

Region's mayors support GST payment plan

Leaders hoping federal government gives 1% GST cut to them to pay for transit, infrastructure

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Toronto Mayor David Miller is being criticized by the federal finance minister for his one-penny plan, but York Region mayors are standing behind him.

Mr. Miller has started a campaign to get Ottawa to give the one percentage point it planned to cut from the GST to municipalities instead, to help pay for transit and infrastructure repairs.

"That's a good idea. Any source of sustainable funding is good," Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Barrow said.

Noting projects such as the region's Viva transit system are too big to fund through property taxes, Mr. Barrow said the plan would



DAVE BARROW: Richmond Hill mayor would welcome funding for Viva.



PHYLLIS MORRIS: Aurora mayor says it's time to break piggy bank and get pennies back.



MARGARET BLACK: King Township woman likes plans simplicity.

help towns and cities without raising taxes.

"Why not channel it differently, rather than reduce it? I'm not sure we notice the one-cent difference," Mr. Barrow said.

The Toronto mayor's plan could see cities across the country get as much \$5 billion between them.

Unlike the usual demands

municipal politicians make on provincial and federal counterparts, the campaign will go to Toronto residents via billboards, transit shelter posters, a website, bumper stickers, buttons and an online petition residents can sign.

Not afraid to use a possible federal election as leverage, Mr. Miller said he will back candidates who

support the plan.

The website will list MPs who support the One-Cent Now campaign.

The move aims to put pressure on Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives, who didn't make a dent in Liberal popularity in Ontario's urban areas during last

year's election, particularly Toronto and the surrounding municipalities.

Aurora Mayor Phyllis Morris attended the One-Cent Now launch in Toronto Monday and threw her support behind it.

"I don't know what mayors are supposed to do — keep sitting quietly and keep being downloaded (upon)? If you don't ask, you don't get. Let's break into the piggy bank and get some pennies back," Ms Morris said.

The struggle between the three tiers of government is nothing new, but never before has a national campaign been started on behalf of cities across the country. Fiscal balance between levels of government is long overdue, Georgina Mayor Robert Grossi said.

"If the federal government doesn't provide something — whether it's one cent of a GST or some other direct payments to municipalities, especially growth municipalities — then we need to do something very drastic," Mr. Grossi said. "I'm prepared to do whatever needs to be done to stop growth in its tracks (to deal with this inequity)."

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