

# The Challenges of Regional Governance in the Greater Vancouver Region

Presented by Jim McDavid and Thea Vakil  
May 28, 2011

## Overview

- Background
- The 2009 Symposium in Richmond
- Key Issues Identified in the Symposium
- Governance Options
- Special Purpose Bodies
- Next Steps

## Background

- Metro Vancouver (Greater Vancouver Regional District) is one of 27 regional districts in British Columbia and was established in 1967.
- There are 22 municipalities in Metro Vancouver.
- Metro Vancouver is governed by a Board consisting of elected officials from the member municipalities, one Electoral Area and one First Nation.
- Municipal councils appoint members to the Board.
- Board members have one vote for every 20,000 individuals in their constituent municipalities up to a maximum of five votes. Directors to the Board are appointed each year.

3

## Richmond Symposium: Background

- General issues identified before the 2009 Symposium on the Challenges of Regional Governance in the Greater Vancouver Region:
  - The sustainability of the Board's current decision making structure in light of the increasing complexity of issues
  - The effects of creating special purpose bodies e.g. Translink that have limited connections with other regional planning and service delivery functions
  - The challenge of adapting a bottom-up cooperative decision-making culture designed for facilitating regional service delivery to complex regional governance issues

4

## Key Issues Identified at the Symposium (1)

- Who speaks for the Greater Vancouver Region?
  - Only 27 percent of the regional population resides in Vancouver proper.
  - The members of the Metro Board are not directly elected and have limited visibility regionally.
  - In 1993 Walter Hardwick recommended that the Greater Vancouver Regional District review the process for populating the Board with a view to directly electing at least some Board members.

5

## Key Issues Identified at the Symposium(2)

- Transportation planning and service delivery are no longer local government functions in the Greater Vancouver Region.
  - In 2007, a panel appointed by the Provincial Government recommended a new governance structure that would include non-elected officials on the Translink Board.
  - The rationale:
    - “We believe that transportation infrastructure and services lag far behind the growing needs for efficient movement of people and goods throughout the Lower Mainland. In addition, decision-making at the Translink Board has proven to be difficult, slow and marked by the division of local political interests rather than regional consensus building”

6

## Key Issues Identified at the Symposium(3)

- Are the existing decision-making rules for other regional districts appropriate for Metro Vancouver?
  - The current approach to regional district governance is based on this principle: decisions should be consensus-based, and rely on cooperation among municipalities to construct mechanisms for the regional delivery of services.
  - Is a consensus-driven approach appropriate in a region where emerging issues are complex, dynamic, and in some cases divisive?
  - Is a different balance needed between respecting the bottom-up interests of municipalities and the interests and issues that affect the whole region?

7

## Key Issues Identified at the Symposium(4)

- What about amalgamation?
  - Given the continued interest in amalgamating police services in the Greater Vancouver Region, and the current questions about regional governance, one option that will continue to be discussed in amalgamating municipalities.
  - Can the existing system adapt to an environment where decisions are typically made more quickly on problems that can escalate quickly to become political risks?
  - The complexity of the current governance system is itself a potential disadvantage - it cannot be described or understood easily and it resists efforts to change it piecemeal.
  - Provincial governments elsewhere in Canada have been known to simplify local government structures unilaterally.

8

## Governance Options

- Possible governance options that could be considered separately or in combination include:
  - Restructure the Metro Vancouver Board by mixing directly elected and indirectly elected Board members.
  - Elect the Chair of the Board directly.
  - Create a voting system that better balances regional and local interests.
  - Extend the time Board members serve from one to three years to coincide with municipal election cycles.
  - Establish conflict resolution processes to deal with disagreements among member municipalities.

9

## Special Purpose Bodies

- The implications of Translink for land use planning and service delivery point to the need for exploring political and organizational options:
  - A concerted effort to convince the government to reverse its decision and return to the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Board as originally contemplated.
  - Accept the reality of Translink but push for a change in how members are appointed to increase the influence of the region and for greater accountability of the Commissioner to the region.
  - Create a process for integrating land use planning with transportation planning and service delivery.

10

## Next Steps

- The Richmond Symposium envisioned several kinds of activities to further this governance agenda:
  - Focus on particular issues or problems and prepare discussion papers that canvass what we know.
  - Use the results to further discussion at symposia or other events.
  - Engage key stakeholders to move issues forward toward potential resolution of specific issues.
  - The governance issues in the Greater Vancouver Region may not be resolvable within the current structure.

11

## Key Issues Discussed Today: Governance

- Governance:
  - Who speaks for the Greater Vancouver Region?
    - Restructure the Metro Vancouver Board by mixing directly elected and indirectly elected Board members?
    - Elect the Chair of the Board directly?

12

## Key Issues Discussed Today: Governance

- Governance:
  - Are the existing decision-making rules for other regional districts appropriate for Metro Vancouver?
    - Create a voting system that better balances regional and local interests?
    - Extend the time Board members serve from one to three years to coincide with municipal election cycles?
    - Establish conflict resolution processes to deal with disagreements among member municipalities?

13

## Key Issues Discussed Today: Governance

- Governance:
  - What about amalgamation of services (police)?

14

## Key Issues Discussed Today

- Special Purpose Body
  - Transportation planning and service delivery are no longer local government functions in the Greater Vancouver Region?

15

## Key Issues Discussed Today: Governance

- Governance:
  - Who speaks for the Greater Vancouver Region?
    - Restructure the Metro Vancouver Board by mixing directly elected and indirectly elected Board members?
    - Elect the Chair of the Board directly?
  - Are the existing decision-making rules for other regional districts appropriate for Metro Vancouver?
    - Create a voting system that better balances regional and local interests?
    - Extend the time Board members serve from one to three years to coincide with municipal election cycles?
    - Establish conflict resolution processes to deal with disagreements among member municipalities?
  - What about amalgamation of services (police)?
- Special Purpose Body
  - Transportation planning and service delivery are no longer local government functions in the Greater Vancouver Region?

16