

Transit

TRANSIT IS AMONG the most critical departments reviewed in the 2022 AMB. As mentioned in our Climate chapter, Transit must play a central role in reducing Winnipeg's greenhouse gas emissions. Personal vehicle transportation accounts for 32.1 per cent of GHG emissions in Winnipeg while Transit accounts for 0.8 per cent.¹ Encouraging more people to consistently use transit is critical for avoiding the worst effects of climate change.

Investment in public transit is an investment in local businesses.

Winnipeg is the only one of Canada's eight largest metropolitan regions which saw a decline in transit ridership between 1996 and 2016.

At the same time, modernizing our transit system constitutes an economic development opportunity for the City. Frequent and reliable public transit gives people without cars access to services and job opportunities outside walking distance from their homes, expanding the employment opportunities available to young people and those with low-incomes. Further, investment in public transit is an investment in the local businesses. Transitioning the Transit bus fleet to electric buses would be a boon to New Flyer Industries who is a large manufacturing employer in Winnipeg. Reducing road congestion by getting more people on buses would also benefit the logistics industry by facilitating quicker deliveries.

Dramatic improvements in transit need to be made quickly in order to meet these goals. Winnipeg is the only one of Canada's eight largest metropolitan regions which saw a decline in transit ridership between 1996 and 2016.² According to the City of Winnipeg 2021 Annual Citizen Survey, the number of people satisfied with

transit is declining.³ Due to fewer riders during the pandemic, Winnipeg Transit's revenue declined significantly.

The City and the Province need to invest in Winnipeg Transit in order to recover lost ridership due to the pandemic and rapidly expand ridership over the coming years. Proposals for creating an efficient and dependable transit system are present in the Transit Master Plan, but these proposals require funding to be dispersed faster than the current plan. The remainder of this chapter will outline Transit spending to increase ridership, improve working conditions for drivers, increase transit user access, and modernize the system.



A New Funding Model

Winnipeg spends significantly less on transit per capita than other major cities of similar size. In 2015, the City of Winnipeg spent \$205.09 per person on public transit, compared to Ottawa's \$425.69, and Edmonton's \$334.92.⁴ Since 2015 Winnipeg Transit's funding has come under increasing pressure. In 2016, the provincial government canceled the long standing 50/50 transit funding agreement, leaving a growing gap in the City's balance sheet.⁵ Transit was among the services hardest hit by the pandemic, with ridership declining by 70 per cent during the spring of 2020.⁶ Transit ridership has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels, sitting at about 53 per cent in early 2020. This loss of ridership and fare revenue has added significantly to Winnipeg Transit's financial woes.

In order for Winnipeg Transit to recover pre-pandemic ridership and begin moving people out of their cars and onto buses, more operating funding will be needed. This will allow Transit to hire the staff required to increase frequency and bolster service. We call on the City to boost Winnipeg Transit's operating funding by \$25 million. This increase would bring our per capita Transit funding closer to that of other major Canadian cities. At the same time, we call on the Province to restore the 50/50 funding agreement to allow Transit the fiscal security to enter this phase of growth.

New Expenditure:

- Increase Winnipeg Transit operating funding – \$25 million

Increase Ridership

This past summer, Manitoba was engulfed by wildfires and thick smoke, drought destroyed farmers' crops, and successive heat waves broke temperature records. As outlined by the most recent United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, governments at all levels must act immediately to avoid the worst of the climate crisis. Transit is a great place to start.

Winnipeg has a prevalent "car culture" which is facilitated by Winnipeg's sprawling land use and transit underfunding. Private vehicles account for 81 per cent of total weekday trips in the city, while weekday transit trips represent only seven to eight percent, according to Winnipeg's 2011 Community Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Forecast.⁷ Cold winters make waiting in bus shelters unappealing. Urban sprawl and inefficient routes create time-consuming rides that can be shortened by using a personal vehicle. New housing developments are often built on the City edges with plans to extend routes into the neighbourhood developed long after the fact and at relatively high cost to the network. Residents of these neighbourhoods may not have any bus routes around their home, making personal vehicles their only option.

Emissions from road vehicles increased by 72 per cent between 1994 and 2011, while the population only increased by 8 per cent.

According to the 2011 GHG Inventory and Forecast, emissions from road vehicles increased by 72 per cent between 1994 and 2011, while the population only increased by 8 per cent.⁸ As Winnipeg's metro population grows toward 1 million, the City will have to figure out how to move people around while cutting carbon emissions.

It is difficult to convince people to switch over to transit if their trip takes significantly longer on the bus or if buses are infrequent or unreliable. This is particularly true during winter months. Getting people out of cars and onto buses requires an efficient, dependable, and comfortable system. Research from the Canadian Urban Transit Association finds that increasing service in more densely populated corridors has led to increased ridership in Canadian cities.⁹

In order to increase ridership we call on the City to expedite its development of the Primary Transit Network outlined in the Transit Master Plan.¹⁰ Developing the Primary Transit Network would create a system of direct routes running at 15 minute intervals or faster seven days per week, significantly increasing frequency and reliability. This policy targets resources towards in demand routes, decreasing bus congestion. Increased staffing for the

Primary Transit Network would be provided by the \$25 million increase to the operating budget outlined above.

New Expenditure:

- Primary Transit Network Infrastructure - \$20.40 million (full breakdown of capital funding below)

Safety

Driver safety has been a central issue for the transit drivers union in recent years. The tragic killing of Transit driver Irvine Jubal Fraser in 2017 still looms large in the minds of many drivers. Through 2021, a number of Transit drivers suffered violent assaults while on the job, including passengers grabbing the wheel of the bus.¹¹ Covid-19 has added to the safety concerns of drivers, who must work in enclosed spaces.

We call on the City to spend \$18 million on health and safety measures to improve the working conditions of drivers. This includes funding to adequate PPE, air filtration on buses, electrostatic and UV light sanitizing sprays, and driver shield extensions. These investments will go a long way to improve the working conditions of drivers while improving Covid sanitary measures for riders. In addition, we call on the City to replace outdated bus radios, which provide a lifeline to drivers. Bus radio upgrades align with investments outlined in the Transit Master Plan.

New Expenditure:

- Driver safety measures (PPE, bus air filtration, bus sanitization improvements, driver shield extensions) – \$18 million
- Replace Bus radio and Intelligent Transportation System – \$17.28 million

Accessibility

One of the major upgrades to accessibility identified in the Transit Master Plan is the upgrading of devices to secure mobility aids, such as wheelchairs, on existing Transit buses. Despite the importance of this upgrade for improving safety on Transit buses, the mobility securement device retrofit is not scheduled to be funded until the 2024–25 budget. We recommend the City move this funding up to the 2022 budget to ensure safety of riders using mobility devices.

Alongside improving the physical accessibility of Transit, work needs to be done to ensure those living on low-incomes are able to afford to ride the bus. In 2020, the City of Winnipeg was successful in introducing the WINNpass program, a subsidized monthly bus pass for individuals living on low-incomes. Currently, the WINNpass offers eligible individuals a 30 per cent discount on a monthly transit pass.

A review of the WINNpass released in October 2021 revealed that uptake of the program was much lower than originally forecast.¹² This was in large part due to the pandemic, however many people indicated that the cost of the WINNpass was still prohibitively high. At \$106 for a monthly bus pass, a 30 per cent discount is not sufficient for individuals or families on very low incomes. We recommend the City increase the WINNpass discount to 80 per cent, bringing the cost of a monthly bus pass to \$21.20 per month.

New Expenditure:

- Mobility Securement Retrofits – \$13.75 million
- Increase WINNpass subsidy to 80 per cent off monthly transit pass – \$4.24 million
- On-request expansion north-west Winnipeg – \$0.774 million

Modernizing the System

In order to improve service, increase ridership, and reduce emissions throughout the Transit system, upgrades to the system need to be made. Improvements to the North End Garage and replacement of heavy equipment are desperately needed to allow for expansion and smooth functioning of the system.

The construction of a downtown rapid transit corridor will significantly reduce travel times across routes by removing one of the largest bottlenecks in the system. Furthermore, budgeting for improvements to stops and bus shelters will improve service, particularly during the cold winter months.

Finally, in order to further reduce emissions from the Transit system, the City should proceed quickly with its investment in a zero-emissions bus fleet. This investment will in turn be an economic development boon for the bus manufacturing industry in Winnipeg.

New Expenditure:

- North End Garage replacement – \$200.07 million
- Rapid Transit Downtown Corridor preliminary design – \$7 million
- Heavy equipment replacement – \$1.5 million
- Transition half of bus fleet to zero-emissions buses – \$140.20 million
- Stops and Shelter Maintenance – \$0.255 million

Capital Budget

Capital spending makes up the largest part of total Transit investments in this year's AMB. It is our assumption that funding for our capital spending will be shared three ways between Winnipeg, the Province, and the Federal government. Partial funding for this capital spending plan has already been approved by the Federal government through the Investing in Canada's Infrastructure Program (ICIP). The remainder of spending we outline comes from the Transit Master Plan, which is set to be forwarded for ICIP funding. Thus, the spending we outline below encompasses the City of Winnipeg's one third share of this capital spending.

Winnipeg Share Capital Expenditure:

- North End Garage replacement – \$66.02 million
- Rapid Transit Downtown Corridor preliminary design – \$2.31 million
- Heavy equipment replacement – \$.5 million
- Transition half of bus fleet to zero-emissions buses – \$46.73 million
- Mobility Securement Retrofits – \$4.54 million
- Replace Bus radio and Intelligent Transportation System – \$5.70 million
- Primary Transit Network Infrastructure – \$6.73 million

Total capital spending: \$132.53 million

Annual debt payment: \$ 8.61 million (\$132.53 million @ 2.75%/20 years)

Endnotes

- 1** City of Winnipeg. (2019). *Winnipeg's Climate Action Plan Summary* (p. 5).
- 2** Khan, Ahmar. (2021, July 6). *The Long, Costly Road Ahead for Winnipeg's Transit Improvement Plans*. National Observer.
- 3** City of Winnipeg. (2021). *CITIZEN PERSPECTIVE: 2021 Citizen Survey* (p.13)
- 4** Canadian Urban Transit Association. (2016). *Canadian Transit Fleet and Onboard Equipment Fact Book*
- 5** Kives, Bartley. (2018, October 3). *Huge majority wants Province to restore Winnipeg Transit funding, poll suggests*. CBC Manitoba.
- 6** McMorrie, Adrian. (2022, January 16). *Low Winnipeg Transit ridership mostly to blame for city deficit: Gillingham*. Global News.
- 7** Golder Associates. (2015). *City of Winnipeg 2011 Community Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Forecast*.
- 8** *ibid*
- 9** Canadian Urban Transit Association. (2021). *How to Grow Transit Ridership in Canada*. Issue Paper 49.
- 10** City of Winnipeg. (2021). *Winnipeg Transit Master Plan*. (p.35)
- 11** Amalgamated Transit Union 1505. (2021, March 31). *ATU calls for better shields*.
- 12** Winnipeg Transit. (2021, October). *WINNpass Review – Stakeholder and Customer Engagement Summary*. (pg. 2)