

Resurrected PST set to haunt business

In the spirit of everything old is new again, the **BC Liberal** government presents the return of the PST. Set to hit the pocket books of you and your businesses again starting April 1, 2013, Son of PST will be rolled out in new livery and a touch of lipstick here and there, but in the long run it's not markedly different from its predecessor.

All of your favourite exemptions and politically motivated work-arounds appear to have survived

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what will be nearly a three-year stint in limbo. Bet on more being promised and/or shoehorned in as the province rolls into election year 2013.

Bottom line, however, Son of PST will still be worse for business than the HST, and it will erode the competitive edge of companies in a lot of sectors across B.C. for years to come.

On the bright side, the new PST will give businesses online account access to register and make tax payments. On the less bright side, the province's businesses will again be saddled with two taxes and all the cumbersome complications, loopholes and duplications that combination will unavoidably bring.

In addition to the \$1.6 billion in HST transition money the province must now repay Ottawa, the **Canadian Federation of Independent Business** estimates that switching back to the PST will cost the average small business owner approximately \$3,000. The province will also be on the hook for the additional bureaucracy that must be rebuilt in B.C. to administer the PST.

B.C.'s finance minister **Kevin Falcon** is right when he says the retooled PST is still inferior to the more equitable HST. It remains, as he once described it, a stupid tax.

Bowing to the will of an electorate already incensed by how the HST was initially sprung upon it and now being stuck with the costs of returning to an inefficient dual tax regime, the Liberals are applying their variation on the KISS credo to it: Keep It Simple Stupid becomes Keep It Stupid Simpletons.

For Liberal election hopes next year, it could be the political KISS of death, and, in many minds, deservedly so. ■

LAST LAUGH



Helmet laws doing more harm than good for city cycling



AT LARGE

PETER LADNER

For a city that wants to be the greenest in the world, we're ranked around number 300 for bike sharing

With Bike to Work week upon us (May 28-June 2), we're only weeks away from Velo-City (June 26-29), an international conference at the Sheraton Wall Centre on best practices of cycling-friendly cities.

Many of these visitors will be looking around in vain for a public bike share system, where

shared specially equipped bicycles are parked at special stations around the city for quick short-trip rentals. For a city that wants to be the greenest in the world, we're ranked around number 300 for bike sharing. That's the number of cities around the world that now have it. These bikes offer a way for people who don't own a bike to connect to transit, or just take a quick trip across town. As a tourist, I've used the Canadian-developed Bixi bikes in Montreal, and they're a dream. For \$5, you get all-day access to any bike in the system. When you get to your destination, you find the nearest docking station, click it into the parking slot and walk away. No worries about theft, maintenance or coming back to get your bike.

The good news is that Vancouver will finally be announcing its own bike sharing system around the time of the conference. The bad news is that it's going to fail because of B.C.'s compulsory helmet law. There

are only two cities in the world where public bike share isn't working: Brisbane and Melbourne. These are the only two bike share cities where helmets are compulsory. No one wants to carry a helmet around or pull on a helmet that might have some else's head lice in it, so the bikes don't get used.

This can be easily fixed by a stroke of the pen in Victoria – either by getting rid of compulsory cycling helmet laws altogether or creating an exemption for shared bikes.

The simplest solution would be an exemption, but there's a strong argument for getting rid of compulsory helmets. There's a reason France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Switzerland and most U.S. states don't require helmets, and why Mexico and Israel dropped their compulsory helmet laws.

The case for making helmets compulsory is simple and superficially compelling: helmets can save lives and reduce head injuries. With the cost of

those injuries covered by the public, it's better to force cyclists to wear helmets than force taxpayers to pay for a cyclist's head injuries.

"If people could see what I see at a visceral level, they would immediately support compulsory helmets," says cycling injury lawyer **David Hay**.

But gut reaction doesn't make good public policy. In fact, safety is far more dependent on having protected bike lanes than by wearing a helmet, just as it makes more sense to put dividers on the Sea-to-Sky highway than to require car drivers to wear helmets.

Although cyclists have a higher injury rate per trip than car drivers, hospital patient days from auto accidents are vastly higher than those from cycling. So on the basis of protecting taxpayers from high costs, car drivers should be forced to wear helmets. If not them, then why cyclists?

Further, research shows that forcing people to wear helmets

deters cycling, and a major safety factor for cyclists is having lots of people out cycling. Getting more people out riding without helmets provides more safety than fewer people riding with helmets.

That's before factoring in the reduction in health-care costs from having more people staying healthy because they're riding bikes. Helmet laws may save brains but they destroy hearts. That was Hong Kong's reason for not having compulsory helmet laws.

I'm all in favour of wearing a helmet when riding – I always do. But it should be my choice, especially since non-cyclists are better off if it's not compulsory.

For bike sharing to work in Vancouver, the helmet law has to go. ■

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