foundation by the provincial government of the day, even if subsequent changes moved it in a different direction. Chapter 4 below explores these aspects of TransLink's governance history in greater detail, demonstrating how regional governance is an arena claimed by government actors from both above and below the regional level (Krawchenko, 2015). However, as Legacy and Stone (2019) point out in their analysis of the 2015 Plebiscite, collaborative and consensus-based arrangements remain vulnerable in the face of the continuous potential for provincial intervention in local and regional governance structures. This vulnerability to top-down institutional reform is an essential element of the policy context within which Canadian regional governance actors must work (Collin and Tomàs, 2004).

2.2.2. Fiscal federalism and downloading

As noted above, municipalities and special purpose bodies in Canada rely on provincial enabling legislation to be able to raise revenues from taxation, user fees, or other funding mechanisms. Since their approved revenue generation capacities have been outstripped by the financial cost of providing large capital investments for public transportation, in practice no Canadian public transit agencies, whether municipally or regionally governed, rely solely on local or regional sources of revenue, and much of their revenue comes from provincial and federal transfers and cost-sharing (Linteau, 1991). This makes them subject to the multi-level government dynamics of Canada's fiscal federalism framework. Several important characteristics of this framework are relevant to the TransLink governance actors studied in this research.

First, unlike with governance reform, the federal government has a role to play in local and regional transit finances through its constitutional "spending power," or freedom to make payments to provincial governments and local institutions for purposes on which the constitution does not give it power to legislate (Watts, 1991). It can exercise this power in part because it takes in more revenue each year than it spends on its own policy programs, a portion of which 'fiscal gap' is spent on local transit infrastructure through three avenues: 1) indirectly whenever money from block transfers and equalization payments to provinces are spent by provincial governments on local infrastructure, 2) through Gas Tax transfers earmarked for infrastructure, but with

provinces determining project allocation, and 3) directly into capital project cost-sharing through the New Building Canada Fund and more recently the Public Transit Infrastructure Fund (Boadway and Kitchen, 2015). Since at least 2007 the federal government has typically committed to funding 33% of eligible transit capital projects under the Building Canada Fund and New Building Canada Fund, with a maximum of 50% contribution for select projects and 25% for public-private partnerships (Ibid.). While these conditional federal-municipal transfers ameliorate the financial burden for some large projects, the federal government exercises considerable discretion as to which projects are approved, and its decision-making is *ad hoc* in the absence of defined policy guidelines (Champagne, 2014). In many cases, the projects desired by the federal government do not precisely match the priorities of regional or municipal actors, and the potential for funding to be withdrawn can lead transit agencies to change their priorities or the characteristics of their projects (Slack and Tassonyi, 2017). Federal cost-sharing also adds an additional layer of complexity to the problem of public accountability for decision-making on public transit projects, as it is not always clear who is ultimately responsible for problems that arise with large projects when so many levels of government are involved in defining their parameters (Kitchen and Slack, 2016). Federal cost-sharing expenditures on public transit are therefore not neutral, as reliance on them adds uncertainty to the planning process for transit agencies, reduces the policy autonomy of local transit governance actors, and arguably weakens public accountability for the projects chosen. Nevertheless, without constitutionally protected means of raising sufficient revenue, reliance on these transfers is necessary for local transit governance actors to operate and sufficiently expand transit services to meet rising demand.

Similar points can be made about the financial contributions of provincial governments under Canada's fiscal federalism framework. Provinces provide direct funding to transit authorities for capital expenditures and operating costs, with the money coming out of general provincial revenues (income/sales tax) or federal-provincial transfers (Boadway and Kitchen, 2015). Provinces also determine the allocation of Gas Tax transfers from the federal government, and can borrow on their own credit to pay for infrastructure projects for which they have assumed responsibility, whereas municipal governments and special purpose bodies may borrow only within strict limits set by provincial governments and must otherwise put forward balanced budgets (Ibid.). Overall, the spending behaviour of provinces come with the same problems for transit

authorities as the federal spending power: uncertainty in what large projects will be funded, reduced local policy autonomy, and complicated lines of accountability. Provincial spending power is augmented, moreover, by their simultaneous ability to legislate changes to municipal and regional government institutions in a top-down fashion, giving them multiple avenues for realizing their own policy preferences (Siemiatycki, 2006; Smith, 2017).

Leaving aside these multi-level governance problems inherent to reliance on senior government financial contributions, it is also important to note the spending patterns of senior governments on multiple areas of social service provision, as these trends have a strong impact on the financial outlook of local and regional transit governance actors dependent on local revenue sources. Since the 1980's a national policy environment of fiscal restraint and welfare state retrenchment has been dominant in Canada and other OECD nations (Pierson, 1996; Giger, 2011), leading to reductions in the magnitude of federal-provincial transfers and encouraging an environment of interprovincial tax competition, which has in turn resulted in loss of provincial revenues (Mackenzie, 2006). Part of the provincial response to these ideological changes and consequent financial constraints has been to engage in downloading of social service delivery responsibilities to municipalities, placing a greater strain on the property tax base relied upon by Canadian cities for most local revenue generation and forcing municipalities to rely more on politically controversial user fees (Duffy et al., 2014). At the same time, senior governments have held to the conventional view that the property tax is the most appropriate revenue source for local and regional infrastructure, and have used arguments for this position to justify limiting intergovernmental transfers and failing to provide legislative approval for other kinds of local/regional revenue sources, despite the fact that property taxes are insufficient to cover the capital spending that larger cities must undertake to renew and expand local infrastructure (Bird, 2006).

This continuing legacy of downloading to municipal governments rooted in welfare state retrenchment should frame our understanding of the federal government's recent turn to a more proactive approach to spending on public transit and other urban infrastructure, which has coincided with declining federal and provincial expenditures on social services (Spicer, 2019). Towns and Henstra (2018) describe a number of policy ideas guiding federal disbursement of funding for public transit beginning in 2002. Prominent among these are the importance of public transit to multiple policy goals

including combating climate change, reducing congestion, and making Canadian cities globally competitive; the existence of a national 'infrastructure deficit' and the necessity of federal contributions to address it; and the need to cooperate and coordinate with provinces and municipalities on transit spending. Theoretically, the prevalence of these policy ideas at the federal level should point to greater future federal involvement in funding transit. There is no guarantee, however, that federal contributions will be sufficient to meet the need for transit expansion in large city-regions like Vancouver.

Overall, the multi-level governance dynamics created by the ongoing potential for top-down institutional reform by provincial governments, combined with the need to continually negotiate funding contributions from senior governments under Canadian fiscal federalism, leave leaders of local transit authorities and regional special purpose bodies such as TransLink in a highly constrained position with respect to funding transportation investments. A change in the policy ideas of regional actors through policy learning, in other words, may not easily translate into action if there are no compelling policy motivations for senior levels of governments, especially provincial governments, to enable changes both legislatively and financially. This situation is complicated further by what scholars have argued are intrinsic policy motivations leading naturally in the opposite direction, towards avoiding blame for negative impacts of policies and potential policy failures rather than claiming credit for the positive impacts of successful policies. The next section explores the concept of blame avoidance and its relationship to the multi-level governance dynamics discussed above, before returning to a discussion of how policy learning should be understood in light of these factors.

2.3. Blame avoidance

Whereas Hall's (1993) discussion of policy learning uses the transition to senior government policies of retrenchment to illustrate the concept of policy paradigm shifts, Weaver (1986) utilizes the concept of blame avoidance to shed light on the strategies of senior policymakers for avoiding the political fallout entailed by the transition to austerity and fiscal restraint. Central to Weaver's argument is the contention that due to an inherent 'negativity bias' among voters, politicians concerned with re-election are more often motivated to minimize the potential blame for the negative impacts of their decisions than they are to maximize the credit they can claim for the good impacts. This is accomplished through a variety of blame avoidance strategies: for example, by

“passing the buck” or making scapegoats of other policy actors, by sharing the blame with as many other policymakers as possible (“circling the wagons”), or even by attempting to keep alternative choices off the agenda entirely. Pierson (1994), drawing on the work of Arnold (1990) and Weaver, calls these “strategies of obfuscation” because they attempt to disrupt and render untraceable the causal links between the negative effects of retrenchment policies, the policies themselves, and the policymakers who decide on them. This disruption of blame attribution processes can be accomplished in a variety of ways, which later writers on blame avoidance have attempted to categorize.

Hood (2002, 2010) makes sense of the vast assortment of blame avoidance strategies by dividing them into presentational, agency-driven, and policy-driven strategies depending on their means of disrupting the attribution of blame. Presentational strategies focus on providing justifications, diversions, or other kinds of “spin” to shape public perception of the costs of a policy or of its relationship to the policymaker. Influence over media narratives and the use of rhetorical and discursive techniques are key to this sort of strategy, which can take many forms: agenda-shifting, changing the subject, problem denial, defensive argumentation, excuse-giving, keeping a low profile, or “burying” of the problem in new information. Depoliticization of policy problems (i.e. persuading the public that a change to the status quo is impossible) can also work as a presentational strategy of blame avoidance (Papadopoulos, 2017), as discussed in the next section.

Agency strategies, on the other hand, “involve various ways of trying to avoid blame by the way lines of formal responsibility are drawn in government and public services.” (Hood, 2010, p. 19) Primarily, this means using the delegation of responsibilities to force less powerful “blame takers” into making or taking responsibility for unpopular decisions, when the negative consequences of these decisions might otherwise be fairly attributed to the more powerful party. Agency strategies of blame avoidance are particularly relevant to this study in that they have been linked directly to institutional reform and decentralization of authority in multi-level governance contexts (Horn, 1995; Flinders, 2008; Maestas et al., 2008; Mortensen, 2013a), although the extent to which multi-level deflection of blame is ultimately successful requires further empirical verification (Cohn, 2001; Mortensen, 2013b, 2016). It is sufficient to note for our purposes that a strong connection between blame avoidance motivations and

institutional reform has been made regardless of patterns of success or failure in averting blame, as top-down governance reform played a key role in the background and framing of the 2015 Plebiscite (as discussed in Chapter 4 below) and the perceived motivations for such reforms can be expected to play a role in public interpretation of the result.

Finally, policy-driven strategies involve pre-empting blame through the operational features of policies implemented (or not implemented) by the blame avoider. According to Hood, policy-driven strategies usually involve the voluntary surrender of discretion in policymaking in order to minimize the likelihood of the policymaker being deemed directly responsible for negative policy outcomes: for example, through doing the bare minimum ("abstinence" from unnecessary policymaking) or through the creation of automatic or routinized decision-making mechanisms. This type of strategy is more relevant to the exercise of senior government spending power on regional transit investments, which as detailed above has been characterized by a high level of discretion, than to senior government reforms of local and regional governance arrangements. Weaver's (1986) seminal article was in fact partly inspired by his confusion about why politicians would adopt indexation policies rather than claiming credit for expanding social service programs; his intuition was that blame avoidance was a good explanation. If we look at transit provision as part of the net of social services that have been subject to retrenchment, this insight points to the possibility that the motivations behind potential future *increases* in senior government spending on transit might be variable, involving either blame avoidance or credit claiming depending on political or economic circumstances. While policy strategies of blame avoidance do not seem to have played a direct role in the 2015 Plebiscite itself or in the Mayors' Council's immediate response to the result, they do return to our attention insofar as the Mayors' Council's policy learning led them to call on the federal government to implement a permanent transit fund, which would entail a loss of future credit claiming opportunities (as discussed at the end of Chapter 5).

Howlett (2012) links blame avoidance strategies to policy learning by distinguishing between "thin" policy learning, which concentrates exclusively on technical-strategic learning processes, and "thick" policy learning, which pays equal attention to learning about what actually works politically and experientially given the institutions, relationships, and external circumstances that must be navigated in order to

make successful policy decisions. Part of this navigation, according to Howlett, involves finding ways to successfully avoid blame. If this is so, however, then for less powerful policy actors “thick” policy learning may also involve learning how to avoid being blame-takers, which occurs when the source of blame is not merely economic or social circumstances but a higher power of the state. Since blame avoidance and policy learning both involve navigating power dynamics, this attribute of “thick” policy learning draws our attention to the relationship between “puzzling” and “powering” discussed in the policy learning literature, and to which Hall (1993) was originally responding through his discussion of policy paradigms. The next section explores why the policy learning of local/regional governance actors, if it is attentive to multi-level blame avoidance dynamics and to the financial and legislative constraints imposed by senior governments, can be expected to lead to different conclusions and strategies than policy learning undertaken by senior government actors themselves.

2.4. Politicization and third-order policy learning

Policy learning, as well as policy paradigm shifts, can occur even in cases where policy actors must make decisions, evaluate policies, and ultimately change their ideas while operating under constrained circumstances. This insight was part of Hall’s (1993) argument that policy learning is impacted by external events as much as by the state’s internal reflection on past policies, but he does not explicitly take into account learning affected by external events that have their origin in a *higher authority* of the state, such as financial cutbacks or institutional reforms imposed from above, especially when these include the transfer of blame for the negative impacts of policy changes. To account for policy learning that originates in this particular kind of situation, where the capacity to *power* policy changes does not match the capacity to *puzzle* over them, Hall’s framework must be expanded upon. To that end, this section draws on the work of Wood (2015), whose theorization of policy learning demonstrates what third-order policy learning can be expected to look like in situations where the financial resources of governance actors, and their authority to adopt new financing tools, are limited.

Wood’s central contribution to Hall’s policy learning framework is his concept of *politicization*, which he calls a tool of “discursive contestation” that grows out of ordinary policy learning processes and corresponds with Hall’s third-order policy learning. Through politicization, policymakers attempt to persuade other actors, including the

public, that "collective action to change policy decisions is both desirable and possible." (2015, p. 3) Politicization is most often used when the authority or resources of policy actors to directly implement the results of policy learning do not exist, and its purpose is to change the discourse(s) governing the policy subsystem in question so that solutions previously thought politically or socially impossible become possible. In other words, politicization coincides with, and often aims to bring about rather than merely respond to, a shift in policy paradigms. Table 3 below summarizes several relevant features of Wood's concept of politicization, which I explore in greater depth below.

Type of Policy Learning	First- and second-order social learning / "Collective puzzling"	Third-order social learning / Politicization / "Powering"
<i>Discursive characteristics</i>	Causal tracing, instrumental rationality, goal-oriented testing/improvement	Naming, blaming, rhetoric, normative claims-making
<i>Contextual characteristics</i>	Resource-rich, impartial, environment; high expertise audience	Resource-constrained, partisan environment; low expertise audience
<i>Groups influencing policy learning / change</i>	Advocacy coalitions	Discourse coalitions
<i>Examples</i>	Committees, Workshops, Internal Reviews	Parliamentary / public debates, media activity, party conferences

Table 2: Puzzling and powering processes influencing policy paradigm change

Source: Adapted from table in Wood (2015), p. 12, and Hall (1993).

First, when policy actors aim to spur policy paradigm change through politicization, this is usually accomplished not so much through the presentation of evidence to convince the public that a given policy solution would be effective, as it is through changing the linguistic field on which the debate about the policy problem and the solution(s) in question is held. As a result, the discursive strategies employed by policy actors tend to be rhetorical rather than rationalistic, and based on fundamental moral or emotional claims rather than merely on argumentation about ideal or logical solutions to policy problems. This is especially the case in democratic polities where power is to some extent based on popular public support. Fundamental to Wood's argument is the contention that policy paradigms change not merely because external events spur a change in "common sense" concerning policy ideas, but also because policy actors, often in conjunction with external events and crises, use language to gain power over a policy subsystem by changing what solutions are understood as both possible and desirable to other policy actors, often including the public. Sometimes this

involves "calling out" other policy actors for their behaviour with respect to a policy problem, or stating normative assumptions about a policy issue plainly and compellingly, or seizing on one policy idea as part of a rhetorical strategy; it usually does not involve painting a detailed picture of the policy problem or the policy options available in all their technical complexity, however logical the preferred solution(s) might be.

Second, Wood observed that at critical points when third-order policy learning is underway and policy paradigms are in the process of changing or being changed, participation in discourse coalitions tends to be more effective, and more common, than participation in advocacy coalitions. This observation draws on the distinction of Fischer (2003, pp. 94-114) between advocacy coalitions, originally described by Sabatier (1988) as coalitions of policy experts with similar policy ideas that function as the prime movers of policy learning, and discourse coalitions, which Fischer argues base their alliances on policy-related storytelling and narrative more than on shared dissemination of policy ideas or causal reasoning. Discourse coalitions make use of the same discursive strategies as policy actors in the "powering" or "third-order" stage of policy learning, and tend to function better in contexts where politicization has become necessary for results to be produced from a process of policy learning. Advocacy coalitions, by contrast, tend to contribute more effectively to first- and second-order policy learning, neither of which result in the reformulation of basic assumptions about the policy context or policy goals of the actors in question.

Third, Wood gives examples of venues typical of politicization/powering, which lean towards engagement with the public through media activities, with (other) politicians and policymakers through parliamentary or public debate, or with political parties; Hall contrasts these with venues devoted more exclusively to rational discussion of policy ideas, such as internal review processes within the organizations led by policy actors, committees, workshops, or think tanks bringing together communities of policy experts to share ideas within a shared policy framework. Overall, under the conceptualizations of both Hall and Wood, policy actors undergoing first- or second-order policy learning tend to focus more internally than externally, remaining within the organization or the policy community, whereas third-order policy learning and politicization usually must be oriented externally and garner external support to be successful.

Fourth, and most importantly for our study, Wood outlines contextual characteristics that tend to define and/or predict situations of third-order policy learning and politicization. Wood sees politicization as being most often necessary when resources are constrained and a new way must be found, despite these constraints, to implement the lessons learned through a policy learning process. The constraints can be political, organizational, financial, or they can even be limits experienced in terms of a policy actor's limited mandate, responsibilities, or authority to implement policy solutions. In some cases, the constraints are due to a partisan environment wherein policy expertise is not valued or is manipulated for loosely related political ends. By contrast, first- and second-order policy learning is usually undertaken in a resource-rich environment, such as internally or within a wider policy context supportive of the policy paradigm assumed by the actor in question. In these cases, policy learning rarely needs to go beyond systematic re-evaluation of policy tools and strategies or, occasionally, adjustment of policy goals based on the ordinary life-cycle of policy learning.

From the above discussion of NPM-style governance reforms and fiscal federalism, politicization might be seen as a useful path forward for municipal and regional governance actors facing hard limits on their decision-making authority given their subordinate position within a multi-level governance hierarchy. If it is understood as a tool to combat the delegation of blame from above, politicization also appears to be well suited to the task in that it can address the root of the problem (the “blaming and claiming” of other actors) rather than continuing to rely on a “good policy” framework which does not challenge the policy motivations that led to the shifting of responsibility for policy decision-making and outcomes downwards. Wood, in fact, sees politicization as a way of overpowering the challenge of *depoliticization*, which he defines as the effort to persuade the public that major changes to a given policy framework are *undesirable* and *impossible* (as in Thatcher’s “There Is No Alternative” doctrine). Both politicization and *depoliticization* may be understood as presentational strategies of blame avoidance (Wood and Flinders, 2014), but the key difference is that the former is more often practiced from below, by policy actors with less authority who may otherwise be forced to take the blame for the status quo, whereas the latter is exercised by powerful policy actors with a vested interest in upholding their preferred policy narratives.

Chapter 4 below attempts to show how all of the above limitations on local/regional policy actors—vulnerability to institutional reform, multilevel project

financing negotiations, senior government blame avoidance, and depoliticization of the transit funding status quo—arose as issues for the Mayors' Council in the lead-up to the 2015 Plebiscite. This study then aims to answer: to what extent did their learning from the experience of the 2015 Plebiscite lead them to address these underlying obstacles to securing transit funding, and the policy paradigms undergirding them, head-on? Moreover, how did their learning contribute to the achievement of their policy goals? Chapter 5 in turn analyzes the Mayors' Council's subsequent actions, and their motivations for these actions as described in several key informant interviews, to determine the extent and the impact of their policy learning after the announcement of the 2015 Plebiscite results.

Chapter 3.

Methodology

My research design, which was qualitative in nature, was composed of two stages. First, I collected and performed a content analysis of the Mayors' Council's meeting minutes, resolutions, media releases, campaign materials, web publications, and consultant reports (n=78), and Mayors' Council-related news media articles (n=218) from the study period, to generate an objective understanding of how they defined their policy goals following the failure of the 2015 Plebiscite as well as the concrete actions, tools, and strategies they employed to achieve their goals. Second, in order to determine the existence and nature of any links between the Plebiscite experience and the Mayors' Council's policy learning, I undertook five in-depth qualitative interviews with key informants from the Mayors' Council, through which I explored how their own evaluation of the Plebiscite and the No result influenced their approach to achieving their policy goals following the Plebiscite.

The time frame under examination in my data collection and analysis ran from the announcement of the results of the Plebiscite on July 2, 2015 to B.C.'s declaration of a state of emergency due to COVID-19 on March 18, 2020. This time period was selected because, firstly, the five years following the Plebiscite saw the Mayors' Council achieve finalized funding arrangements for much of its 10-Year Plan despite facing numerous obstacles, and this reversal of fortunes following the disappointment of the Plebiscite result calls for explanation. The intergovernmental funding agreements made with the federal and provincial governments in 2016 and 2017 for Phases One and Two of the 10-Year Plan attracted far less media coverage at the time than the failure of the Plebiscite, but their significance for the regional transportation system's future was equally important. Secondly, beginning in early 2020, many pre-existing arrangements and assumptions concerning TransLink funding were destabilized by the impact of COVID-19 on system ridership and farebox revenue. This destabilization dramatically changed the policy context for transit funding in Canadian cities such as Vancouver, making March 2020 a logical place to end my examination of the Mayors' Council's post-Plebiscite learning. This is not to say, however, that their achievements following the Plebiscite were merely temporary, as the substantial service improvements and projects

funded through the Phase One and Two agreements have been preserved during COVID through provincial and federal Safe Restart grants.

3.1. Media and government document review

My first data collection task was to gather and review documentation illustrating what the Mayors' Council viewed as their goals in the five years following the Plebiscite, what strategies were employed in order to accomplish these goals, and what was concretely achieved during this time period through their efforts. A range of documents produced by and related to the Mayors' Council were utilized, as shown in the table below.

Time Period	Source	Documents	Information Gathered
July 2-23, 2015	News media (Proquest Newsstream)	Online and print articles related to "TransLink" and "Vancouver Plebiscite"	Preliminary analysis of No result - See <i>Figure 1</i> and <i>Appendix A</i>
July 2015 - March 2020	News Media (Proquest Newsstream)	Online and print articles related to "Mayors' Council" and "TransLink"	Public engagement activities and newsworthy decisions of the Mayors' Council; public discussion related to the Mayors' Council and TransLink governance
July 2015 - March 2020	Mayors' Council	Meeting Minutes and In-Camera Resolutions	Inside perspective on the goals and motivations of the Mayors' Council following the Plebiscite, and on the strategies adopted to support these goals
2017, 2019	Mayors' Council	#CureCongestion campaign materials, voting guides, and election platforms	Evidence of approach taken by Mayors' Council to one of their main strategies for achieving funding agreements
2014, 2017	Mayors' Council	10-Year Investment Plan and Updates	Detailed summary of the 10-Year Plan for which funding was being sought after the failure of the Plebiscite
2013, 2014	Acuere Consulting	Consultant Reports on TransLink Governance	Background for understanding the policy mandate and powers of the Mayors' Council during and after the Plebiscite

Table 3: Government and news media documents

Through preliminary analysis of these documents, it was determined that the major policy goals of the Mayors' Council during the study period were solving TransLink's "accountability gap," meaning the lack of structural accountability to the public in TransLink's governance framework, and filling its "funding gap," or the lack of approved financing tools and senior government funding commitments for necessary improvements to the transit system, specifically the 10-Year Plan which had been left

unfunded by the failure of the Plebiscite. As the latter was the primary policy goal considered *actionable* by the Mayors' Council throughout the study period given their lack of power to change the governance situation, the remainder of the data collection and analysis concentrated on how the Mayors' Council's policy learning influenced its efforts to address this funding gap.

The second stage of document analysis therefore involved clarifying and categorizing the specific means employed to fill the funding gap for the 10-Year Plan, as well as the Mayors' Council's specific accomplishments in this direction. Open coding was used to identify and inductively categorize these policy means and accomplishments. News media articles from the study period were used to corroborate and align the evidence from Mayors' Council documents with public coverage of their activities. As policy learning cannot easily be demonstrated without input from the policy-makers themselves, analysis at this stage was limited to determining what objectively took place following the Plebiscite, and a detailed timeline of the study period, shown in Appendix B, was constructed that would serve the purpose of guiding the interviews with Mayors' Council members. The interviews themselves would provide material for further analysis by exploring the relationship between the Plebiscite and the motivations and thinking guiding the Mayors' Council's activities during the post-Plebiscite period.

3.2. In-depth qualitative interviews

The second stage of my research design comprised in-depth qualitative interviews, which were conducted over Zoom with current and former members of the Mayors' Council, including one senior staff member. Regrettably, the COVID-19 pandemic precluded the use of in-person interviews.

The interview questions were informed and guided by the data analysis from the first stage, as well as the major concepts identified in the literature review. As mentioned above, preliminary document analysis uncovered that the primary actionable policy goal of the Mayors' Council after the Plebiscite was the acquisition of funding for their 10-Year Plan, and this analysis also provided the basic outlines of the actions and strategies taken on by the Mayors' Council to accomplish this goal. What the data analysis from the media and government document review could not provide, however, was information regarding the "puzzling out" of the funding gap and other problems

which lay behind the Mayors' Council's decision- and strategy-making after the Plebiscite. The purpose of the interviews was to illuminate the Mayors' Council's collective thought process and the extent to which their actions were influenced by the experience and the results of the Plebiscite, either as interpreted by the public or as interpreted by the Council's members and staff themselves.

The selection of interviewees was based on several factors. First, those members who were present and active on the Mayors' Council during both the Plebiscite period and at least part of the 5 years following it were shortlisted. Among these, those who the document review showed were most active in the search for funding for the 10-Year Plan, or who otherwise took a prominent role in the Mayors' Council, were contacted first. From there, I followed the suggestions of interviewees as to whose perspective would add insight to the study. Overall, five Mayors' Council members responded, and all those who responded were willing to be interviewed. One of those interviewed wished to remain anonymous. The table below shows the interview participants and their roles on the Mayors' Council.

Interviewee	Role
Michael Buda	Executive Director of Mayors' Council, August 2014 - Present
Jonathan Côté	Mayors' Council Member, 2014 - Present Chair of Mayors' Council, 2018 - Present Mayor of City of New Westminster, 2014 - Present
Jack Froese	Mayors' Council Member, 2011 - Present Vice-Chair of Mayors' Council, 2018 - Present Mayor of Township of Langley, 2011 - Present
Darrell Mussatto	Member of Mayors' Council, 2007 - 2018 Mayor of City of North Vancouver, 2005 - 2018
(Anonymous)	(Anonymous)

Table 4: Study interviewees

Interview audio was recorded using Zoom and saved locally. The interview audio was then transcribed. All audio and transcript files were stored in a secure, password protected location. In the body of findings below, each interviewee was assigned a randomized number for the purposes of quotation. This step was taken to provide a measure of anonymity with respect to the specific remarks of participants, given the high public exposure of their roles in multiple policy contexts. As participants were asked to clarify the motivations and consensus-based decisions of the Mayors' Council as a whole, the author of each remark was not regarded as essential information for the purpose of presenting findings.

Analysis of the interview transcripts utilized open, axial, and selective coding (Babbie and Roberts, 2018, p. 343) to isolate elements of the Mayors' Council's learning following the Plebiscite. Axial coding was used to connect the reflections of the Mayors' Council members with specific strategies and actions identified in the document and media review, while open coding was employed to identify instances of policy learning for which the document review did not provide any direct indication or clues. Finally, selective coding was used to determine how influential and far-reaching each particular case of learning or lesson-drawing was for the Mayors' Council's approach to the post-Plebiscite search for funding. Through this selective analysis, two broad policy learning themes (with several "sub-plots") were identified, which are presented below as the findings of the study.

Chapter 4.

Background and Context

Before the Mayors' Council's policy learning following the 2015 Plebiscite can be examined, the historical and political context leading to the vote itself as well as the specific responsibilities, resources, and relationships of the policy actors involved must be taken into account. In this chapter I present and analyze aspects of TransLink's organizational and financial history in order to situate the Mayors' Council within TransLink's governance framework and multilevel government context at the time of the 2015 Plebiscite. I then recount the events surrounding the 2015 Plebiscite itself, including the main developments of the campaign and voting period as well as public interpretation of the results as expressed in both news media and polling data.

4.1. TransLink governance and financing, 1999-2014

TransLink was created in 1998 under the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Act, which was based on an agreement negotiated in 1997 between the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) and the Province of B.C. setting out a framework for governance of a new regional multimodal transportation agency (Greater Vancouver Regional District, 1997). A memorandum of understanding on cost-sharing for new Skytrain lines was also negotiated and signed by the two parties in 1999 (Auditor General of B.C., 2001). Given that the provincially-led Vancouver Regional Transit Commission which TransLink replaced already provided an integrated regional transit service, the rationale behind creating a new authority was not to address jurisdictional fragmentation but to "increase local/regional involvement in transportation planning, to expand the capacity of the system and to increasingly tie revenue generation to 'place' (Krawchenko, 2012, p. 143). In short, TransLink was created under the expectation that it would be a more autonomous authority than its predecessor, both in terms of policy decision-making and in terms of self-financing (McDougall, 2017). In part, this autonomy was to be enabled by provincial support, promised in the 1997 agreement, for new regional financing mechanisms to support system expansion, which had not kept pace with population growth in the 1980's and 1990's (Greater Vancouver Regional District, 1997; Meligrana, 1999). This approach to financing the new authority was in keeping

with the argument of scholars of fiscal federalism that decentralization of authority makes local governments more efficient, flexible, and responsive when the linkage between local spending and local revenue is also strengthened (Bird and Slack, 2014; Slack and Tassonyi, 2017).

At the same time, however, the governance framework agreed upon for TransLink indicated an intention on the part of the GVRD and the Province to continue in Greater Vancouver's tradition of consensus-based regional governance, which has included a wide net of government and non-governmental stakeholders as well as the public in deliberative regional planning processes (Legacy, 2012; Legacy and Stone, 2019). This intention can be seen firstly from the fact that TransLink was mandated to coordinate its policymaking with the GVRD's land use and transport planning guidelines which had been developed through several collaborative, public-inclusive engagement processes over previous decades, resulting in the Livable Region Plan (Greater Vancouver Regional District, 1976), Transport 2021 (Greater Vancouver Regional District, 1993a; 1993b), and the Livable Region Strategic Plan (Greater Vancouver Regional District, 1996). The decision to require TransLink to support the goals and implement the policy levers put forward in the latter two documents gave representation to the contributions and insights of the public and of multiple regional stakeholders.

Secondly, the initial governance structure of the authority pointed to a continuation of multilevel collaboration with the provincial government, despite TransLink's new decision-making autonomy. The legislation which created TransLink in 1998 centred TransLink's governance framework on a Board which provided both policy and management direction to the agency and several new subsidiary operating companies. The Board was composed of stakeholders from multiple levels of government: mayors of the region's 23 municipalities were appointed to 12 seats by the GVRD in accordance with a population-based formula, and 3 spaces were also included for provincial MLAs appointed by the Province (Bill 36, 1998). The Mayors' Council for Regional Transportation, the subject of this study, did not yet exist, but local elected officials controlled 12 out of 15 Board seats. In addition, the GVRD Board responsible for appointing TransLink Board members was itself composed of local elected officials, strengthening the ties between the two bodies (Friesen, 2014). Overall, the inclusion of local, regional, and provincial interests on the TransLink Board, and the manner in which the governance framework was agreed upon (through a negotiated agreement between

the GVRD and the Province rather than unilateral provincial decision-making) were consistent with a widely recognized legacy of municipal-provincial collaboration and "gentle imposition" rather than intrusive micromanagement on the part of the B.C. government (Tennant and Zirnhelt, 1973). The creation of TransLink was an example of institutional reform, but this was not top-down reform without regard for the consent of the region, as Ontario's municipalities were experiencing at the time under the "Common Sense" regime of Premier Mike Harris (Sancton, 2001).

In terms of both governance and financing, however, problems with TransLink became apparent within the first three years of the authority's existence. First, structural accountability of the agency to the public was lacking in the original governance framework (Gardiner, 2016). The democratic accountability of the Board did not match the powers granted to it, with the 12 mayors appointed by the GVRD being only indirectly elected to their positions but holding direct control over service provision and taxation (Smith, 2009). Moreover, although spots were allotted for provincial MLAs on the TransLink Board, these representatives would attend only intermittently and eventually stopped attending permanently in 2000, citing conflict of interest with their MLA roles and the difficulty of travelling to the Lower Mainland for Board meetings (Auditor General of B.C., 2001). This left the provincial government unrepresented on the Board, making it easier for the government to avoid sharing accountability for problems with TransLink. In addition, the introduction of new service delivery subsidiaries added an extra layer of political insulation protecting Board members and the provincial government from accountability. When labour action took the bus subsidiary out of service in 2001, it was unclear who should be called upon to resolve the situation and take responsibility for the harm caused (Smith, 2009); the bus strike lasted 5 months and was eventually ended through back-to-work legislation by the newly elected BC Liberal provincial government (Wales, 2008).

Second, the signed commitments of the Province to support self-financing of TransLink went unfulfilled, as was made clear when legislative authorization for a regional vehicle levy intended to fund TransLink's first 5-year plan was blocked by the BC NDP provincial government in 2000 (McDougall, 2017). The 1997 agreement stated that the new authority "will have the ability to raise funds from: vehicle charges...project tolls... property taxes on a benefiting area basis...[and] profits from the purchase and sale of land and other assets" (Greater Vancouver Regional District, 1997, pp. 5-6), any

of which would require provincial legislation to enable collection of the funds. With the 2001 provincial election season approaching, however, the government refused to authorize the vehicle levy despite its approval by the TransLink Board, cutting \$446.3 million from the 5-year plan's projected revenues (TransLink, April, 2000b) and making it necessary to claw back service improvements which had already been implemented (Wales, 2008). The funding gap also led to doubts on the TransLink Board about whether TransLink could afford to operate the Millennium Line which was nearing completion, precipitating a dispute with the provincial government over responsibility for start-up and operating costs (Auditor General of B.C., 2001).

TransLink recovered its financial footing in 2001 after the BC Liberal provincial government granted it a new 2 cent provincial gas tax allowance conditional on increasing property taxes and fares, which enabled TransLink to cover its operating expenses and fund a modest three-year plan amounting to \$74.7 million in new expenditures (TransLink, 2002). Approval in 2004 of new parking taxes and further property tax and fare increases enabled a much more ambitious 2005-2007 three-year plan totalling \$1.9 billion in capital expenditures; at the time, TransLink's 10-year "outlook" anticipated a further \$1.47 billion in spending by 2013, pending new federal gas tax funding promised in Paul Martin's New Deal for Cities (TransLink, February, 2014). However, the projects included in the 2002-2004 and 2005-2007 plans fell short of the recommendations in Transport 2021, which TransLink was legally mandated to support, and not all of them were implemented in a timely fashion (e.g. the RAV Line and Millennium Line extension discussed below). Farmer (2018) has concluded that by the end of 2006, which was the "horizon" year for Transport 2021's medium range plan, only 38% of the goals of that plan had been fully implemented.

Although TransLink was able between 2001 and 2008 to approve new regional revenue sources sufficient for service expansion, bus fleet replacements, and other improvements, the policy autonomy it was promised in the 1997 GVRD-Province agreement was compromised during this period through conflict between the provincial government and the TransLink Board over the phasing of rapid transit projects and the use of a public-private partnership (P3) model for the Richmond-Airport-Vancouver / RAV Line (now the Canada Line). The first point of contention lay in the fact that the provincial government wished to see the RAV Line completed before the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, which necessitated finding funding for the project before the

eastern extension of the Millennium Line to Coquitlam. The mayors on the TransLink Board argued that the Millennium Line extension should come first, as this was the corridor identified as the next priority in the Liveable Region Strategic Plan and in the 1997 GVRD-Province agreement (Krawchenko, 2012). In addition, the Province was adamant that a P3 model be used to finance, build, and operate the RAV line, but the Board had serious reservations related to the risks involved and the impact of the confidential bidding process on public transparency and accountability (Siemiatycki, 2006). As a result, the Board voted down the project twice in 2004, before finally approving it following political pressure from Minister of Transportation Kevin Falcon as well as a promise of \$450 million from the federal government which had an interest in seeing the project built in support of the upcoming Olympic Games (Cohn, 2008). Combined with a provincial contribution of \$370 million, the federal money was instrumental to the final approval of the project (Smith, 2009). As we have seen in Chapter 2 above, in federal polities the spending power of senior governments often enables their policy preferences to prevail even where decision-making authority has officially been devolved to local or regional policymakers (Champagne, 2014; Slack and Tassonyi, 2017).

The RAV Line conflict was significant not only because of the project's characteristics and funding sources, but because the resistance of the TransLink Board to the project was used by Kevin Falcon to justify imposing governance changes on TransLink. After the second Board vote against the RAV project, Falcon was quoted as saying that "[his] confidence in TransLink's ability to make regional transit decisions has been severely shaken" (Holmes, June 23, 2004); later in the year, just after the third Board vote approving the Canada Line, Falcon stated that "you have a group of people who are trying to make regional transportation decisions in an environment that is riddled with parochial backyard politics," and promised to review TransLink governance (Beatty, Dec. 3, 2004). In March 2006 he announced the appointment of a three-person governance review panel, which provided him a year later with a report detailing recommended changes (TransLink Governance Review Panel, 2007).

The proposed changes would sever the connection between the Metro Vancouver (previously GVRD) Board and the TransLink Board, and alter the composition of the TransLink Board to include only appointed professional members, without any mayors. The express purpose of these changes was, according to the

governance review panel, to make TransLink decision-making “non-political” (Ibid., p. 2), implying that the region's mayors had rendered the transit investment decision-making process dysfunctional through their internal arguments about which projects should come first. This characterization of the mayors’ conduct was publicly contested by Malcolm Brodie, the TransLink Board chair at the time, who argued that most mayors had made major compromises on service improvements and capital projects that ran counter to the needs of their own municipalities (Palmer, 2007). Regardless, Falcon decided to implement the changes recommended by the governance review panel, and legislation passed in October 2007 saw the mayors—this time all of them, rather than a selection of 12 appointed by the GVRD—placed on a new governance body, the Mayors’ Council on Regional Transportation (Bill 43, 2007).

Along with a new TransLink Commissioner responsible primarily for authorizing fare increases, the Mayors’ Council would have only a limited policy mandate between 2007 and 2014. Bill 43 assigned to them no influence over TransLink management, and their direct influence on TransLink policy was limited to approving or rejecting “supplement plans” to the 10-year base investment plans developed annually by the TransLink Board. Only the supplemental plans were allowed to include new funding sources, so the Mayors’ Council had sole responsibility for approving new regional taxes and fees, but without direct control over the mix of investments included in either the base or the supplemental plans. They were also assigned the role of annually appointing Board members, who had to be selected from a list prepared by a Screening Panel to which the Mayors’ Council could appoint only 1 out of 5 members (Ibid.)—an innovation that went beyond the recommendations of the governance review panel. Once the Board appointments were made, the Board would otherwise direct all aspects of TransLink policy-making and planning.

Upon examination, features of this governance reform bill show the influence of New Public Management policy ideas (Smith, 2009). First, in terms of qualifications for potential Board members, Bill 43 required that Screening Panel selections and Mayors’ Council appointments to the Board from these selections be “qualified individuals who, as a group, hold all of the skills and experience needed to oversee the operation of the authority in an efficient and cost-effective manner” (Ibid., 180 and 186). The idealization of efficiency and the prioritization of performance-based over democratic accountability are hallmarks of NPM (Hood, 1991), and in this case the legislation omits consideration

of any other desired qualities of Board candidates, such as their accountability to the public or their proficiency in delivering investments which balance efficiency and other important policy goals (e.g. equity). Second, the composition of the Screening Panel meant that the choices open to the Mayors' Council in their role of selecting Board members were limited to professionals deemed acceptable primarily to the region's business community. The bill stipulated that, besides one provincial and one Mayors' Council appointee, the remaining three members of the Screening Panel be appointed by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of B.C., the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade, and the Greater Vancouver Gateway Council. The predominance of private sector association appointees on the Screening Panel indicated that functional representation of regional interest groups would carry at least as much weight as democratic representation in selecting Board candidates—a central feature of corporatist governance (Schmitter, 1974; Simmie, 1981). Since most of the candidates shortlisted by the Screening Panel since 2007 have been transfers from the corporate world, this arrangement has also been referred to justly as corporate or “corporatized” governance (Krawchenko, 2012; 2015).

Between 2008 and 2013, the focus of the new corporate Board was on finding cost efficiencies to cope with the impact of the 2008 financial crisis (TransLink, July 31, 2009a; Bula, Jan. 21, 2010). For the newly created Mayors' Council, the period was marked by disputes with the Province over financing options for potential transit expansion, often revolving around conflict over further increasing property taxes. In 2009 the Mayors' Council attempted to approve their first supplemental plan, totalling \$450 million per year in new spending, to support the goals of the recently released Transport 2040, the successor plan to Transport 2021 (Metro Vancouver, 2008), but Minister of Transportation Shirley Bond vetoed the Mayors' Council's suggested new funding sources of road pricing or reallocation of regional carbon tax revenues, pressuring them to increase property taxes further instead (Nagel, July 3, 2009). The Mayors' Council refused to do this, and in response approved a smaller \$130m "Funding Stabilization Plan" reliant on fuel tax, parking tax, and fare increases, which was necessary merely to maintain existing service levels (TransLink, July 31, 2009b). Bond also ordered a review of TransLink governance by the Comptroller General of B.C., who argued that TransLink and the Mayors' Council should focus on reducing costs before pursuing service expansion and recommended a new TransLink Commission to strengthen provincial

control over the TransLink Board (Office of the Comptroller General, October, 2019). However, the new governance framework recommended in this report was never implemented.

In 2010 the question of how to finally fund the eastern extension of the Millennium Line (renamed the Evergreen Line), which the 1997 GVRD-Province agreement stated would be finished by 2008 (Greater Vancouver Regional District, 1997), came to the fore with Canada Line construction and planning for the 2010 Olympics coming to a close. The provincial and federal governments had each committed to paying approximately 30% of the projected \$1.4 billion cost, with the Province expecting TransLink to pay \$400 million of the remaining \$600 million (Palmer, July 15, 2010), contradicting the cost-sharing agreement negotiated in 1999 in which the Province promised to pay 60% of Millennium Line capital costs (Auditor General of B.C., 2001). In October, with talks on regional funding sources to cover this \$400 million stalled between the Mayors' Council and the Province, the corporate TransLink Board forwarded to the Mayors' Council a supplemental plan with the regional Evergreen Line contributions included, but naming property tax increases as a main funding source (TransLink, October, 2010). After consultation with the Metro Vancouver Board, the Mayors' Council refused to approve this supplemental plan, and obtained a promise from Premier Gordon Campbell to explore mutually agreeable alternative funding sources (Sinoski, Nov. 22, 2010; Nov. 26, 2010). However, events surrounding the attempted implementation of a Harmonized Sales Tax and the resulting resignation of Campbell delayed these negotiations, and they did not resume until Christy Clark replaced him as Premier in May 2011. The Mayors' Council asked Clark for provincial approval for a regional gas tax increase, which was eventually granted but triggered public outcry when first announced, leading the Mayors' Council to believe further public consultation was needed (Quinn, July 15, 2011). After this consultation had taken place, on October 8, 2011 the Mayors' Council approved a supplemental plan including the 2 cent/litre gas tax increase, as well as a temporary property tax increase averaging \$23 per household per year for 2013/14, accompanied by an agreement with the Province that further discussions would ensue on replacing the provisional property tax increase with another funding source (Bailey, Oct. 8, 2011). The approval of this supplemental plan enabled Evergreen Line construction to commence.

In March 2012, the Mayors' Council proposed multiple funding sources for replacing this temporary property tax increase including road pricing, carbon tax reallocation, and a vehicle levy, and also asked for governance reforms that would give them a veto over the 10-year "base" financial plans prepared by the TransLink Board (Nagel, Mar. 19, 2012). In response to the Mayors' Council's governance request, the Province proposed giving the chair and vice-chair of the Mayors' Council two seats on the TransLink Board, but refused to consider granting the Mayors' Council authority over base plans (Nagel, Apr. 10, 2012); the Mayors' Council refused this offer, stating that the change would be insignificant and would not give them a strong enough voice on the Board (Sinoski, June 21, 2012). In response to the Mayors' Council's funding suggestions, the Province rejected all of them, and arguing that the annual \$30 million to be provided by the property tax should be generated instead through service optimization and by finding further cost efficiencies (Bula and Bailey, Mar. 23, 2012). In response, the Mayors' Council threatened to withdraw the temporary property tax increase beginning in 2013, which was expected to result in the cancellation of most elements of the 2011 supplemental plan except for the regional Evergreen Line contribution (Bula, Apr. 13, 2012).

These cuts were eventually rendered unnecessary by cost savings identified in an audit of TransLink (Nagel, Mar. 18, 2013), but the dispute served nevertheless to magnify the centrality of the disagreement between the Province and the Mayors' Council over the use of the property tax. The strong position of the Mayors' Council, as articulated by Chair Richard Walton, was that property tax contributions to TransLink were "maxed out" and that other revenue sources would have to be found to maintain existing service levels and expand the system (Nagel, Feb. 5, 2013). This had been their position in 2009 when they resisted the pressure of Minister Polak to expand the transit system using property taxes; when they refused the corporate Board's property tax-based supplemental plan in 2010; and in 2012 when they threatened to go back on the 2011 supplemental plan's temporary property tax. In the insistence of the Province on the property tax, however, they were coming up against a long tradition under fiscal federalism of senior governments arguing that the property taxes are the ideal, and often the only appropriate, revenue source for subnational governments (Bird, 2006; Boadway and Kitchen, 2014). The firmness of both the Province and the Mayors' Council in their

positions on this issue, and their long-standing conflict over it, forms an essential part of relational framework leading to the 2015 Plebiscite.

In the fall of 2012, Minister of Transportation Mary Polak attempted to clarify the criteria the Province would use to decide on potential regional funding sources for TransLink, saying that proposed sources must be "affordable for families", must not have a negative impact on the provincial economy, and must be shown to have public buy-in (Bula, Oct. 17, 2012). According to reporter Jeff Nagel, Polak justified the public buy-in criterion by referencing the Harmonized Sales Tax debacle which had led to the resignation of Premier Gordon Campbell, saying, "we all saw what happens when you try to implement a tax that the public has not been consulted about and the public has not been engaged with prior to it being implemented" (Nagel, Feb. 6, 2013). After considering these criteria, on Jan. 31, 2013 the Mayors' Council put forward yet another new regional revenue source option: a regional sales tax of between 0.1% and 0.5%, citing the success of such taxes in the United States and the refusal by the Province of all their previous suggestions (Bula, Feb. 6, 2013). This was the first mention of the funding source eventually voted on in the 2015 Plebiscite.

The provincial government had not yet responded to this new suggestion when the commencement of the May 2013 provincial election season turned the impasse over TransLink funding into an election issue. On April 16, 2013, Premier Christy Clark announced in the BC Liberal platform a promise to subject future funding sources for transit in the Lower Mainland to a November 2014 referendum (Today's BC Liberals, 2013)—a promise which would force, in a way that had not been tried before in Canada, a demonstration of public buy-in for new transit funding sources. Mayors' Council Chair Richard Walton was quick to criticize this move, which had not been discussed with the mayors beforehand, as an example of blame avoidance, stating that "my concern is that by coming up with a referendum because it saves money is very clearly a deflection of the Province's responsibility and risk" (Sinoski, April 18, 2013). Numerous mayors expressed dismay at the suggestion of a referendum and reinforced Walton's analysis, calling it "one more example of the abdication of leadership by the Province," "political posturing," "an utter and total mistake," and "a total abrogation of responsibility" (Nagel, Apr. 17, 2013). Moreover, the November 2014 date proposed for the referendum was criticized as both too early and too late: too early to be able to mount an effective public campaign, but too late in the sense that improvements to the transit system were

considered urgent, and a year and a half was too long to wait for funding to be approved (Sinoski, Apr. 18, 2013).

After Clark won the May 14 election, however, the TransLink-related legislation actually passed went beyond the referendum requirement and included, in a separate and simultaneous bill, substantive changes to TransLink’s governance framework, some of which responded to the Mayors' Council's request to the Province made in March 2012 for more control over TransLink decision-making (Nagel, Mar. 19, 2012). After nearly a year spent shepherding the legislation through multiple readings, on May 1, 2014, Clark’s government passed Bill 23, which implemented the promised referendum requirement. The same day it also passed Bill 22, which gave most of the TransLink Commissioner’s responsibilities (including approving fare increases) to the Mayors’ Council and, more importantly, required that the Mayors’ Council periodically approve the TransLink Board's entire long-range and 10-year investment plans. It also abolished the split between financial "base" and "supplement" plans, and called for the first 10-Year Plan approved by the Mayors’ Council to include any new regional funding sources from the start, as long as these sources could be approved by voters in a referendum according to Bill 23. Finally, it changed the Board composition to include two provincially-appointed members and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Mayors' Council, in addition to the 7 Mayors' Council appointees selected from the Screening Panel shortlist. Table 5 below summarizes these changes in relation to previous legislation affecting TransLink’s governance framework.

	1999-2007 (Original governance model)	2007-2014 (BC Liberal changes)	2014-Present (Bill 22 changes)
Governance body of mayors	TransLink Board (12 mayors/councilors)	Mayors’ Council on Regional Transportation	Mayors’ Council on Regional Transportation
Medium/long-range planning and policy mandate of mayors	Developing and approving all medium/long-term plans	Approving "Supplements" to 10-year "Base" plans developed annually by Board, including new funding sources	Approving entire 10-Year Plans including new funding sources and fare increases, and long-term strategies
Short-term planning mandate of mayors	Developing and approving annual plans and budgets	No role	Participation through 2 Mayors' Council-appointed members on Board

Table 5: TransLink policy-making roles of Metro Vancouver’s mayors, 1999-present

Source: Compiled from data in Acuere (2013; 2014).

Under Bill 22, which determined the Mayors' Council's policy mandate and resources during and after the 2015 Plebiscite, the Mayors' Council's role in the decision-making process for new investments in the regional transportation system was strengthened, as it was now officially empowered to provide substantial input and have a final say both on financing sources and on what the funds were to be used for. As a result, the changes were generally viewed as promising by the Mayors' Council and its consultants (Acuere, 2014).

However, the changes were tied up with a referendum requirement, and with responsibility for fare increase approvals previously taken on by the TransLink Commissioner, both of which would make the Mayors' Council's new decision-making authority more politically costly to exercise. In addition, the need for new financing was now more urgent in that significant expansion necessary to accommodate the pressures of population growth had not been approved, with the exception of the Evergreen Line, since TransLink's last 3-year plan in 2005. In April 2014, Chair Richard Walton stated that an additional \$200 million per year was still needed just to fund 2011 service levels without cutting further into reserve funds (Nagel, Apr. 4, 2014). The region's infrastructure deficit and transit service gaps had grown, especially in suburban parts of the region, under the cost-cutting and service optimization carried out by the corporate Board (Bula, May 29, 2014), and the Province would still be able to veto any new financing sources before they could be voted on in the coming referendum. It was under this strategic situation that the Mayors' Council would be required, according to Bill 22, to develop and approve a new 10-Year Plan for Regional Transportation and to defend their choice of regional financing sources before the public in a referendum.

4.2. The 2015 Metro Vancouver Transportation and Transit Plebiscite

Legacy and Stone (2019) have briefly summarized the role of the Province of B.C. in the process leading to the 2015 Plebiscite, pointing to the possibility that blame avoidance strategies on the part of the provincial government played a role in both the framing of the vote and its outcome. Most study participants offered similar interpretations of the motivations of the Province and also echoed Legacy and Stone's evocation of the government's hypocrisy in forcing transit expansion through a referendum while simultaneously approving multi-billion dollar road and bridge projects

in the same region without consultation (Interviewees 1, 3, 4, 5). This section adds more detail to these criticisms by describing the manner in which the Province influenced the planning of the 2015 Plebiscite and the formulation of the central components of the ballot question, such as the 0.5% regional sales tax and the Mayors' Council's 10-Year Plan for Regional Transportation. I then reflect on the events of the campaign and voting periods, as well as public interpretation of the result in news media and opinion polling, to gain a sense of the information available to the Mayors' Council as they reflected on the outcome of the Plebiscite.

4.2.1. Planning the 2015 Plebiscite

On February 6, 2014, less than a year after Clark won the premiership of British Columbia on a platform that included a referendum requirement for new Lower Mainland transit funding sources, a 4-page letter was sent by Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Todd Stone to the Mayors' Council, advising them that he was considering governance changes giving them more control over TransLink decision-making, and instructing them to agree on a regional transportation vision and potential regional funding source(s) by the end of June of that year so that a referendum could be held in November 2014 in conjunction with municipal elections, which are held on a single day across B.C. (Bailey, Feb. 7, 2014). The legislation mandating a referendum for new funding sources had not been passed yet—it would be passed in May 2014 as Bill 23—but the order from Stone was accompanied with a threat that if the mayors could not accommodate his June 30 deadline for a full plan and funding source proposal, the provincial government would not allow a referendum to take place until the following set of municipal elections in 2018, delaying much-needed transit expansion by another 4 years. The Mayors' Council had previously protested that a November 2014 referendum would not allow enough time to prepare (Nagel, Apr. 15, 2013), but in the letter Stone expressed his willingness to postpone the referendum until June 2015 at the latest, as long as the Mayors' Council met his deadline for the plan and funding source proposal (Bula, Feb. 26, 2014).

Although it was a stiff challenge to come up with consensus on a complete regional plan in a matter of months, the Mayors' Council was ultimately successful in approving a plan by the provincially-imposed deadline, putting forward on June 12 a comprehensive set of transportation investments balanced between the region's

municipalities, along with funding sources to cover the region's financial contribution to the 10-Year Plan (Bula, June 13, 2014). This Plan was enormous in size, including approximately \$7.5 billion in new expenditures over 10 years, and would raise TransLink's annual budget from \$1.4 billion to \$2.2 billion (Mayors' Council, 2014), an increase of \$800 million per year. By way of comparison, the previous two approved supplemental plans combined raised TransLink's budget by \$200 million per year (City of Vancouver, Sept. 30, 2011), and the 2005-2007 three-year plan raised its budget by only \$92-97 million per year (TransLink, February, 2004). Second, the proposed mix of investments included a number of large projects including rapid transit and LRT lines in the region's largest municipalities, a suite of new express bus routes and local bus service improvements across the region, improved SeaBus and commuter rail service, upgrades to roads and the regional cycling network, replacement of an aging bridge (later taken over by the provincial government in 2017), and facility upgrades across the transit system (Mayors' Council, 2014). Unlike the 2002-2004 and 2005-2007 plans implemented in the previous decade, the new 10-Year Plan would set TransLink on track to meet the new regional medium-term targets set in Transport 2040, the region's new transportation strategy (TransLink, 2008).

Following Stone's instructions, the Mayors' Council also proposed a mix of funding sources to pay for the regional financial contribution to the Plan. The major near-term regional funding source put forward in the Plan, which would need to be put to a referendum according to the new legislation, was a reallocation of the region's share of the provincial carbon tax. Mobility pricing, revenue from increased ridership, and a toll on the new Pattullo Bridge made up the rest of the longer-term regional funding sources (Ibid.). The precise mix of financing sources first approved would not remain in place after further negotiations with the Province, however, unlike the overall size of the Plan and the investments proposed in it, which remained relatively stable even after the failure of the 2015 Plebiscite (although Surrey's LRT lines were converted to SkyTrain in 2018). Approving this 10-Year Plan along with potential financing sources fulfilled part of the Mayors' Council's new policy mandate that came into effect with the passing of Bill 22 in May 2014.

The Province received this Plan without contesting its investment priorities, but the major near-term funding source the Mayors' Council proposed to cover the regional contribution to the 10-Year Plan, a regional reallocation of the provincial carbon tax, was

rejected immediately by the Province without any prior discussion of the proposal with the mayors, although an offer to postpone the referendum to spring 2015 (rather than to 2018) was also made in Stone's letter rejecting the proposed funding sources (Bula, June 13, 2014; Stone, June 14, 2014). Two weeks later, the Mayors' Council decided to take up Stone's offer to postpone the referendum, citing a desire to reconfirm consensus on the 10-Year Plan between the new set of mayors after the November 2014 municipal elections, as well as a need for more time to find agreement with the Province on regional funding sources and the specific ballot question (Bula, June 26, 2014); the Province in turn announced a new start date of March 2015 for the Plebiscite. The Mayors' Council also sent another letter to Stone asking him to clarify the position of the Province on funding sources, as his previous guidelines ("being affordable for families, having no negative impact on the economy, being regional in nature and not impacting provincial revenue") set a standard that seemed impossible to meet (Mayors' Council, June 27, 2014). As they received no definitive answer on what would be accepted, the fall leading up to the 2014 municipal elections was spent by the Mayors' Council researching the feasibility of possible alternative sources of funding (Mayors' Council, Dec. 11, 2014b).

Once the municipal elections had taken place in November 2014, the Mayors' Council, now with new membership, continued to encounter challenges in obtaining provincial approval for proposed funding sources. In December 2014, the Province issued a public statement threatening that a provincial 33% contribution to the 10-Year Plan's capital projects should not be counted on, and suggesting that the Mayors' Council use "existing levers" such as property tax increases to make up the regional contribution (Nagel, Dec. 3, 2014). With this statement the BC Liberal government preemptively called into question not only any regional funding options under consideration by the mayors but also existing intergovernmental cost-sharing precedents common across Canada for funding transit capital projects since the Building Canada Fund was introduced in 2007 (Boadway and Kitchen, 2014). Its instructions on regional funding sources also, unsurprisingly, directly contravened the agency of the Mayors' Council and TransLink in deciding on its own policy means for achieving the transit expansion plan it was now mandated to approve.

With a date for the Plebiscite having already having been announced by the Province, however, the Mayors' Council had a strong incentive to agree on a funding

source and ballot question promptly. Further delays would make it more difficult for them to run a successful campaign, as the mayors had heard in their consultations with policy-makers who had run transit referendum campaigns in Los Angeles and Seattle (Sinoski, Nov. 12, 2014). Despite their recently expressed view that a carbon tax reallocation would be the most appropriate revenue source (Mayors' Council, 2014), the Mayors' Council voted in December 2014 to approve a ballot question based on a 0.5% regional sales tax as the 10-Year Plan's new near-term funding source (Mayors' Council, Dec. 11, 2014b), which was approved by the Province a week later (Bula, Dec. 19, 2014). Although the Mayors' Council were the ones that ultimately had to campaign for the public's approval of this funding source, the Province at this point also decided to impose a name on the sales tax, declaring that it would be called the Metro Vancouver Congestion Improvement Tax. The final ballot question therefore read as follows:

Do you support a new 0.5% Metro Vancouver Congestion Improvement Tax, to be dedicated to the Mayors' Council transportation and transit plan? (Elections B.C., September 22, 2015, p. 4)

It is worth noting at this point that the Mayors' Council had previously suggested to the Province that the Plebiscite question be split into two ballot questions, with one question asking the public whether they supported the 10-Year Plan and another inquiring about their support for the proposed funding source(s) (Mayors' Council, June 27, 2014, p. 3). This would have left the result less open to interpretation, as there were two components to the final question and it was not necessarily clear which part was being accepted or rejected when a voter voted "Yes" or "No".

After the question was announced, the Province acted unilaterally in deciding the details of how the tax would work, for example when business groups called for clarification on how the tax would apply to specific types of purchases, such as car sales near the region's borders, and on whether it would work as an add-on to the provincial sales tax or as a separate tax (Bula, Feb. 2, 2015). As the Province had sole jurisdiction for writing enabling legislation for the new funding source but refused to communicate with the mayors about the Plebiscite except indirectly through media briefs, the Mayors' Council had no control over elements of the regional sales tax that remained unclear to the general public, such as whether the tax would continue to be collected indefinitely (i.e. whether it would have a "sunset clause"). This undoubtedly made it more difficult to shape the public conversation about the regional sales tax from the beginning of the

campaign period, as the Mayors' Council could not provide definitive explanations that would clear up the concerns of voters about its features. Overall, it is clear that as a result of the *ad hoc* decisions imposed by the Province, the mayors were not in a position to defend their first choice of funding mechanism for the Plan, which appears to have been a carbon tax reallocation given its place in their first 10-Year Plan submission (Mayors' Council, 2014), nor were they allowed to shape the public's perception of the funding mechanism that was chosen by deciding on how it would be collected in the region.

The Province's influence on the Plebiscite, however, went beyond the control they exerted over the timeline of the vote and the choice and characteristics of the proposed regional funding mechanism. It also extended to their conspicuous and intentional absence during the campaign period during the winter and spring of 2015 once the ballot question had been finalized and made public. Research on transit plebiscites in the U.S. indicates that votes tend to be more successful when they are clearly and unambiguously championed by elected leaders (American Public Transit Association, 2014), but the Province and Premier Clark were unwilling to lend their support to the "Yes" campaign at any point during the campaign or voting periods, leaving this task entirely to the Mayors' Council and the Better Transit and Transportation Coalition (BTTC), an advocacy coalition of business, student, and union leaders supporting a Yes vote in the 2015 Plebiscite. This was one of the dangers which the Mayors' Council had been warned of by elected leaders in Seattle and Los Angeles (Sinoski, Nov. 12, 2014), and as we shall see below, the lack of a clear champion was one of the reasons commonly cited for the Plebiscite's failure.

In light of the conduct of the Province with respect to the 2015 Plebiscite, it is clear that the Mayors' Council was left with a sense of having been undermined and "set up to fail" by the provincial government throughout the Plebiscite process, including through the decision to hold a plebiscite on transit funding in the first place. The assumption of an inherent negativity bias of voters towards new taxes, and the consequent unlikelihood of any new regional tax or user fee to pass in a plebiscite, was shared by every participant in this study. As one participant put it,

It was meant to fail. It was always going to fail. How many people are going to vote in a plebiscite to increase their own taxes? You have to go from your home to a voting centre and put down a vote to increase your

taxes. Now how many people are going to do that? It was a complete and utter abdication of leadership by the government of the day, it was done for PR purposes, and even the government itself barely got on board with trying to put it through to success. It was a disaster from the time it was conceived to the time it was over. A big waste of money, and just a way for the government to avoid doing what it needed to do, making some hard decisions. (Interviewee 4)

Indeed, the tenor of most participants' comments on the Province's conduct, including its leaders' refusal to come down in support of a Yes vote, was that their actions were a way of avoiding blame for decisions on transit spending in the Lower Mainland:

They didn't want to be held accountable for spending taxpayer dollars to build transit in Metro Vancouver. But they also didn't want to be held accountable for opposing transit development in Metro Vancouver. They wanted to sit on the sidelines and then come down out of the hills after the battle was over and shoot the wounded. The best way of doing that is saying, "No, it's not that we don't support transit. It's not even that we don't support tax increases to build transit. But that has to be a decision of the people of Metro Vancouver." (Interviewee 1)

As we shall see in the next section, this perceived effort to deflect blame for a lack of progress on transit funding to the public's decision in the Plebiscite also created an opportunity for the public to attribute blame to TransLink as an organization. In keeping with the literature on negativity bias drawn on by Weaver (1986), retrospective voting on the past performance of policy actors would also play a strong role in determining the outcome of the 2015 Plebiscite, compounding the effect of the public's general aversion to tax increases. This would only become clear, however, once the campaign period was underway.

4.2.2. The campaign and voting periods

Once the ballot question was approved by the provincial government in December 2014, a Plebiscite Regulation specifying the date and other characteristics of the vote was submitted to Elections B.C. on February 12, 2015 by the provincial government, in accordance with B.C. law. The Regulation stated that the Plebiscite should be conducted entirely via mail-in ballots sent to registered voters living in TransLink's service region (Elections B.C., September 12, 2015), which includes Metro Vancouver's 21 municipalities, one unincorporated electoral district, and Tsawwassen First Nation. The Plebiscite Regulation also stated that the result was to be non-binding, which according to the provincial Elections Act meant that the vote had to be referred to

as a plebiscite rather than a referendum. The 2015 Plebiscite voting period was set to begin on March 16, 2015, the deadline for returning packages was set on May 29, and the results were to be announced on July 2 after approximately one month spent counting and tabulating the ballots (Ibid.).

The campaign period effectively began when the final ballot question was approved by the Province, at which time opinion polling gave the Yes side a slight lead (Insights West, Dec. 15, 2014). This gave the Mayors' Council less than three months to make their case before voting began in March 2015. Throughout this period, the Mayors' Council worked in partnership with the Better Transit and Transportation Coalition (BTTC), an advocacy coalition that formed between business, student, labour, and community groups throughout the region. In the first few weeks of the campaign period, Iain Black, president of the Vancouver Board of Trade, and Bill Tieleman, who had previously worked on a campaign against the Harmonized Sales Tax, were instrumental in bringing together many of these partners (Hager, Dec. 15, 2014; Bula, Dec. 16, 2014). The "No" side, for its part, was spearheaded by Jordan Bateman of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, a conservative anti-tax think-tank associated with the Fraser Institute and the U.S.-based Atlas Network (Climenhaga, 2018). Bateman spent less than \$40,000 on advertising, but received a great deal of media coverage from local newspapers and media outlets. In this respect, his campaign was similar to those waged by Tea Party members and anti-tax advocates in Atlanta and San Francisco who were able to project their positions against proposed regional transit taxes through news media despite limited advertising spending (Trapenberg Frick, 2013; Paget-Seekings, 2013; Karner, 2019). While the Yes campaign was not associated with any one public figure, Bateman early on became the "champion" of the No side and used that singular status to gain interviews and public engagement opportunities.

The messaging of the Better Transit and Transportation Coalition in its media engagement and advertising, which began airing in February and on which just under \$6 million was spent (Mackin, Dec. 31, 2015), focused primarily on how the proposed 10-Year Plan would meet the challenge of rising congestion, seeing this as a big tent issue that concerned all of the business, student, and labour groups involved as well as the broadest segment of the voting public. Before the Yes side began their campaign activities in earnest, however, opinion polling already showed that the public was confused about the final ballot question, and that the likelihood of a Yes result had

dropped to below 50% in the first month after the announcement of the Plebiscite timeline and question (Insights West, Jan. 20, 2015). The Mayors' Council and the BTTC were facing an uphill battle before their campaigning even began, and with less than two months left before voting packages were to be mailed, they had very little time to reverse this immediate trend.

Bateman, on the other hand, used his public exposure to stoke frustration over the alleged incompetence and inefficiency of TransLink itself, ignoring for the most part the relative merits or drawbacks of the plan and funding source found in the ballot question. The naming of his campaign, "No TransLink Tax", encapsulated this shift of focus from the tax itself to the organization that would spend the money. Willmott's (2017) study of the 2015 Plebiscite argues that Bateman and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation drew upon a discourse of "taxpayer governmentality" (p. 255) in order to win over voters, especially those already inclined to be sceptical of the cost-effectiveness and trustworthiness of local and regional government institutions. I will explore the relationship between Bateman's reliance on discourses of taxpayer subjectivity and the BTTC's "advocacy coalition" approach in Chapter 5 below, but here it suffices to say that Bateman's efforts to divert public discussion of the Plebiscite away from the actual ballot question were effective. By late February, opinion polling was concluding that even potential Yes voters were dissatisfied with TransLink's performance and lacked confidence in both TransLink's implementation of projects and the Mayors' Council's decision-making on funding (Insights West, Feb. 20, 2015). The number of Yes-leaning voters expressing confidence in TransLink had dropped even further by early March, just before the voting period (Insights West, Mar. 9, 2015; Angus Reid Institute, Mar. 16, 2015). By the end of the Plebiscite, most media coverage as well as opinion polling indicated that TransLink itself, as an organization, was the biggest liability for the Yes side (Angus Reid Institute, July 3, 2015; Insights West, July 3, 2015; See news sources in Appendix A).

Ultimately, it was not only members of the public who appear to have accepted the No campaign's premise that the Plebiscite was about TransLink rather than the elements of the ballot question. In early February, part-way through the campaign period and just after the Yes side's advertising had started, the TransLink Board decided to demote TransLink's CEO, Ian Jarvis, and fire a number of senior executives serving under him (Bula, Feb. 11, 2015). The precise motive was unclear, but the move was

made at the same time as accusations of inefficiency and poor management on the part of TransLink were being leveled at TransLink by the No campaign. Breaking Jarvis' contract early, however, made it necessary to provide him with a generous severance package while also spending further money on an interim replacement, all of which was easily ridiculed as wasteful by Bateman during the rest of the campaign period. Mayors' Council Chair Gregor Robertson and Vice-Chair Linda Hepner both made it clear to the media that they supported the move by the Board, and that they had been pushing for new leadership at TransLink (Kane, Feb. 11, 2015; Bula, Feb. 12, 2015).

The Mayors' Council, for its part, besides appearing in public engagement events and telephone town halls with representatives from the many organizations signed on with the BTTC campaign, took action in early March to shore up public perception of TransLink's accountability by persuading Jim Pattison, a prominent and well-respected local businessman, to head an "accountability panel" tasked with ensuring the Congestion Improvement Tax would be spent responsibly if the Yes side were to prevail. While this was lauded as a wise move by marketing experts and journalists (Robinson, Mar. 6, 2015), it appeared to have had little ultimate effect on those already intending to vote No in the Plebiscite, with only 3% saying it would make them more likely to vote Yes (Insights West, Mar. 9, 2015). In reality, the Mayors' Council could not have made TransLink substantially more accountable to the public without further changes to its governance structure integrating mechanisms of accountability into the organization (Gardiner, 2017), changes which only the Province of B.C. had jurisdiction to make. The proposed accountability panel, which would have included mostly representatives from the region's business community, was instead very much in keeping with the functional interest group representation already present on the corporate Board, which had been responsible for TransLink's management decisions since 2007.

By comparison with the campaign period, the month and a half voting period during which the public received and returned their ballots was relatively uneventful. Near the ballot return deadline TransLink experienced a significant Skytrain shutdown (Smyth, May 26, 2015), but it is unclear whether this significantly affected the outcome given the number of ballots already returned. In the end, the results announced on July 2 indicated that a "No" response had been returned on 61.68% of valid submitted ballots, with "Yes" being returned on the remaining 38.32% valid ballots (Elections B.C., Sept. 12, 2015). The actual reasons for the No outcome are, to be sure, varied. Without

coming to any definitive conclusions, the next section categorizes these reasons for voting No and explores their relative prevalence in both news media and opinion polling.

4.2.3. Reasons for the No result

As Chapter 3 below should make clear, this study aims at more than drawing lessons for winning potential future plebiscites, especially because this is clearly not the goal of the Mayors' Council who have publicly stated that they will not take part in any further transit funding plebiscites or referenda (Mayors' Council, May 4, 2017b). Nevertheless, it is worth revisiting public discussion of, and opinion on, the reasons for the "No" result after it was announced in July 2015, as the participants in this study also made it clear that they were tuned into public sentiment concerning the reasons for the Plebiscite's failure and that this had an influence on their policy learning in multiple areas, especially in their search for alternative funding sources to implement the 10-Year Plan. Some of their information came from public opinion polling, but the news media environment is also worth examining given its influence on the opinions reflected in those polls. I therefore conducted a preliminary news media scan of Canada-wide online and print articles covering the outcome in the three weeks following the announcement of the results (see Appendix A for sources), coding for cited reasons for the "No" outcome regardless of editorial stance. Figure 1 below shows the results, which reflect the general prevalence of various explanations for the No result in the news media environment following the vote. Note that this figure does not reflect televised media coverage of the Plebiscite.

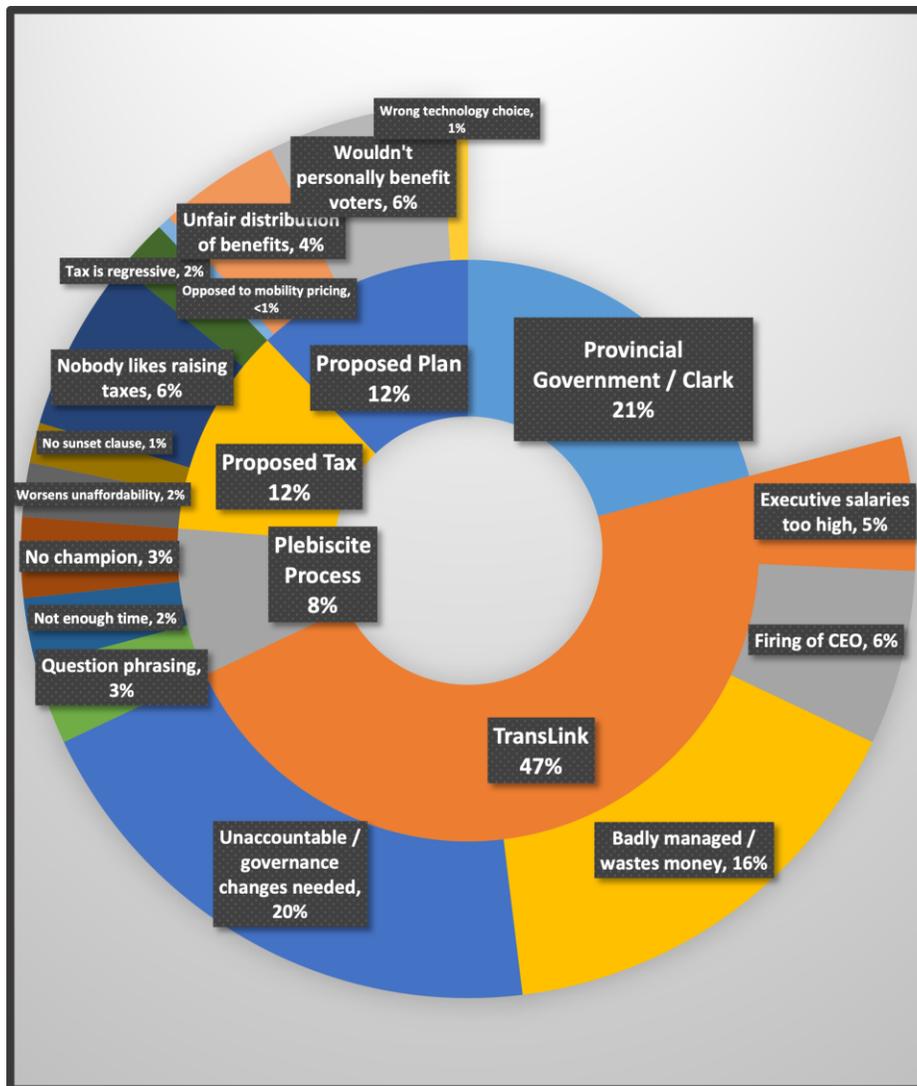


Figure 1: Broad and specific coding of cited reasons for failure of 2015 Plebiscite, by percentage of occurrences in Canada-wide print and online news articles (July 2-23, 2015), n=182.

Looking first at the broad reasons for the failure of the Plebiscite, issues relating to the ballot question itself, including the proposed 10-Year Plan and the Congestion Improvement Tax, made up less than a quarter of cited reasons (24%), with the majority of citations referring to TransLink itself and problems with it as an organization (47%). The leadership of Christy Clark and her ministers with respect to the Plebiscite was also mentioned frequently as an indirect reason for the Plebiscite's failure (22%). The first detail that stands out from these numbers is the prevalence of citations referring to governance actors themselves (68% referring to either TransLink or the provincial government) as reasons for the No result, which if an accurate reflection of public

sentiment would imply that votes in the Plebiscite were indeed used largely to retroactively punish TransLink policy actors rather than to weigh in on the prospective costs and benefits of the proposal on the ballot question. In reality, many of the specific reasons for the Plebiscite's failure could also have been attributed to the actions or inactions of the provincial government—e.g. the 0.5% sales tax itself to the extent that the Province ruled out most alternatives to it, TransLink governance issues since the Province created TransLink's governance framework, or the process of planning and conducting the Plebiscite given that the timing of this process was decided by the Province—even if journalists did not always make these connections. However, as we shall see in Chapter 5 below, the Mayors' Council learned as much from reflecting on how the public *actually* assigned responsibility for TransLink's problems as it did from reflecting on who should have been assigned that responsibility.

Opinion polling reports lack data on the extent to which 'No' voters were responding to the Province's leadership on transit, although this may be a function of the limited questions and response choices respondents were given. Angus Reid's polling did indicate that 51% of respondents, and 60% of 'No' voters, believed that holding the Plebiscite was a bad idea in the first place (Angus Reid, July 3, 2015), an opinion which more directly reflects a judgment made on the Province's decision-making. Insights West noted that 14% of respondents believed the Province was mainly responsible for the failure of the Plebiscite (Insights West, July 3, 2015). The same study noted, however, that TransLink was considered mainly responsible for the No result by 54% of respondents, and overall the most commonly attributed reasons for the Plebiscite failure in opinion polling and news media were reasons related to TransLink itself, rather than to the Province's instigation and handling of that process.

As mentioned above, problems intrinsic to TransLink featured heavily in analyses of the result, with most articles mentioning the success of Bateman's No TransLink Tax campaign in pushing public discussion of the Plebiscite in this direction. This characterization is reinforced by the opinion polling results released after the voting deadline. Insights West found that 62% of residents believed the most pressing concern after the Plebiscite was "reforming the way TransLink operates," and that 76% of 'No' voters "did not have confidence in TransLink to implement transportation projects properly (Insights West, July 3, 2015). Angus Reid's polling echoed this characterization of 'No' voters' primary concern with TransLink's performance and governance (Angus

Reid, July 3, 2015). With respect to the Mayors' Council's role in these TransLink-related issues and their potential learning from the No outcome, it is important to make a distinction between the specific issues related to the management and cost-effectiveness of TransLink, and the lack of accountability inherent in TransLink's governance structure. Given the Mayors' Council's mandate and powers after the 2014 governance changes (Bill 22, 2014), the TransLink Board was primarily influenced in its management and planning activities by the Mayors' Council through the selection process for new Board members, but the Mayors' Council had only limited control over this process with only 1 out of 5 votes in the Screening Panel stage which created the shortlist of candidates. Without further governance changes, the Mayors' Council would not be able to directly influence the Board's decision-making. On the other hand, the Council was not technically restrained from developing a working relationship with the Board, as the Board and TransLink staff needed at the very least to communicate with the Mayors' Council during the development process of the first 10-Year Plan proposal, and as we shall see below the Mayors' Council did find ways to improve their working relationship with the Board to achieve better outcomes in the years following the Plebiscite. By contrast, improving the lack of accountability in the governance structure itself was completely outside the orbit of the Mayors' Council's powers, although the Council did call repeatedly, before and after the Plebiscite, for the Province to address this issue with further governance changes.

The Mayors' Council *did* have control over the elements of the 10-Year Plan, and some level of choice when it came to the funding source that ended up in the ballot question, although the Province would veto many of their suggestions as in previous years. Issues with these two ballot elements divided evenly between news media citations relating to the Congestion Improvement Tax (12%) and those relating to the 10-Year Plan (12%). Interestingly, the general distaste for raising taxes was cited in news media more often than any particular feature of the tax, such as its regressive character as a sales tax or its lack of an end date. Likewise, the failure of the Plan to benefit voters personally was cited more often than any other specific issue with the Plan, such as technology choice for major projects, unfair distribution of projects, or the future reliance of the Plan on mobility pricing.

The "process" issues faced by the Yes campaign in terms of limited time, lack of a clear champion, and question phrasing were also interpreted as reasons for failure, but

not nearly to the same extent as issues with TransLink or with the ballot question. With respect to the Mayors' Council's conduct, this may imply that there was little they could have changed in terms of procedural factors to make the Plebiscite succeed: aside from the case of the demotion of the CEO, which they failed to distance themselves from and even claimed to have supported (Bula, Feb. 12, 2015), the time to address most of the process-related reasons for failure was before, rather than during, the Plebiscite campaign period. Regardless, the Mayors' Council had no plans to participate in further plebiscites after the failure of the 2015 Plebiscite, so these strategic reasons for the Plebiscite's failure are unlikely to have been relevant to their learning following the announcement of the results.

Chapter 5.

Analysis and Discussion

Analysis of the interview transcripts and government and media documents revealed patterns and responses indicative of policy learning and lesson-drawing on the part of the Mayors' Council. Broadly speaking, the instances of policy learning that were identified can be separated into two categories: 1) lesson-drawing which led the Mayors' Council to make better use of its existing powers and resources despite the continuing limitations of its policy mandate under Bill 22, and 2) learning which led the Mayors' Council to push back against its political and organizational constraints by applying pressure to senior government partners in order to achieve its policy goals, especially its goal of filling the funding gap for the 10-Year Plan. Analysis of the interviews also revealed that the application of these lessons was considered by the Mayors' Council to have played a significant part in achieving the Phase One and Two funding agreements identified in the document and news media review, which allowed for a significant portion of the 10-Year Plan to begin implementation starting in 2016 and paved the way for a campaign for permanent transit funding from the federal government in 2019.

5.1. Clarifying policy problems and goals

Before the Mayors' Council began applying its learning from the 2015 Plebiscite in earnest, however, it had to clarify the policy problems it was facing, as well as its goals, in the face of the Plebiscite's failure. On the day the No result of the Plebiscite was announced, the Mayors' Council's first move was to release a set of resolutions stating its response to the Plebiscite and its immediate intentions. Among other points, the resolutions stated that immediate governance changes to TransLink were critical, that the Mayors' Council would continue to support the 10-Year Plan, and that the Mayors' Council remained opposed to the use of property taxes to fund the 10-Year Plan. (Mayors' Council, July 2, 2015). Moreover, the Mayors' Council resolved at the same meeting that it "would be forced to reconsider its role in the TransLink governance structure" if progress were not made on TransLink's funding and accountability gaps by the end of 2015.

These statements contain, in concise form, a summary of the policy problems facing the Mayors' Council and a reaffirmation of what would be a primary goal going forward, the implementation of the 10-Year Plan. At the same time, they contain a warning that the Mayors' Council might refuse to continue taking part in TransLink governance if action were not taken within six months to rectify the agency's problems as laid bare by the Plebiscite. Here they are referring to action taken by the Province, the only actor with the power to change TransLink's governance framework through legislation (Nagel, July 2, 2015). One study participant spoke to the sentiments of the Mayors' Council at the time which lay behind this statement:

You know, that time, it was kind of a gut check time for the Mayors' Council because there was definitely a kind of behind the scenes discussion that maybe the Mayors should walk away from this and just hand this file back to the Province and say, "You haven't been a faithful, genuine partner in this work," and just essentially walk away from it, and just in frustration for a whole litany of issues there. (Interviewee 5)

The Mayors' Council's understanding of the "funding and accountability gaps" mentioned in their July 2 resolutions was clarified in a later report by Michael Buda, Executive Director of the Mayors' Council, presented in October 2015. The report viewed these two problems as interconnected. The accountability gap was a result of the fact that TransLink's governance framework, as discussed in Section 2.1 above, lacked structural accountability to the public due to the appointed nature of its Board and the peripheral role of local elected officials in TransLink policy-making. This had consequences for funding: because, as revealed in the Plebiscite, the public lacks trust in the governance of TransLink, "building support for allocating new revenues to the Mayors Plan will be difficult." At the same time, the report recognized that governance changes giving elected leaders (i.e. the Mayors' Council) more power over TransLink policy without significant new funding sources to enable the 10-Year Plan and future investments would "leave the Mayors' Council in a potentially more challenging position—an agency without new resources" (Mayors' Council, Oct. 1, 2015c, p. 3). It was therefore essential, the report argued, to work on both problems at once.

That is, at least initially, what the Mayors' Council proceeded to do. Recognizing governance reform as a critical goal, during the remainder of 2015, members of the Mayors' Council worked with the Metro Vancouver Board on a newly struck Transportation Planning and Governance Review Task Force, whose conclusions led

the Metro Vancouver Board to release a statement at the end of the year recommending that the Mayors' Council be made solely responsible for transportation policy decisions in the region, "including those required to develop strategies, transportation plans, investment plans, annual budgets and funding sources" (Metro Vancouver, Dec. 15, 2015). This would remain the position of the Mayors' Council as well for the remainder of the study period, but it was immediately apparent that the recommendations of Metro Vancouver and the Mayors' Council were not going to be taken up by the BC Liberal government (Bailey, Dec. 16, 2015), leaving the Mayors' Council on its own to work out how it would influence TransLink policy given the framework left in place by Bill 22. After their work with Metro Vancouver in late 2015, there were in fact few concrete steps that could be taken to persuade other actors to change the governance situation; this was later underscored when no such legislation was tabled even after the election in 2017 of the BC NDP, who had promised to look into TransLink governance (Saltman, Oct. 12, 2017). Recalling the relative prevalence of cited reasons for the Plebiscite's failure (see Figure 1), the Mayors' Council's lack of power to change the governance situation meant they could not directly address the major issue believed to have caused the Plebiscite's failure: TransLink's reputation with the public.

This did not mean, however, that the Mayors' Council saw the Plebiscite's failure as a reason to change its other major policy goal: finding a way to fund the 10-Year Plan as originally proposed. The Mayors believed, as stated in their post-Plebiscite resolutions above, that bringing the Plan to fruition remained essential and was still supported by the public. On the other hand, however, the Mayors' Council's interpretation of the No result implied that their proposed policy *means* to fulfill that goal—the 0.5% regional sales tax—would have to be changed. Although the double-barrelled ballot question left some room for ambiguity (cf. in Figure 1, 12% of cited reasons being related to aspects of the 10-Year Plan itself), to the Mayors' Council it was quite clear that the No result was a rejection of the Congestion Improvement Tax rather than the 10-Year Plan:

I think people for sure interpreted it as a Plebiscite on TransLink's popularity at the time, but you know, the question was pretty clear. The question wasn't about transit or the transit plan, it was about the use of a regional sales tax, which, you know, the result was very clear. So it helped take that kind of tool off the table pretty quickly. (Interviewee 1)

This left the Mayors' Council with a major *actionable* policy goal of finding a new mix of funding sources—regionally, and ultimately from senior government contributions—that would enable the 10-Year Plan to be implemented, in lieu of the 0.5% sales tax defeated in the Plebiscite. In other words, while the Mayors' Council could go no further on the accountability gap, there was work still to be done on the funding gap. Their further efforts to fill it would draw on their creativity as well as several aspects of their learning from the Plebiscite experience, which are discussed below.

Ultimately, the Mayors' Council would not follow up on their threat to withdraw from participation in TransLink governance, despite the refusal of the Province to change the governance framework. Instead, other ways and means were found to accomplish the 10-Year Plan in spite of the obstacles placed in front of them. At first, these looked more like survival tactics oriented towards making do with the constraints imposed by their fraught multi-level governance situation, but the Mayors' Council's outlook would later become more ambitious, especially as provincial and federal elections changed the landscape of intergovernmental relations:

I think what it really came down to for the Mayors' Council was they had to make a decision: number one, do we walk away from this and all the work and everything we've invested in our advocacy to improve transportation in the region as a way to get the provincial government to finally respond and engage in that. Or, do we stay at the table and really outline our case, and do it in a way as more of an intergovernmental strategy, as to say, "we need to change the way funding works. The current system is broken. We are not able to invest in transportation the way this region needs to." (Interviewee 5)

While the latter path would involve a greater amount of uncertainty as well as compromise, the Mayors' Council's choice to continue fighting for transit funding would, it turned out, eventually pay off.

5.2. Making do with constraints

The first half of 2016 marked a turning point for the Mayors' Council. In January a Funding Strategy Committee had been struck to examine options to close the regional funding gap, which was expected to report back in early spring (Mayors' Council, Jan. 27, 2016b). There was soon good news on the funding file, as a federal Liberal majority government was elected in October 2015, replacing the Conservative Harper regime which had been in power for almost ten years, and in April 2016 its first budget promised

\$370m from a newly announced Public Transit Infrastructure Fund (PTIF) toward shovel-ready transit projects in Metro Vancouver. On the other hand, the provincial government had just declined the Mayors' Council's most recent request for governance changes, and showed no signs of removing their requirement to hold another plebiscite if the Mayors' Council were to propose new regional funding sources for TransLink. This put the promised additional federal contribution into question, as the region needed to have projects ready to begin implementation to meet the PTIF's short-term timeline for its first round of funding (Mayors' Council, Apr. 29, 2016, p. 4). In this new strategic situation, the Mayors' Council began to pivot towards a focus on taking advantage of this window of opportunity to fill the funding gap for the 10-Year Plan. The further steps they took to do this came about without much public attention or fanfare, but in reality were the result both of careful attention to the reasons for the 2015 Plebiscite's failure and of adaptation to the constraints placed on their decision-making abilities by the governance framework previously imposed by the Province.

5.2.1. Breaking down the 10-Year Plan

The first step taken by the Mayors' Council to take advantage of the new federal funding was to break up their 10-Year Plan into three phases, to be rolled out successively as funding for each phase was finalized. The catalyst for this change was the time-sensitivity of the federal government's PTIF funding offer, but the impetus for the new approach went deeper, and was related directly to the difficulties encountered in the effort to fund the entire 10-Year Plan through a single funding source in the 2015 Plebiscite. One participant summarized this learning very directly:

I think that was...also another learning from the Plebiscite, was that putting everything onto one funding source, one giant funding source that was going to solve everything, it was felt that really, no, we're just going to have to take smaller bites, we're not going to be able to do the entire 10-Year Plan in one investment plan. So we're going to have to have smaller chunks of investments multiple times as opposed to one big plan, and that it's not going to be one magic bullet funding source, it'll have to be a variety of sources all cobbled together. And I think that has proven to be a far more successful model than one giant taxation or one giant plan that covers everything. (Interviewee 5)

According to a report of the Funding Strategy Committee in September 2016, there were several problems with relying on a single large regional funding source to fund the 10-Year Plan (Mayors' Council, Sept. 16, 2016, p. 6). First, it is hard to gain

public approval for a *large* regional financial contribution: as many commentators repeated throughout the Plebiscite campaign and voting periods, nobody likes raising taxes on themselves, especially by a substantial amount. The catalyst provided by the federal funding announcement in April 2016, which projected its own phased distribution of public transit funds to Canadian cities over 10 years, appears to have sparked the insight that the overall amount of the regional contribution might be lowered by taking advantage of future phases of senior government funding which, under TransLink's provincial legislation requiring plans to be fully funded before beginning implementation, could not be factored into a 10-Year Plan approved all at one time in advance.

Second, regardless of the overall eventual size of the regional contribution, there was also the problem that many improvements in a fully-funded total 10-Year Plan "will not begin for many years and do not require immediate decisions and public announcements on confirmed regional revenues." (Ibid.) The public, in other words, will not see the rewards of their contribution for many years, even if collection of their money begins immediately:

That was what we learned, we had to be really concrete in how we describe the kind of improvements that were coming, and they had to be near-term. People just don't, rightfully so, don't buy that hey, guess what, if a .5% sales tax increase today, you're going to get an LRT in Surrey on Fraser Highway nine years from now. People are like, "No, you're just going to increase my taxes now, and then you'll increase my taxes later on to pay for that. And I don't believe that's ever going to be built anyways because I don't believe that it's possible." (Interviewee 1)

Part of the problem being described here is the necessary complexity of the 10-Year Plan that Bill 22 had mandated the Mayors' Council to approve in 2014. The amount of information that members of the public were asked to process in preparation for their vote in the 2015 Plebiscite was vast, with the "summary" version of the Plan covering 34 pages of dense text along with several appendices (Mayors' Council, 2014). Given TransLink's concurrent legitimacy crisis during the Plebiscite, too, there was a higher public expectation for proof that the agency could actually implement the projects it was trying to fund. The Plebiscite had revealed to the Mayors' Council that TransLink's "credit rating" was low in the eyes of the public, and that an advance of money for such a large array of complicated projects over a 10 year period was going to be a hard sell.

With a much smaller Phase One plan approved quickly, on the other hand, the Mayors' Council would be able to leverage the new federal funding immediately, *and* it would be able to prove to the public that the financial investment would reap rewards that justified the price:

With the Phase One plan we were able to say, we'll increase your taxes next June (this is in November or December) but we're going to bring in new transit service on these routes and of this type in January. So, three months after we approved this Phase One plan, where we say we're going to increase your taxes 6 months from now. Well, 2 months from now you'll see new bus service on your route, and it's going to look like this. Here's a map, here's a schedule, and these are the new times. (Interviewee 1)

As we shall see below when looking at the Mayors' Council's efforts to fund Phase Two of the 10-Year Plan, this is indeed largely what happened. Although there was more work to be done to achieve agreement on Phase One after deciding to split the 10-Year Plan into three parts, once an agreement on funding had been made with the Province and public consultations were completed in November 2016, the Mayors' Council was able to vote to approve Phase One knowing that substantial service improvements would begin rolling out in early January 2017, just as negotiations over Phase Two were set to begin with senior governments. The sense of momentum gained from this would, according to participants, contribute to the success of their #CureCongestion campaign to procure senior government commitments for Phase Two, which contained much larger rapid transit investment components with longer timelines.

This graduated, momentum-building effect illuminates another benefit of splitting the 10-Year Vision into three phases, which was the ability it gave the Mayors to implement the overall 10-Year Plan unevenly, starting with a smaller set of investments centred around immediately deliverable local bus and bus rapid transit improvements and leaving much larger investments for later phases. They were thus able to fund Phase One with a smaller regional contribution that would be less likely to risk public outcry. This still left the problem of needing to negotiate the Bill 23 plebiscite requirement for new regional funding sources, which had not been revoked, but it made the compromises the Mayors' Council would have to make on the specific elements of the regional contribution, which are detailed below, smaller and therefore easier to swallow.

Overall, splitting the 10-Year Plan into three phases had the following effects: reducing the amount of information the public had to process, providing the public with immediate evidence of value for money through quick service improvements, and streamlining necessary coordination with senior government funding program timelines. The need to achieve these effects was, in turn, learned from several aspects of the Plebiscite experience: the 0.5% tax was too much of an ask with uncertain and distant rewards, the 10-Year Plan was too voluminous for the public to easily understand, and the regional contribution to be covered by the tax was larger than necessary (and larger than the public desired) because senior government financial commitments from future years could not be leveraged to offset it.

5.2.2. Compromising on regional funding sources

Breaking up the plan, however, was not going to be enough to convince the BC Liberal government to approve new funding sources without another plebiscite, regardless of how small the first batch of regional funding was projected to be. It was recognized in mid-2016, therefore, that the Mayors' Council's funding strategy needed to include some concessions to the Province, including to their previous indications that the Mayors' Council should make use of existing revenue tools to meet the needs of their 10-Year Plan. According to one participant, the primary wish of the Province had always been that Metro Vancouver mayors rely on local property tax increases, which were already one of the legislated powers of local governments, to fund transit:

...the Liberals were still saying, we will not give up on the Plebiscite requirement, you're not getting any new funding unless you have a plebiscite. And what that really meant when they said that, the provincial government, going way back to the Gordon Campbell years, was absolutely determined that we were going to have to fund regional transportation mostly on the backs of the property tax...Which has all kinds of flaws, it's regressive, it doesn't move with the economy, it's unfair in a lot of ways. But that's what they wanted. And the property tax has the advantage that the province doesn't have to approve it. So the province wanted to force us to have this tax and to increase the property tax, in a way, so a hike in taxes, without them being blamed. That's what it was. (Interviewee 4)

This comment highlights, once again, the Mayors' Council's discernment that the use of the 2015 Plebiscite was a blame avoidance strategy on the part of the Provincial government: the Province had a clear desire for a given policy option, but wanted the

Mayors' Council to be the ones responsible for making, and owning, either the unpopular decision itself or the consequences of no decision being made (transit not being funded). Unfortunately, the Mayors' Council was still powerless, in 2016, to avoid the potential to be blame takers, especially in the case of another plebiscite in which, the Mayors' Council had learned, TransLink would be exposed to the regnant anti-tax discourse coalition against which its local advocacy coalition had been powerless. Approving smaller property tax increases as part of a mix of regional funding sources (which together made up a much smaller part of the 10-Year Plan) therefore seemed, to the Mayors' Council, a more prudent option—an example of "thick" policy learning in which, through experience, a policy is selected that "works" in the given political and, in this case, multi-level governance circumstances constraining the policy choices at hand (Howlett, 2012).

The Mayors' Council's funding strategy submission to the provincial government in April 2016, which did not yet distinguish between phases of the 10-Year Vision, thus included a proposal to adjust the TransLink Property Tax to apply to more owners, along with a one-time 2% fare increase, regional development cost charges, sale of surplus TransLink property, and a commitment to mobility pricing (charging for personal automobile usage either by mileage or at specific regional bottlenecks) beginning in 2021 (Mayors' Council, April 29, 2016b). This was the first sign of a willingness to concede on property taxes and fares. In June, the first public announcement revealing the potential of a Phase One installment of the 10-Year Plan was made, indicating that progress was being made in concert with the provincial government to take advantage of federal PTIF funding (Mayors' Council, June 16, 2016). In September, a final agreement between the Mayors' Council, the provincial government, and the federal government on Phase One of the 10-Year Plan was announced in a media release, this time with a \$3/year property tax increase included as one of the funding sources (Mayors' Council, Sep. 16, 2016b). After public consultations were completed and reviewed by the mayors, the Mayors' Council approved the Phase One plan in November, preparing the way for implementation beginning in January 2017 (Mayors' Council, Nov. 7, 2016). At a meeting in October, it was mentioned that there had been "unanimous agreement of the Mayors' Council several years ago that property taxes would not be increased to provide additional funding for transit services", and discussion took place on the potential for these revenue measures, including the fare increase, to worsen unaffordability in the

region (Mayors' Council, Oct. 12, 2016, p. 4). One key informant shed light on the process that led to the reversal of this consensus on whether to use property taxes and fare increases, despite continuing acknowledgement of their downsides:

You know, I think with respect to the other funding sources, I think the Mayors' Council had identified some funding sources they were particularly interested in, and ultimately it led to a lot of back and forth, and ultimately some compromise between the Mayors' Council and the provincial government...And I don't think either side would say this is exactly what we wanted, but it was basically the parties working together, throwing different options, that ultimately led to a resolution. (Interviewee 5)

As with the 2015 Plebiscite's 0.5% sales tax, it is clear that the Mayors' Council considered it necessary to move forward with funding sources that were not their ideal, and that the compromise with the Province was real rather than merely apparent. The Mayors' Council believed there were better options, especially given the affordability consequences of the proposed mix of sources. In light of this, I asked participants about the reason for their confidence that raising fares and property taxes would not also draw substantial negative media coverage and public opposition to their decision, as the 0.5% sales tax had done during the 2015 Plebiscite. This did not occur, but it was unclear why the Mayors' Council believed beforehand that it would not. Their response indicated that after the Plebiscite, they sensed from public polling a real worry among the public that transit expansion would *not* be funded, implying that the Phase One announcement, which had the appearance of a done deal, came as a relief to many rather than a burden:

There was a concern at the Mayors' Council that raising property taxes the way we did, and fares. Some people say, well, given the Plebiscite, aren't people going to, there's going to be a tax revolt, people aren't going to support this. But if you look at the news coverage after we proposed how we were going to pay for the Phase One plan with tax increases, the reaction was "Thank God we're getting more transit." There was no coverage over the tax increases...So, no, what the Phase One reconfirmed to the Mayors is that there's a lot of latent demand and support for transit. People are willing to put their money where their mouth is on this. But we have to do it in a way that's manageable for people. We need to explain how it's going to work. (Interviewee 1)

The Mayors' Council correctly determined, in other words, that the public would blame them for the consequences of inaction as much as (or more than) for the consequences of their decision to use these particular funding sources. The challenge, then, was to

make action happen on the 10-Year Plan: to get part of the vision for transit expansion to the implementation stage. Making these compromises on regional funding sources enabled this to happen, and by the end of 2016 visible progress had been made.

It might be argued, of course, that the federal PTIF funding was what ultimately enabled the Phase One approval in 2016, rather than the work and compromises made by the Mayors' Council. But this is not how the Mayors' Council saw it:

I mean, the federal funding was the catalyst, but it was the Mayors who decided let's figure out how to use it, use it all, use it quickly, and let's put together credible proposals to make it impossible for the provincial government to do anything other than go OK, I guess we have to participate. Which is what happened. (Interviewee 1)

The agreement made in September 2016 was, in fact, the first grant approval made under the Public Transit Infrastructure fund, befitting a local situation in which speed, rather than the shoring up of public consensus on either specific investments or regional funding sources, was of the essence. Another participant contrasted the dynamic at work in negotiations with the federal government to the situation in Toronto, underscoring the extent to which federal funding, if not accompanied by active and intentional work to put the pieces together, can be relatively inert and unable to make an impact on its own:

By the Mayors endorsing [the 10-Year Plan] and continuing with a consistent message and a consistent plan, that goes a long ways when you're going to Ottawa. If you look at Toronto, a change in premier, a change in mayor, and they're completely changing their type of transit that they're going to be doing there, and setting themselves back five years. When that happens, it's extremely difficult to build your transit system. (Interviewee 2)

In summary, what made this compromise possible was partly its application to a much smaller and more quickly deliverable Phase One plan, which required much less funding than the entire 10-Year Vision, and which was backed by substantial federal grants without which the regional sources available would not have been sufficient. But at the same time, the Mayors' Council's learning from the 2015 Plebiscite enabled them to see that approval of the smaller Phase One plan would not have happened without this compromise, as the key obstacle to its approval was not public opinion but the provincial government's refusal to consider new funding sources without another plebiscite, which would—they knew—be disastrous. Instead, they made a tough decision:

Taking it out in the public and saying, OK, now you've got to vote on this, it's too big a negative, and such a big negative it's hard to overcome. So I think there's a difference...there's a balance on public consultation or just doing it, you have the extremes, right? One end, you say well, we're going to talk to the public forever and get the consensus. Well, that will never work...But you have to make tough decisions, in government you have to make tough decisions sometimes. When the decisions are made, a lot of people say, "Yeah, I don't like it, but I get it." And they move on. (Interviewee 2)

In conjunction with the smaller price tag and the faster rollout of Phase One, this compromise on funding sources allowed the Mayors' Council to avoid another lengthy debacle in which TransLink's reputation would be further damaged, and ultimately allowed them to avoid playing the role of blame takers once again. No choices the mayors made on funding in 2016 would have enabled them to avoid compromise with the provincial government, so they charted a course that got the job done faster. The public did, in fact, move on.

5.2.3. Making the governance framework work

As noted above, the BC Liberal government was unwilling at any point after the 2015 Plebiscite to alter the governance situation to give TransLink more structural accountability by providing the Mayors' Council with a fuller set of policy-making powers and responsibilities. However, the 2015 Plebiscite did give the mayors an occasion to work through the possibilities latent in the new Bill 22 governance framework that was passed along with the plebiscite requirement in 2014. Although the Mayors' Council initially threatened to withdraw from TransLink governance activities after the Plebiscite, their eventual response to the impasse was to begin working more closely with the TransLink Board in an effort to make the post-Bill 22 governance framework function better, especially in support of the 10-Year Plan which required extensive collaboration between the two parties. As one participant noted, after the Plebiscite,

the Mayors' Council developed new strategies to make the existing governance structure work better...post-referendum, there was a lot more collaborative work, joint committees, joint meetings between those two bodies, and a lot more synergies to that work. I'm not sure why that happened post-referendum, why the referendum led to that change, but there definitely is a difference in how the governance worked before and after the Plebiscite, to essentially make the best out of the governance structure. (Interviewee 5)

Understanding this change, and its consequences, requires understanding how prior legislative changes to TransLink's governance framework affected the working relationship between the region's elected mayors and non-elected TransLink Board members. Prior to 2007, the mayors had formed an integral part of the Board itself, which was responsible for both policy and management. Between 2007 and 2014, however, they were allowed only an approval role for "supplementary" 7-year plans involving new funding tools, and their collaboration with the Board, which provided most of the policy direction, was minimal. The 2007 governance changes, as noted in Section 2.1 above, were intended to "depoliticize" TransLink governance by separating the mayors, as a group, from the policy decision-making process, allegedly because they had "politicized" the process by competing for the partial interests of their own municipalities. The mayors, however, saw serious problems with the new framework in which responsibility for policy decision-making was not clearly delineated:

Well, the Mayors have never been satisfied with the governance structure. Having a Mayors' Council and having a corporate, supposedly corporate Board, the Mayors have never been satisfied with that. First of all from the point of view that they don't agree with the reasons for the change in the first place. And secondly, the Board has all the operating decisions and some of the policy, and so members of the public have no idea who's responsible for anything, aside from the fact that they think that the Mayors form the Board. So the Mayors get it in the ear constantly. (Interviewee 4)

In 2014, on the other hand, while the Bill 22 governance changes did not solve the confusion of policy responsibilities or the lack of structural accountability in the governance framework, they did open the door for better working protocols to be established between the Board and the Mayors' Council due to the Mayors' Council's stronger approval role on both medium-term (i.e. 10-Year) and long-term plans, as well as the appointment of two mayoral representatives to the Board (Acuere, 2014, pp. 10-11). At the same time, the run-up to the 2015 Plebiscite mandated by Bill 23 marked a departure from the de facto separation of the Board and the mayors, as the two parties needed to work together once again to prepare the 10-Year Vision that was to be approved by the Mayors' Council and then voted on:

I think one of the biggest wins that we got out of the Plebiscite was that we learned to work together with the Board. The Mayors' Council and the Board and the staff had to come together. We had to, and to be honest, when I first got on the Mayors' Council I don't know who the Board was, I don't know what they did, I never saw them. It was like,

we're the Mayors' Council, our job is to approve something that the Board has created, but we don't even know, we don't have a say in what they created. When we had to work on the 10-Year Vision, the Board and the mayors came together, and what were we going to put forward? Because we didn't have much time. (Interviewee 2)

Indeed, it took a great deal of collaborative work to come to a consensus on a fully itemized and costed 10-Year Plan in the roughly six months preceding the Plebiscite, and the Mayors' Council's work with the Board was a major part of this. Legacy and Stone's (2019) article on the 2015 Plebiscite takes this into account, arguing that the 10-Year Plan voted on in the Plebiscite, and the coalition assembled to campaign for it (the Better Transit and Transportation Coalition), represented a triumph of Vancouver's long consensus-building tradition of regional planning, regardless of the final result of the vote. However, issues remained in terms of strategic coordination between the Board and the Mayors' Council during the Plebiscite campaign—for example, the Board's firing of the CEO, which reinforced the narrative that TransLink was poorly managed and wasteful—and just before the Plebiscite the Mayors' Council's consultants indicated that there was still a long way to go in terms of building productive relationships between the Board and the Mayors' Council (Acuere, 2014, p. 11).

Turning to the period after the Plebiscite, it also took close collaboration to renegotiate the sequencing of the Plan's implementation once the decision to separate it into three phases came under consideration in mid-2016. The timeline during this period was very tight, especially during the months following the federal government's Public Transit Infrastructure Funding announcement in March 2016, which created a short window of opportunity for kickstarting the 10-Year Vision. Achieving clarity quickly on what was possible in terms of dividing and apportioning some of the dozens of complex projects included in the 10-Year Vision into a shorter time horizon necessitated more frequent meetings on the part of the Mayors' Council to build their own consensus on priorities (Mayors' Council, Jan. 20, 2017, pp. 28-30), as well as joint committee meetings addressing complex planning concerns and ongoing revisions to the funding strategy to match new indications of support from senior governments. 2016 was actually the first year the Mayors' Council had used committees,

...because even before the Plebiscite there actually weren't any sub-committees below the Mayors' Council. The Mayors' Council always just met as one group, and that was post-Plebiscite, it was realized that meeting once a month as a larger group, we actually needed to do some

more intense work that involved committees, so [the Funding Strategy Committee] was the first committee that was struck...I think that committee was used as a way to build a bridge with the TransLink Board in a way that had never been done before. And now you see there are three sub-committees of the Mayors' Council today, and I think none of that structure existed before the Plebiscite. (Interviewee 5)

This "Funding Strategy Committee" was struck in January 2016 and tasked with exploring options to close the regional funding gap in collaboration with TransLink and municipal staff (Mayors' Council, Jan. 27, 2016b). It worked with the TransLink Board's Investment Plan Committee throughout 2016 on a proposed 2017 annual Investment Plan which assumed the approval of Phase One funding by the end of the year (Mayors' Council, Oct. 12, 2016), providing a realistic outlook on what could be implemented quickly once the funding for Phase One was approved. This directly fulfilled one of the Mayors' Council's consultants' suggestions that the Mayors' Council seek a stronger role in the formation of annual investment plans, even though Bill 22 gave the Mayors' Council no official approval role over them (Acuere, 2014, p. 11), and may also have provided an opportunity for the Mayors' Council to clearly communicate to the Board the importance of the upcoming Phase One implementation to the Phase Two public outreach strategy, as shown in a resolution from January 2017 (released 4 months later):

"That TransLink ensure that the Phase One roll-out communications and marketing strategy is designed to support Phase Two-related advocacy and public outreach by ensuring the marketing of the 10-Year Vision projects is distinct, high-profile, long-term, region-wide, and clearly communicates the benefits of Phase One investments to all types of residents, including transit users and drivers." (Mayors' Council, May 4, 2017, p. 2)

In light of the disconnect indicated by the Board's actions during the Plebiscite, this sort of instruction shows a higher level of coordination not only on technical details of the 10-Year Vision, but on the strategic thinking necessary to shepherd the Plan to the stage of implementation in the given political circumstances. It is possible that the Mayors' Council was learning, in this case, to use its collective political and multilevel governance experience as an asset rather than a (supposed) liability in order to exercise leadership over policy decision-making, regardless of the Board's official jurisdiction over many details of TransLink policy.

This points again to the "thick" policy learning necessary to navigate and counteract the blame avoidance strategies of other powerful policy actors, such as senior governments (Howlett, 2012). As with their willingness to compromise on funding sources, the desire of the Mayors' Council to work with the Board and actively bring them onside, despite their disagreements on the role the Board should play in the overall governance structure, contrasts with the Mayors' Council's relative acquiescence in their separation from the Board's decision-making and planning in the pre-Plebiscite period. This determination of the Mayors' Council to work with what they had, not only in terms of funding options but in terms of governance, was an essential part of the effort that led to the approval of \$2 billion in Phase One investments just a year and a half after the demoralizing experience of the 2015 Plebiscite. It was also an essential element in the effort to acquire Phase Two funding, as TransLink Board and Mayors' Council members would later begin meeting as a Joint Finance Committee in 2018, integrating their approaches to funding and intergovernmental strategy even more closely in an effort to gain approval for a much larger tranche of investments. The next section will explore the success that the Mayors' Council achieved during this period in greater depth.

5.3. Pushing back: politicizing the funding gap

The instances of learning from the 2015 Plebiscite detailed above fall mostly into the category of first or second-order policy learning as characterized by Hall (1993), whether they be a change in policy instruments (compromising on funding tools), strategic adjustments to an existing plan (breaking up the 10-Year Vision), or a new focus on deepening working relationships with other regional policy actors. In all three cases, despite the financial boost granted by the federal PTIF announcement in 2016, the options pursued for filling the regional funding gap drew upon existing resources and capacities of the Mayors' Council and features of the current multi-level transit governance paradigm, more than on a re-evaluation of the nature and framing of the policy context itself and of the "funding gap" they intended to fill. This section details a case of the Mayors' Council's learning from the 2015 Plebiscite which much more closely approximates third-order policy learning, especially if understood in Wood's (2015) sense as a process of politicization through which collective "puzzling" out of the problem has transitioned into the collective "powering" through of solutions.

5.3.1. The 2017 #CureCongestion campaign

2017 marked another turning point for the Mayors' Council, which had just finalized a tri-government agreement on funding for Phase One of the 10-Year Vision, the only remaining unfinished component being legislation giving TransLink authority to implement development cost charges. In January, the first set of transit service improvements funded under Phase One were implemented, including increased frequency on SeaBus, additional SkyTrain cars during peak hours, and bus service improvements across the entire system. There were worries at the time about the need to defer retirement of older buses to implement the service changes (Phase Two contained the funding for new bus orders), as well as delays on the part of the federal government to indicate its financial support for Phase Two before the upcoming B.C. provincial election in May 2017, a date which if passed would prevent a tri-government agreement from being reached for up to a year as the new parliament established itself (Bula, Jan. 17, 2017). Within a couple weeks of these service changes taking effect, the Mayors' Council therefore directed the Funding Strategy Committee not only to continue pursuing a federal-provincial-regional funding approval for Phase 2 before the upcoming B.C. election, but also to "develop a draft public engagement campaign designed to inform residents about the importance and role of the Provincial Government in supporting the 10-Year Vision" in case an agreement could not be reached before the provincial election (Mayors' Council, Jan. 26, 2017). This was the beginning of what would become #CureCongestion, a series of campaigns that coincided with the provincial and federal government elections which took place in 2017 and 2019 respectively.

Before the first #CureCongestion campaign began, the effort to make progress on Phase Two between January and March of 2017 met with mixed success. The federal government came through in its March 2017 annual budget with a commitment to provide transit funding—this time \$2.3 billion, a much higher amount than the \$370 million committed to Phase One—for eligible projects in Phase Two through the second stage of its Public Transit Infrastructure Fund, a commitment lauded as historic by the Mayors' Council (Mayors' Council, March 22, 2017). The provincial government, however, provided no indication of addressing the Phase Two plan before the federal government's announcement, and also left the development cost charge authorization unfinished while continuing to maintain the plebiscite requirement for other new regional

funding sources. After the federal announcement, the Province responded by committing only the matching amount required for the region to receive the PTIF grant, which was not enough to fund the remainder of the Phase Two plan:

The provincial Liberal commitment was 40% of the federally funded projects, so it was just the Broadway Extension and the Surrey-Newton-Guildford LRT. It wasn't 40% of all projects in the 10-Year Vision. And it was actually a requirement of the federal government. So in order to access the federal funds the Province had to commit 40% of the federally funded projects in the Phase One plan, and then they said, "OK, going forward, don't worry, we'll be there for you after all on Broadway and on Surrey." Which was fine except that A) it wasn't enough to get the rest of the projects in the Phase Two plans funded, and B) it was a little late. They humiliated the region in a plebiscite, spent three years arguing, and all the rest...so the Province kind of came crawling up and frankly did the minimum. (Interviewee 1)

The public engagement campaign, titled #CureCongestion, therefore went ahead, taking place in April and May 2017 in the run-up to the provincial election, which was considered by the Mayors' Council to be of utmost importance to the future of the 10-Year Plan. Although at the time the incumbent BC Liberals were still strongly favoured to win and the potential to influence the parties' positions on transit funding was not guaranteed, the campaign was the result of the Mayors' Council's decision to take a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to their relationship with the provincial government, regardless of which party ended up in power:

We launched the CureCongestion campaign because we knew the provincial election was going to be pivotal. The Mayors' Council is a pragmatic bunch, I mean, some of them are politically involved at a provincial or a federal level, but when they have their mayors' hats on, especially at the Mayors' Council table, they're all pragmatic, they're not partisan. So I would say even the provincial Liberals on the Mayors' Council, with their pragmatic, non-partisan hats on, knew that unless the provincial Liberal platform included very specific and new provisions for transit, that we were just going to get more of the same, which is the bare minimum. They knew that wasn't good enough. So they agreed that we needed to do something different in the lead-up to and during the provincial election to apply real public pressure on all parties, not just the Liberals. (Interviewee 1)

This decision to apply pressure to all major parties through a public engagement campaign *before* a provincial election, rather than afterwards, contrasts sharply with the Mayors' Council's positioning during the period leading up to the 2015 Plebiscite. After the previous provincial election in 2013, in which Christy Clark won the premiership on a

platform which included a referendum requirement for new Lower Mainland transit funding sources, the Mayors' Council had effectively no leverage to resist their treatment by the Province as they struggled to gain public approval for the sizable regional funding source they were forced to commit to in the 2015 Plebiscite. Wanting to avoid the same situation in 2017, their perspective was that

...we have to make the need for provincial funding of transit in Metro Vancouver, it has to be part of the debate in the election...so let's spend some real money and some real time doing that, which is how the #CureCongestion campaign came to be. In general we wanted to influence the debate in the provincial election so that there would be an informed debate about the role of the Province in funding transit, and that would then get one or both parties to say, "OK, well I guess we'd better do something about this in our platform." So that the new government was ready to play ball right out of the gate. (Interviewee 1)

The ball game the Mayors' Council intended to play involved several demands. The first was that the incoming provincial government drop the plebiscite requirement, a central platform element of the previous election. According to one participant, during the planning of #CureCongestion, the 2015 Plebiscite

...was definitely still top of mind and fresh in the minds of the Mayors' Council, and I think it was one of the impetuses for the Mayors' Council to become more active in discussions during provincial and federal elections. Even if you go back to the provincial CureCongestion campaign, one of the asks of the provincial, all the parties, is to say, which party will commit to not forcing us into a referendum to get funding. Like, that was a direct ask that was a part of numerous asks as part of that campaign. So it was still very much in the minds of the Mayors' Council and shaping their thinking. (Interviewee 5)

The other demands of the first #CureCongestion campaign concentrated on support for the Pattullo Bridge replacement and SkyTrain upgrades, authorization of development cost charges, following through on matching the new federal PTIF funding, more HandyDart funding, and "working with the Mayors' Council to ensure that remaining operating and capital costs of the Vision are fully funded in a manner that is fair and equitable to Metro Vancouver taxpayers." (Mayors' Council, May 4, 2017a). While an essential precondition of these demands was the revocation of the plebiscite requirement, then, the ultimate goal in mind appears to have been the approval of Phase Two of the 10-Year Vision, to which all of the additional demands refer. The major goal

of the campaign, in other words, remained the filling of the funding gap for the 10-Year Plan.

The Mayors' Council's demands were first communicated to the BC Liberal government, and to the other parties, through a Party Questionnaire in which they were invited to detail how they would fulfill them if they were to gain power, as well as to respond to several additional questions regarding their commitment to supporting the 10-Year Vision. The responses were in turn published in a "#CureCongestion Voters Guide" two weeks before the election, giving voters an opportunity to see exactly where the parties stood on congestion-related and Lower Mainland transit issues before election day. This Voters Guide also included a summary table of major party commitments as expressed in the party platforms released on various dates in April. Aside from the Voters Guide, the major campaign activities of the Mayors' Council included media responses to each party's platform release, candidate briefings on the 10-Year Vision, a "Symptoms of Congestion" video which garnered over 420,000 social media views (Saltman, July 27, 2017), and a "#CureCongestion Day of Action" on May 2 (Mayors' Council, May 4, 2017c). Several weeks after the election, the Mayors' Council also released a 90-Day Action Plan oriented towards the incoming provincial government, which reiterated their central demands while adding more details about the level of funding expected and concrete timeframes for achieving each request (Mayors' Council, May 29, 2017).

5.3.2. #CureCongestion as a result of third-order policy learning

While it is clear that the immediate occasion for the #CureCongestion campaign was the perceived importance of the election, the nature of the demands expressed in the #CureCongestion Voters Guide and 90-Day Action Plan, as well as the features of the campaign itself, provide clear evidence of the Mayors' Council's learning from the 2015 Plebiscite. As revealed in discussions with study participants, the Council's reflection on the Plebiscite resulted not only in strategic adjustments to their own proposed regional funding sources, plan phasing, and working relationships within TransLink, all of which had helped them pursue their goals effectively in the immediate post-Plebiscite situation, but in a targeted intervention in the political situation determining the very terms of the debate over TransLink funding. Several features of the campaign demonstrated evidence of both policy paradigm change and politicization as

described by Wood (2015) and detailed above in Chapter 3. In particular, these features include:

1. the campaign's focus on building power and leverage with respect to other policy actors (i.e. the provincial government) as a way of solving the policy problem, rather than merely puzzling out further possible policy options to be implemented by the Mayors' Council,
2. the campaign's use of normative statements about what is fair, and rhetorical mobilization of a simplified policy concept (fighting congestion), more than complex rationalizations/explanations of its proposed investments or funding sources.
3. its orientation to a mostly external audience (political parties and the public) rather than a partly internal audience composed of policy experts

First, it is important to take into account that the demands on the provincial government made by the Mayors' Council for Phase Two funding during and immediately after #CureCongestion were more ambitious than those made for Phase One, and went beyond, rather than falling behind, existing intergovernmental precedents for cost-sharing of transit capital costs. Phase Two was much bigger than Phase One in absolute terms: including two large rapid transit projects which were centrepiece investments of the 10-Year Vision, it was almost four times larger and added up to over \$7.5 billion, whereas Phase One amounted to only \$2 billion. More importantly, however, using the language of a "Fair Share Funding" formula initially conceived by the Mayors' Council in the months following the end of the 2015 Plebiscite, the campaign ultimately called, in its post-election 90-Day Action Plan, for 40% of all capital projects in Phase Two to be funded by the provincial government, rather than merely 40% of those included in the federal PTIF announcement (Mayors' Council, May 29, 2017). The Mayors' Council funding strategy submission to the Province in 2016 (before the 10-Year Vision was split into three phases) argued that a proposed higher percentage of senior government capital contributions was to compensate for the fact that regional contributions would still have to cover 100% of the operating and life-cycle costs associated with the 10-Year Vision investments, making the traditional 33-33-33% capital allocation between the three levels of government unsustainable over the long-term given the growing demands on local governments with their limited tax base and taxing authority (Mayors' Council, April 29, 2016b, pp. 2-3), and the 2018 pre-budget submission to the provincial government after the #CureCongestion campaign echoed

this reasoning (Mayors' Council, Oct. 19, 2018b). For Phase One, however, the Mayors' Council was unable to insist on a higher provincial contribution, and relied on an almost 50% capital share contribution from the federal government to achieve the needed level of funding; #CureCongestion marked the first time the Mayors' Council would apply pressure to the Province to move beyond its assumed 33% capital contribution toward the 10-Year Vision.

This subtle, but important, alteration reflected a deeper change in how the policy goal of "filling the funding gap" was to be pursued by the Mayors' Council going forward. Rather than the Mayors' Council, and the region as a whole, being assumed responsible for raising additional funds or cutting expenditures to support necessary transit expansion, the Mayors' Council was now characterizing the Province as the party both capable of and responsible for increasing its funding contributions. The funding gap for the 10-Year Vision still needed to be filled, in other words, but it was no longer a merely *regional* funding gap (despite continuing to be called that), as the Province was being asked to contribute more in lieu of approving more regionally-based sources. Because of the timing of the campaign before the provincial election, the shoe was now on the other foot: the Mayors' Council was proposing terms to the provincial government. One participant clearly explained the logic behind their more assertive position, in which approving transit expansion was now the independent variable and the Province's choice of funding mechanism a dependent variable which voters could influence:

So it was just trying to change the terms of the debate so that it was no longer the Province or the federal government saying, "Oh look, you guys just have to figure out a way to pay for it, and maybe we'll come in with money afterwards." ... And, you know, the Plebiscite was another way of achieving the same thing, which is, if you can get access to the same kind of growth tax revenues that senior governments have, which is in this case sales tax, then you can fund it yourself. But if the Province isn't willing to grant us those taxation authorities, then they're going to have to provide that same revenue but as a grant. (Interviewee 1)

While this reality of fiscal federalism might have been entirely clear to TransLink policy-makers before the 2015 Plebiscite, its articulation and confident expression by local and regional elected officials in the Mayors' Council represented a paradigm shift in thinking about how regional transit investments can and should be financed. Moreover, the decision to use a public engagement campaign to pressure the prospective provincial government into making greater financial commitments represents evidence of

a different kind of policy learning on the part of the Mayors' Council from that which aided it in accomplishing the Phase One agreement. In 2016, the focus was still on determining, in collaboration with the TransLink Board, what regional funding tools should be pursued given the failure of the 0.5% sales tax, whereas in the 2017 #CureCongestion campaign, the focus was on gaining political leverage sufficient to make at least part of the regional funding share unnecessary by drawing on provincial tax room. The Mayors' Council learning process, consistent with Wood's (2015) concept of politicization, had moved from a state of "puzzling" to one of "powering," and this shift had been informed by reflection on why the Mayors' Council had been unable to negotiate effectively with the Province before and during the 2015 Plebiscite.

Second, as might be discerned from its title, in the #CureCongestion campaign the Mayors' Council relied more heavily on a rhetorical strategy centred on a single issue, congestion, than on detailed rational argumentation concerning the multitude of (very real) benefits brought by the 10-Year Plan it was attempting to fund. This was subtly different from the approach to influencing public opinion taken by the Mayors' Council's Better Transit and Transportation Coalition, which had concentrated on explaining the social and economic benefits of the 10-Year Plan that would be provided by the tax. However effective its advocacy coalition had been at doing this, the Mayors' Council had seen through the Plebiscite how ineffective such information and argumentation was at facing off the simplistic messaging employed by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, which reduced the Plebiscite to a contest over TransLink's popularity. The "No" campaign, spearheaded by Jordan Bateman and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF), appeared to have very limited financial and human resources, but was successful in influencing the terms upon which the debate about the 0.5% sales tax was held in the public sphere. The CTF used consistent, impactful messaging to control the story, rather than just the arguments, about the policy tool in question, and their use of anti-tax language to create emotional frustration with TransLink and local government actors resonated broadly with a public that had apparently already bought into the CTF's narrative of "taxpayer subjectivity" (Willmott, 2017). This is to say that, lacking the resources of the Mayors' Council's regional advocacy coalition—who had on their side, according to Bateman, "everyone...but the people" (Bateman et al., 2016)—the CTF instead drew upon a pre-existing anti-tax discourse coalition to defeat the proposed tax.

As a result of this experience, the Mayors' Council knew the importance, in its first public relations campaign since the Yes campaign in 2015, of utilizing effective discursive strategies that would take advantage of the lessons learned through the Plebiscite experience. One of those lessons was that the messaging would have to be simplified to a considerable extent in order to resonate with the public. The Mayors' Council, based on their reading of public opinion research that came out during and after the Plebiscite, chose to centre their messaging around the problem of congestion, despite the rejection of the so-called "Congestion Improvement Tax" in 2015:

The messaging that went out was consistent, and then taking that same consistent messaging out in these other campaigns, I think we were building on it. I don't think that was a negative during the [2015 Plebiscite] campaign. The negative was, TransLink wastes money, why do we give them more money? They'll find it another way, and they're bad, and don't vote for the tax. It was that. Nobody doubted, nobody said that congestion wasn't an issue...So I think that resonated with people then and it's continued to resonate, and it seems to have stuck, it was a good marketing campaign. (Interviewee 2)

It was clear from the participants in this study that some on the Mayors' Council considered this rhetorical approach predominantly emphasizing congestion to be, at least from a personal point of view, too reductive to accurately describe what they were fighting for in the 10-Year Plan. The focus on congestion was coming not from their own natural way of thinking about transportation policy, but from learning that sprang from the 2015 Plebiscite, leading them to a focus on clearer messaging:

Yeah, so on the personal level it's not my favourite language, because if you want to have a good thoughtful intellectual discussion about transportation investment, it oversimplifies what the work we're trying to do that involves many modes of transportation and working together in a dynamic region. But I think what came out of the Plebiscite was, there was a lot of public surveys done...and one thing came out of a lot of that information and polling data was, what really resonated with people was a frustration about growing congestion on the roads but also growing congestion on the transit system, whether it's crowded buses or bus passups and things like that. So, from a messaging point of view, that was the messaging that seemed to resonate the most with people, was catching peoples' eyes because it was speaking to something that was affecting people and their lives, whether they were a road user or a public transit user. (Interviewee 5)

Just as importantly, however, tied to the emphasis on congestion was a different way of framing the more detailed financial demands that would ultimately address the problem of congestion, this time based on an appeal for a "fair share" of provincial tax

revenues. As mentioned above, this language went back to the first six months after the 2015 Plebiscite results were announced, when the Mayors' Council was exploring its next steps to formulate a funding strategy to replace the failed 0.5% sales tax. At that time, instead of merely putting the matter in instrumental or rational terms (e.g. what regional funding source makes the most sense out of all the remaining options?), the problem was also translated into moral terms: the current cost-sharing arrangements are not fair, given the multiple financial burdens municipalities have to bear through their limited taxation tools (Mayors' Council, Jan. 27, 2016b, p. 2). While there was no occasion in 2016 or in the Phase One approval process to use "Fair Share" language in a public campaign, in 2017, this morally loaded term was extended to the emotionally charged problem of congestion: it's not fair that we have to suffer in congestion, and there's something we can all do about it (voting for a party that will actually fund transit). Like the rhetorical emphasis on congestion itself, which superseded the more in-depth rational explanations of the Mayors' Council's 10-Year Plan emphasized in the 2015 Yes campaign, this normative claims-making in support of a policy paradigm change is also evidence, according to Wood's framework, of politicization and third-order policy learning.

Third, the Mayors' Council's intended audience in the 2017 #CureCongestion campaign was appropriate for a situation in which politicization of the policy problem and a change of policy paradigms were the intention, rather than merely strategic adjustments to existing policy tools. In the 2015 Yes campaign, the audience was the public (voters in the Plebiscite) but so were the leaders of the Better Transit and Transportation Coalition, from student unions to chambers of commerce to labour unions. In #CureCongestion, the audience was also the public, but the ally it was seeking was the prospective provincial government. These two combinations—the public plus leaders of the regional transportation policy constituency, and the public plus politicians—lent two very different tones to the messaging used in the campaigns, and resulted in two different sets of contextual dynamics. In 2015, the Mayors' Council was drawing upon a resource-rich set of allies who were well versed in the details of transportation policy through their various formal and informal connections to TransLink's work in the region. In other words, the second half of its audience was leaders and policy experts in various fields, but not necessarily persons perceived as representative of the public as a whole.

In 2017, however, the Mayors' Council was targeting policy actors not necessarily well versed in transportation policy or related fields, but whose primary concern was the desires and needs of the public. Through the choice to target the incoming provincial government as a potential ally rather than relying on the consensus it had built regionally around the importance of expanding transit, the Mayors' Council transitioned from relying on a resource-rich, high-expertise milieu, which according to Wood is typical of advocacy coalitions and first- and second-order policy learning, to a partisan milieu marked by an inconsistent level of expertise, typical of situations in which politicization is strategically necessary to make policy change happen, and in which discourse coalitions rather than advocacy coalitions tend to be more effective. The transition to a new audience thus allowed them more freedom to explore alternative campaign strategies, such as the decision to prioritize anti-congestion messaging, which attached the Mayors' Council to a discourse coalition that was sure to include motorists and other voters highly represented on the No side in 2015:

So we knew that it was easy for the 20% that were regular transit users...But alone that's not going to be enough, especially if you're thinking about influencing the BC Liberal party, which at the time had a lot of seats in suburban Metro Vancouver, where car commuters are more prevalent. So we came up with language that we knew, based on public opinion research, to be more compelling to automobile users. That was the same reason why the sales tax was called the congestion whatever it was. But the difference between the two, obviously, is that we were asking people to support calling on the new provincial government to fund transit. (Interviewee 1)

The goal for the Mayors' Council remained the same, then—filling the funding gap for regional transit in order to gain for the region all of the benefits of transit expansion, not just relieving congestion—but the campaign strategy used to get there, as well as the audience chosen for their first public engagement campaign after the Plebiscite, were adapted to circumstances which required a different kind of coalition from that assembled in the Yes campaign in 2015.

All of the above features, as well as the obvious fact that it was explicitly oriented towards influencing a provincial election campaign, show that the #CureCongestion campaign might best be described as an initial attempt to politicize TransLink's funding gap, and thereby change the policy paradigm surrounding multi-level funding of transit investments, by making the funding gap's amelioration through provincial tax room rather than regional funding sources seem like a possible, and desirable, result of collective

action through voting. When speaking about the politicization of the funding gap, however, it is important not to conflate this with the politicization of specific transit planning or investment decisions, of which the mayors were accused by the BC Liberal government prior to the 2007 governance changes separating them from the TransLink Board (Holmes, June 23, 2004; Beatty, Dec. 3, 2004). In 2017, the Mayors' Council was not politicizing their policy problem (the regional funding gap) in the sense of subjecting the 10-Year Plan, which as Legacy and Stone (2019) have amply shown had been formulated through a legitimate process of consensus-building in collaboration with experienced transit planning staff, to the insular ends of their own individual municipalities. Rather, as elected officials representing the Metro Vancouver region as a whole, the Mayors' Council was collectively challenging the multi-level transit governance policy paradigm which operated on the assumption that it was fair for municipalities to bear the majority of the cost for transit and transportation improvements using their own limited funding capacities:

So, after the Plebiscite we wanted to change the game a little bit. We wanted to change the narrative around, I mean the Mayors' Council kind of let themselves be boxed into this position where transit expansion was 100% the responsibility of and at the discretion of local government with its limited funding tools. And we wanted to blow that open by saying, "Well, no, actually that's not realistic." When you're talking about capital expansion of major transit, the funding requirements are so high that the revenue tools that we've got available just aren't up to the task. We've been forced to use those revenue tools to fund what transit expansion we've been able to afford up 'til now, but it's not reasonable for these reasons, and therefore we need, basically, a new funding approach. (Interviewee 1)

This "new funding approach", or new funding paradigm, was considered instrumental to achieving the ultimate goal of filling the so-called "regional" funding gap for the 10-Year Plan. But the intention to change a policy paradigm is not enough to actually change it; the results of the campaign also matter. The next section explores the impact of the #CureCongestion campaign on subsequent efforts to complete the 10-Year Plan and on the assumed set of policy ideas undergirding multi-level transit funding arrangements in Metro Vancouver.

5.3.3. Immediate results of #CureCongestion

According to the participants in this study, and based on the commitments made by the incoming provincial government after the 2017 election, the first #CureCongestion campaign was a resounding success in achieving its demands, and brought the Mayors' Council most of the way to achieving an agreement with the provincial government on Phase Two of the 10-Year Plan, which was ultimately finalized in March 2018 (Mayors' Council, March 16, 2018). The specific ways in which it contributed to this outcome include the pressure it exerted on the incoming BC NDP government under John Horgan to approve development cost charges and further new regional funding sources without a plebiscite, the new policy precedent it set in terms of demanding and receiving a pre-election commitment by at least one party to a higher share of provincial capital funding, and possibly the impact of some of its demands, which were geographically specific to provincial ridings in the Lower Mainland that were flipped by the BC NDP, on the outcome of the closely contested provincial election itself.

As the Phase Two agreement would have been much more difficult to achieve if the BC NDP had not formed a government after the election, it is logical to tackle the latter impact first, as it may have been crucial even if it is impossible to verify conclusively. Because most observers, including the Mayors' Council, expected the outcome of the election to be another BC Liberal government, it was not actually anticipated that the #CureCongestion campaign would have an effect on which party was elected. The final seat counts on voting day were close enough, however, to make a coalition government with the BC Greens possible for either the BC NDP or the BC Liberals, a situation which eventually resulted in an NDP-Green coalition government forming in July after the failure of a throne speech by the BC Liberals. Because the throne speech was defeated by two votes, this raises the possibility that a very small number of seats—potentially only one—would have made the NDP-Green coalition impossible and allowed the BC Liberals to retain the confidence of the legislature.

With that in mind, it is worth considering the seats flipped, and redistributed seats won, by the NDP in the Lower Mainland in the 2017 election. Of these, three were in North Delta and Surrey, and two were in Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge, both areas south of the Fraser River in the Lower Mainland which stood to benefit tremendously from the projects included in the Mayors' Council's 10-Year Plan. Because of the Voters

Guide created by the Mayors' Council for #CureCongestion, residents of the Lower Mainland knew that the BC NDP had committed, in response to one of the Mayors' demands, to fast-tracking the replacement of the Pattullo Bridge, which was at risk of collapse due to age and deterioration and considered an essential project by residents of North Delta and Surrey. The Voters Guide also showed that the NDP had committed to ensuring funding for Phase Two of the 10-Year Plan, which included construction of light rail between Surrey and Langley and through some of the busiest neighbourhoods in Surrey. Both of these commitments, along with a promise to remove tolls on bridges crossing the Fraser River, represented salvos in the battle between the NDP and Liberals for suburban voters in the Lower Mainland which was reported on in the media throughout the election season (Shaw, Apr. 21, 2017). While it is impossible to say for sure which issues won the NDP these ridings, one journalist after the election claimed that the NDP had won precisely because of their focus on "a whole bunch of ridings in the suburbs and in Vancouver, areas where transit and transportation are of utmost importance" (Baldrey, Mar. 22, 2018), and similar analyses were prevalent in light of the BC NDP's victory in additional suburban seats south of the Fraser River in the 2020 provincial election (Chan, Oct. 26, 2020). Failing to win any one of these five suburban seats in 2017 would have taken away the chance for the NDP to form a government, and thus made following up on their 10-Year Plan related commitments in 2017 and 2018 impossible.

Fortunately for the Mayors' Council, however, the NDP were able to form a government after the election, and it was clear to the Mayors' Council early on that the #CureCongestion campaign had impacted the extent to which transit funding for the Lower Mainland was a priority for the party:

The evaluation of the 2017 provincial election was, it was a giant success. That's not just optimism bias, that was the appraisal of senior officials in the NDP who said, "Actually, that was important for us. We realized we had to respond to that by talking about transit, and we did change the way that we ended up talking about transit in the election, which then led to us including that in the platform." Which then led to you guys having a government with 40% provincial contribution towards all projects in the 10-Year Vision, which is much, much more than the BC Liberals ever committed, and much more than any provincial government anywhere in Canada was even close to committing. So, the Mayors were very clear that yeah, that worked. (Interviewee 1)

The first success of the Mayors' Council's campaign was persuading all of the major parties to respond to and participate in the Party Questionnaire, which also impacted the specific elements of the platforms released by the parties in April. The result of this in the post-election period was firstly a greater ease in gaining approval for regional funding sources, and secondly the NDP was motivated to follow through on its campaign promise to fund 40% of the entire Phase Two component of the 10-Year Plan due to its inclusion in their platform. The NDP's victory thus opened a path to firm up the successes made through the Mayors' Council's strategic learning from the 2015 Plebiscite in Phase One, and also to explore reframing basic precedents about intergovernmental cost sharing for transit at the same time. As one participant put it:

I do think the CureCongestion campaign was a big part of the success in positioning ourselves in a good spot to lead to Phase 2 which was a much more substantial phase of investment there, and led to a variety of what I would say were smaller funding sources to help be able to fund that, along with a continued greater percentage capital investment from the provincial and federal government. That precedent had been started in Phase 1. (Interviewee 5)

The first impact, on the ease of approving regional funding sources after the election, cleared up two particular issues related to the regional funding share for the 10-Year Plan. First, the legislative authorization for development cost charges was granted in May 2018 (Coriolis Consulting Corp., Aug. 1, 2018), bringing to an end the concern that some of the Phase One improvements would have to be rolled back. Second, these development cost charges were also utilized as part of the regional funding share for Phase Two, along with a new gas tax which the Mayors' Council was able to add in part because the NDP had removed the plebiscite requirement:

So Development Cost Charges were allowed, so that was one new funding source. There was also a gas tax that was also applied as a funding source that allowed the funding gap to be achieved. The Mayors' Council also did on their own account, given some new funding sources were being added, looked to some adjustments to property taxes and transit fares too. So yeah, it was kind of a mix there, but two of those four funding sources needed approval provincially for the Mayors' Council to be able to enact, and that happened post-CureCongestion campaign. (Interviewee 5)

The precise mix of regional funding sources for Phase Two was worked out, in negotiation with the Province, by the Mayors' Council and TransLink Board's Joint Committee on Transportation Planning and Funding, which was the result of the July

2017 renaming of the Mayors' Council's Funding Strategy Committee and the Board's Investment Committee who had been meeting concurrently since before the provincial election (Mayors' Council, July 27, 2017). As in Phase One, the regional funding mix involved compromise on the part of the Mayors' Council, with another proposal to transfer the region's share of the provincial carbon tax to the 10-Year Plan being refused, this time by the NDP, and further property tax and fare hikes approved instead. Because of the federal government's \$2.3b PTIF commitment and the provincial government's pre-election commitment to pay 40% of all Phase Two capital costs, however, the total regional share that needed to be filled by these funding sources was already much smaller, and as with the Phase One fare and property tax increases, there was little public outcry after their approval.

The second and more important impact of #CureCongestion, the ultimate approval by the Province of a 40% contribution to all capital costs in the Phase Two plan, was finalized in the final Phase Two agreement signed in March 2018 (Mayors' Council, March 16, 2018b). The factor which led to this approval and to the approval of the smaller regional funding sources was simple: as a result of the #CureCongestion campaign, the discussion on transit commitments for the Lower Mainland took place in public before the election rather than afterwards, so the provincial government came out of the election having made specific promises that it afterwards had to fulfill:

Yeah, I think [CureCongestion] did [help get legislative approval for funding sources], because I think it forced all of the provincial parties to have to be more specific during the election about what actions and how they were going to work afterwards. So I think by forcing the question, getting more specific things during the campaign, it ultimately led that when we had the minority government post-election, that the coalition between the NDP and the Greens, that made certain commitments related to the CureCongestion campaign, that there was less flexibility, they had made those commitments, and now the Mayors' Council had something more concrete to follow up with there. (Interviewee 5)

The reality which resulted, the passing in September 2018 of a final tri-government agreement on Phase Two of the 10-Year Plan with a \$2.55b capital contribution from the provincial government and over \$2b in capital funding from the federal government (Saltman, Sept. 4, 2018), was an unprecedented achievement for Metro Vancouver. The Mayors' Council's more confident demands and more assertive posture toward their senior government partners had worked, a success which

encouraged the Mayors' Council to think even bigger during the next stage of their journey of recovery from the failure of the 2015 Plebiscite.

5.3.4. The road to permanent transit funding

Within a few months of the final tri-government approval of Phase Two in September 2018 and the 2019 federal election, the Mayors' Council welcomed a new set of mayors elected in the November municipal elections and appointed a new Chair and Vice-Chair, both of whom were participants in this study. Before the new year it also approved a new set of goals in its 2019 work plan, including priorities to "advance the remaining elements of the 10-Year Vision, and update the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) to guide future investments and priorities beyond the Vision, all within an environment of coming transformative change in transportation technology" (Mayors' Council, Dec. 13, 2018, p. 21). To accomplish the former goal, the work plan recommitted to the focus on intergovernmental advocacy begun in the #CureCongestion campaign, stating that "with a federal election planned for October, 2019, and a minority provincial government always mindful of electoral realities, the Mayors' Council will actively plan to influence both governments both before and through the election periods to ensure that there is strong senior government support" (Ibid., p. 22). In 2019, this commitment materialized in another #CureCongestion campaign building on the precedent for intergovernmental cost sharing set in the Phase One and Two agreements.

While this campaign, and the demands made by the Mayors' Council through it, was no longer a direct result of lessons learnt from the 2015 Plebiscite, it did represent a continuation of the approach adopted in the 2017 #CureCongestion campaign, which was based on learning from the Plebiscite:

I think [the 2019 campaign] was just a continuation of a change of strategy with the Mayors' Council that all evolved after the Plebiscite...It really was about the Mayors' Council wanting to become more active in intergovernmental discussions provincially and federally in this regard, in ways that didn't happen and didn't exist before, and be more assertive and be more aggressive in our work there. (Interviewee 5)

Through the campaign, the Mayors' Council would use its more assertive posture to call for a reconsideration of the temporal scope and character of the federal government's role in funding regional transit projects in Metro Vancouver. While the federal Liberal government had proactively come through with large amounts of funding for projects in both Phase One and Phase Two of the 10-Year Plan, this approach was typical of multilevel funding agreements for infrastructure in Canadian cities in that it was targeted predominantly to large capital projects, and given at the discretion of the federal government according to federal timelines (Horak, 2012, p. 343; Owen, Apr. 9, 2019); this was funding which could not be relied upon year after year for the rest of the 10-Year Plan or future investment plans, such as those formulated under the new Regional Growth Strategy. What the Mayors' Council now wanted the federal government to entertain was the idea that a certain level of disbursement of federal funds for transit in large Canadian cities such as Metro Vancouver should be made permanent:

...our big ask was for this transit fund that would be able to provide a more predictable funding source over the long term for transit agencies, and that's what we were really trying to get on the table. So, it was a relatively new idea federally. (Interviewee 5)

This proposed funding source was called a "Congestion Relief Fund", echoing the "Congestion Improvement Tax" of 2015 and the "#CureCongestion" campaign title chosen in 2017.

The methods used to promote the Congestion Relief Fund were similar to those employed in 2017, but included new elements. First, the Mayors' Council concentrated more on voter mobilization in this iteration, and included a website and email tool for voters to send messages to their MP candidates (Bula, May 23, 2019) along with a Voters Guide based on a questionnaire sent to federal parties similar to that provided in 2017 (Mayors' Council, Oct. 16, 2019). Secondly, members of the Mayors' Council made a trip on April 9 to Ottawa to attend "Transit Day on the Hill", an event organized by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) which had a similar interest in promoting a federal framework for consistent funding of transit projects in large Canadian cities:

It was also something that the FCM was working on around the same time. They kind of call us, you know, us and our region wanted to push that concept and the FCM also wanted to push a similar concept, so I think everyone in the first big regions to really jump on this idea of creating this permanent transit federal fund. So, really I think that 2019 was kind of the initial work on that of planting that seed, getting that

idea into even just the vocabulary of the federal government's elected officials and bureaucrats. (Interviewee 5)

While it may be possible to argue that this seed was indeed planted in Ottawa through the trip made to Ottawa in April 2019, in contrast to the 2017 #CureCongestion campaign, the immediate impacts of the 2019 campaign as a whole were considered to be minimal by the Mayors, with their advocacy receiving less media engagement and less capacity to apply the pressure of public opinion to the federal parties' platforms being earned. The mayors generally interpreted this as a result of Vancouver's relatively minor role in the political scene in eastern Canada:

We rolled out a similar campaign in the federal election and I would say that the evaluation of that was, it probably wasn't as effective, mostly because it's really hard to influence a federal election when you're just one tiny city...so we were kind of like a pimple on the federal election debate stage, we never really got national news pickup. (Interviewee 1)

You know, I think as mayors, or anybody in British Columbia, we recognize how difficult it is to get our message to Ottawa. And I know that certainly locally it's maybe a little bit easier, but to get our message to Ottawa across the Rockies, and when we're competing with Toronto, we're competing with Montreal, we're competing with large centres there that have equally important projects that they need to get done. (Interviewee 2)

As a result, while the federal Liberal government gave no negative indications about future support for Metro Vancouver public transit investment, the Mayors' Council would have to wait for the next federal budget in March 2020 to make their case again. This they did with another trip to Ottawa to promote their pre-budget submission, which called again for a Congestion Relief Fund providing permanent funding for transit in Metro Vancouver, as well as a "transition fund" to cover the remainder of Phase Three of the 10-Year Plan and funding for electrification of TransLink's bus fleet (Mayors' Council, Feb. 4, 2020).

Unfortunately for those who made this trip, however, there would be no immediate chance to see the results of their lobbying efforts, as the announcement of a state of emergency due to the exploding COVID-19 pandemic led the federal government to delay submitting a full yearly budget to the following year, at which point the financial outlook for both all three levels of government and for TransLink had been upended by the public health crisis. This left their advocacy efforts in a state of flux:

You know, I think the jury's still out in terms of where this will all lead us, and obviously COVID-19 has turned public transit on its head right now. But I think the strategies of even how we approached COVID relief has been impacted by the Mayors' Council wanting to be a little bit more present, a lot more active, and more aggressive than we were before the Plebiscite. I think that, at least for the time being and I think into the future, I see that continuing to be the approach that the Mayors' Council, and it's been more successful and it's led to greater partnerships provincially and federally than we were seeing before. (Interviewee 5)

At the end of the study period, therefore, the Mayors' Council's horizon in terms of intergovernmental advocacy had been vastly expanded, but results had not yet been produced on their most recent demands, which were the most ambitious to date. The policy paradigm for what was possible in terms of intergovernmental transit funding had certainly changed, but more work was required to make permanent what had been accomplished.

Chapter 6.

Conclusion

By the time the government of B.C. declared a state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Mayors' Council had travelled far from their defeated outlook following the failure of the 2015 Plebiscite. Having agreed, after seriously considering stepping away from TransLink governance altogether, to continue in their efforts to fund the 10-Year Plan despite the many difficulties in their relationship with the provincial government, they learned several tactical and strategic lessons from the failure of the 2015 Plebiscite which enabled them in 2016 to creatively utilize their limited political, relational, and financial resources to achieve a funding agreement on Phase One of their 10-Year Plan with the provincial and federal governments. In 2017, building on this success, they transitioned from a process of puzzling out next steps to a phase of "powering", building political leverage which they had lacked in the 2015 Plebiscite period through a campaign to communicate a new approach to transit funding policy centred around the political possibility of higher senior government contributions to regional transit investments. This campaign, titled #CureCongestion, was effective in eliciting commitments to various elements of the 10-Year Plan from potential governing parties, which were utilized in 2018 to reach an agreement on the much larger Phase Two of the 10-Year Plan. These senior government commitments were unprecedented in the recent history of Metro Vancouver, and the manner in which they were obtained—through active intergovernmental advocacy and public engagement—represented a shift in the policy paradigm framing the horizon of possible options for Canadian municipal and regional governance bodies seeking new sources of transit funding.

This paradigm shift—a result of the Mayors' Council's policy learning following the 2015 Plebiscite—in turn gave the Mayors' Council the confidence, by 2019, to travel to Ottawa and plant the seed of a new idea: a permanent "congestion relief fund" which Canadian cities could rely on year after year to fund public transit projects. It is impossible to tell what the ultimate impact of their second #CureCongestion campaign and lobbying efforts would have been on federal transit funding policy had the COVID-19 pandemic not interrupted the 10-Year Vision and the ordinary functioning of transit agency finances across Canada, but it should be noted that the federal Liberal

government did come through, a year into the pandemic, with a commitment to starting a \$3 billion per year Permanent Transit Fund for transit projects in Canadian cities, set to begin in 2026-27 (Jones, Feb. 10, 2021). While the Mayors' Council has acknowledged that the jury is still out on whether and how this fund will actually be implemented after additional election cycles (Zussman, Feb. 10, 2021), this announcement is a highly encouraging development, and one in which the Mayors' Council's 2019 and 2020 lobbying efforts in Ottawa, which emerged from their learning process following the 2015 Plebiscite, certainly played some part. Moreover, the relative speed with which the federal and provincial governments worked together to agree on Safe Restart operating funding in response to the devastation of TransLink's financial situation following the pandemic-driven collapse in ridership (Government of B.C., Sept. 18, 2020) also warrants further reflection, especially when seen in the context of the Mayors' Council's intensive intergovernmental relations work conducted over the previous five years following the 2015 Plebiscite.

Looking back to the assumptions under which TransLink was created by the BC NDP government in 1999, the conclusion of this thesis that the Mayors' Council's learning from the 2015 Plebiscite produced a public re-evaluation of what was realistic in terms of intergovernmental transit funding arrangements appears to contradict the idea that TransLink's independence in terms of transportation policy decision-making should be matched by responsibility for raising the money for necessary investments using financing tools primarily under its own control (McDougall, 2017). While TransLink's failure to acquire stronger regional taxation powers through the 2015 Plebiscite was disappointing for many, one unintended consequence may have been the repositioning of the region's elected officials on the Mayors' Council in an intergovernmental stance better suited to the world after COVID-19, which shows signs of trending towards a stronger role for senior government in many facets of everyday life including transportation. Only time will tell, however, whether the progress that has been made on this front for Metro Vancouver will last.

Another ramification of this conclusion is that it is indeed possible for local and regional governance actors to influence the policy motivations of senior government partners by counteracting the negativity bias that leads them to practice blame avoidance (Weaver, 1986). The 2017 #CureCongestion campaign not only gave the incumbent provincial government ample opportunity to practice credit claiming rather

than blame avoidance with respect to transit investments, but made it more dangerous for them not to do so by encouraging the opposition party to take the credit instead, as demonstrated to the public through the #CureCongestion Voters' Guide (Mayors' Council, May 4, 2017c). This was only possible, however, once the Mayors' Council had learned, in part through the experience of the 2015 Plebiscite, the importance of taking a political approach to finding funding in conjunction with their use of public-facing rational argumentation supporting their consensus-based progressive mobility framework (Legacy and Stone, 2019). The paradigm shift that made this move from "puzzling" to "powering" possible resulted in part from changes in the dynamics of blame avoidance surrounding TransLink's multi-level governance framework, pointing to the potential for further connections between Hall's third-order policy learning (understood in Wood's sense as politicization) and blame avoidance in multi-level governance contexts. Future case studies in other city-regions may be able to discern patterns in this relationship, especially since senior governments in G20 countries have recently been more willing to engage in deficit spending on transportation to support economic recovery (Fried et al., June 2021) and therefore, presumably, to claim credit for investments in urban infrastructure.

Another area that warrants further attention is the potential longevity of TransLink's corporate (or corporatist) regional transportation governance framework established initially in 2007 through the reforms imposed by Minister of Transportation Kevin Falcon. This research showed how the Mayors' Council's learning led them to bend their working relationship with the corporate TransLink Board to their own purposes after the failure of the 2015 Plebiscite, enabling them to continue rolling out transportation investments while creating positive momentum for the agency in subsequent years. However, while the Mayors' Council was able to make progress on smaller pieces of the 10-Year Plan through joint meetings and a renewal of close collaboration on funding strategy beginning in 2016, these *ad hoc* arrangements remain informal and therefore possibly unstable in future crisis situations. Moreover, given that the Mayors' Council is still not clearly or solely responsible for all aspects of TransLink policy, the lack of public accountability for TransLink decision-making remains, a problem that undermined the agency's legitimacy with the public during the 2015 Plebiscite. To date the Mayors' Council has not been successful in lobbying the provincial government for governance changes, and if this stalemate continues there may come a

time when the willingness of the public to make significant financial contributions to an agency run in part by a corporate Board will be put to the test once again. Further study of other regions with corporatized transportation governance frameworks in search of additional transit funding may illuminate some of the challenges that lie ahead for TransLink.

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Appendix A.

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Appendix B.

Chronological Summary of Events

Date	Description of Event
May 14, 2013	BC Provincial Election: Christy Clark elected PM. BC Liberals form majority government.
May 1, 2014	BC Liberal government passes Bill 22, which includes new changes to TransLink's governance structure, and Bill 23, which puts into effect a referendum requirement for new TransLink funding sources. Mayors' Council asked to agree on a detailed 10-Year Plan and new funding source(s) by June 2014.
May 23, 2014	Federal Conservative government approves \$2.76b expansion of gas tax funding for B.C. municipalities, including \$1.47b for TransLink capital projects.
June 13, 2014	Mayors' Council votes in favour of approving a detailed 10-Year Plan and funding source as requested by Provincial government. BC Liberal government publicly rejects reallocation of regional share of carbon tax to TransLink as a funding source.
June 26, 2014	Mayors' Council gets approval from BC Liberal government to push date of Plebiscite from November 2014 to March/April 2015.
Dec. 3, 2014	BC Liberal government advises public that the \$1.6b 33% provincial contribution to the 10-Year Plan's capital projects should not be counted on, and that the difference should be made up with "existing levers" such as increasing property taxes.
Dec. 12, 2014	Mayors' Council votes to approve Plebiscite question, which puts forward a 0.5% sales tax as the major new funding source for 10-Year Plan.
Dec. 18, 2014	BC Liberals approve Plebiscite question proposed by the Mayors' Council.
Jan. 18, 2015	Gregor Robertson (Vancouver) replaces Richard Walton as Chair of Mayors' Council; Linda Hepner (Surrey) is elected Vice-Chair.
March 16, 2015	Distribution of mail-in voting packages begins
May 29, 2015	Plebiscite voting period ends (mail-in deadline)
July 2, 2015	Plebiscite results made public: 62% No, 38% Yes.
Oct. 19, 2015	Federal Election: Justin Trudeau replaces Stephen Harper as PM, federal Liberals form majority government.
Nov. 25, 2015	Mayors' Council makes public "Fair Share" funding formula resolution directed at federal and provincial governments, focusing on "life cycle costs" rather than capital costs. (This is the 50/33/17 formula)
Dec. 15, 2015	BC Liberal government announces no TransLink governance changes will be made in light of Plebiscite results.
Jan. 27, 2016	Mayors' Council creates Fair Share Funding Strategy sub-committee
March 23, 2016	Federal Liberal government's first yearly budget indicates willingness to upgrade 33% contribution cap for 10-Year Plan Phase One transit capital projects to 50%. BC Liberal government rejects upgrading their own 33% contribution cap, suggesting region should hold another vote on transit funding.

April 29, 2016	Mayors' Council writes to Province proposing revised 10-Year Plan with property tax hikes, fare hikes, mobility pricing, sale of city and TransLink-owned lands, and development cost charges as potential funding sources; asks BC Liberal government to reconsider allowing regional carbon tax as funding source, and to consider giving Mayors' Council greater control over TransLink governance.
May 19, 2016	Mayors' Council writes to Minister of Infrastructure and Communities Sohi, requesting federal PTIF funding
May 26, 2016	Mayors' Council Funding Strategy publicly announced; BC Liberal government publicly rejects carbon tax and governance requests, and casts doubt on funding 33% of the whole 10-Year Plan.
June 15, 2016	Mayors' Council, BC Liberal government, and federal Liberal government agree on funding contributions to Phase One of the 10-Year Plan, incorporating Mayors' Council's concessions on property taxes and fare increases.
Nov. 23, 2016	Mayors' Council votes to approve Phase One plan and funding sources after completing public consultations.
Jan. 26, 2017	Mayors' Council directs Funding Committee to continue to pursue a fed-prov-regional funding announcement for Phase 2 before BC Election, but also to "develop a draft public engagement campaign designed to inform residents about the importance and role of the Provincial Government in supporting the 10-Year Vision."
March 23, 2017	Federal Liberal government's yearly budget commits to funding \$2.2b (40%) of the 10-Year Plan's Phase Two capital projects.
March 31, 2017	BC Liberal government commits to matching federal contributions to Phase Two of 10-Year Plan, bringing its share of capital contributions to 40% for Phase Two.
April 5, 2017	Mayors' Council launches #CureCongestion campaign in run-up to provincial election; publishes scorecard ranking election platforms of major parties on regional transit and transportation funding. Also sends out media release restating opposition to another referendum, and proposing use of provincial property and transfer taxes to fund 10-year plan.
May 2, 2017	MC leads "Cure Congestion Day of Action"
May 9, 2017	BC Provincial Election: Results announced, but outcome unclear due to near-tie between BC Liberals and BC NDP.
May 29, 2017	BC NDP announce confidence and supply agreement with BC Greens to potentially form minority government.
May 29, 2017	Mayors' Council releases "90-Day Action Plan to #CureCongestion" aimed at incoming provincial government.
June 29, 2017	BC Liberal government defeated in confidence vote on throne speech; Governor-General of BC invites John Horgan to form minority government.
July 27, 2017	Funding Strategy Committee renamed to Joint Committee on Transportation Planning and Funding (w/ TransLink Board Investment Committee)
August 25, 2017	BC NDP government announces end to bridge tolls in the Lower Mainland, with lost revenue and debt servicing to be funded from provincial tax streams.
Oct. 19, 2017	Mayors' Council releases backgrounder calling for "a fair funding arrangement": 40% provincial capital share and reallocation of provincial carbon tax to Phase 2
Feb. 16, 2018	BC NDP government announces it will pay for entire cost of Pattullo Bridge replacement, previously a component of the 10-Year Plan.
March 16, 2018	Mayors' Council and BC NDP government reach agreement to fund Phase Two of 10-Year Plan.
June 28, 2018	Mayors' Council and TransLink Board vote to give final approval to Phase Two of 10-Year Plan.

Sep. 4, 2018	BC PM John Horgan and PM Justin Trudeau confirm bilateral financial backing for Phase Two of 10-Year Plan.
Nov. 9, 2018	Mayors' Council 2019 Work Plan includes developing a Federal Election Outreach and Engagement Strategy.
Nov. 22, 2018	Jonathan Cote (New Westminster) elected Chair of Mayors' Council; Jack Froese (Township of Langley) elected Vice-Chair.
March 20, 2019	Federal Liberal government budget announces increase to federal gas tax transfers over the next year, with potential of extra \$130m for TransLink's 10-Year Plan.
April 9, 2019	Mayors' Council announces re-launch of #CureCongestion campaign in run-up to federal election, asking potential governing parties for stable, secure transit funding (i.e. a "Congestion Relief Fund") past the end of its 10-Year Plan. Platform developed in partnership with FCM.
May 7, 2019	Delegation of 6 Mayors' Council Members, CEO and Executive Director participate in "Transit Day on the Hill" in Ottawa
Oct. 21, 2019	Federal Election: Justin Trudeau re-elected Prime Minister, federal Liberals form minority government.
February 4, 2020	Members of Mayors' Council fly to Ottawa to lobby for Congestion Relief Fund as federal Liberal government budget is being drafted.
March 13, 2020	Federal Liberal government declares national state of emergency, delaying release of 2020-2021 budget.
March 18, 2020	Province of BC declares state of emergency due to COVID-19.