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# FAST FACTS

**February 21, 2012**

## Winnipeg City Council Misses the Bus - Again

**C**ouncil’s recent decision to increase bus fare by a total of 25 cents by June 2012 adds to a growing list of wrong-headed policies moving the city further away from the desires Winnipeggers expressed in OurWinnipeg, the City’s own master development plan. Not only does the policy quash hopes for more rational, environmental transportation, it wantonly disregards the plan’s stated goal of creating a more inclusive, equitable city.

It’s difficult to understand what the Mayor and those councillors who voted in favour of the increase were thinking, especially given that council’s constant flip-flopping with the provincial and federal governments is largely responsible for the funding shortfall and construction delays for Rapid Transit. One justification reverted to a “user-pay” argument: those who use transit should pay for rapid transit. Never mind investing in public infrastructure that will benefit all Winnipeggers — including businesses, non-profits, community groups — for generations to come and put the city squarely in the 21st century.

But this move is disappointing on a more fundamental level: it lets motorists off the hook for their wear and tear on city infrastructure while passing the expense of more sensible urban development onto the backs of Winnipeg’s low-income earners and poor. Many low-income/

poor Winnipeggers live in the North End and will not reap the benefits of their “contribution” to rapid-transit, because it only services the South end of the city – at least into the foreseeable future. It also sends the wrong message to higher-income Winnipeggers who responsibly choose public transit over automobile use. Not only will the fare increase impact lower-income and poor Winnipeggers disproportionately, it will also be more costly to the City in the long run.

CCPA Mb.’s recently released report by Linda DeRiviere and Jeffrey Brojges (Community transformation from an economic costing perspective) explores the potential benefits of creating jobs close to where low-income people reside. Although transportation is not its focus, the study helps us understand that public transportation greatly helps the inner-city’s low-income population move about the city. DeRiviere and Brojges looked specifically at Lord Selkirk Park (LSP), finding that 65.5 % of employed people living there use public transit, walk or get a ride in someone else’s car to get to work. This figure compares with 29.4 % for the rest of Winnipeg. DeRiviere and Brojges note that labour in LSP is “relatively immobile”, with fewer families having access to a private vehicle. The report cites research concluding that lack of access to transportation, combined with an unreasonably lengthy commute,



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## *FAST FACTS continued ...*

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can prevent people from reaching jobs in other areas of the city. This suggests that increasing bus fares 10.2% in 6 months will make transit less accessible to low-income earners and the unemployed.

According to DeRiviere and Brojges, 52 % of economic families in LSP (compared with 10 % for Winnipeg as a whole) qualify for government transfer payments because of their low income – which affects 68 % of LSP economic families. If we connect the dots between the transportation and income data, we can conclude that the unemployed who cannot afford to get to where the jobs are, and the low-income employed who have to deal with steep increases in their transportation costs, will remain poor and in need of government subsidies. In other words, there's a relation between being able to work and having access to public transportation. There is also a connection between access to transportation, social inclusion and quality of life. Calgary made these simple connections.

Calgary figured out that you don't empower marginalized people by increasing transit fares: you help them by decreasing them. The book *Cities Reducing Poverty* includes the chapter "Fair Fares in Calgary" which documents the story of how and why Calgary's city council decided to lower transit fares for all adult Calgarians with incomes below 75% of the low-income cut-off.

A dedicated coalition of citizens and organizations convinced council that "economically disadvantaged people benefit from urban planning options that support walking or cycling and from transportation alternatives that include public transportation, taxis, para-transit [e.g. handi-transit], ride sharing and vehicle sharing."

According to a 2007 survey, those who qualified for Calgary's Low Income Transit Pass (LITP) increased their use of public transit. Before the passes were available, 63 % of participants took public transit fewer than 8 times a week; once passes were distributed, 81 % used it 8 times

or more per week. Participants were able to: save money and/or buy more products they needed; socialize more; access school more easily; and, fully half the group found it easier to obtain and keep a job. Almost half said it was easier to volunteer, and 97 % reported that their lives had improved once they had the LITP. But measures like the LITP don't just improve individuals' lives.

Governments can also reduce overall costs to society by implementing simple policies such as the LITP. DeRiviere and Brojges found that if the employment rate in LSP and South Point Douglas matched the City's overall rate, the net present value of such job creation could well be in the tens, even hundreds of millions of dollars. Improving access to public transit is not the only remedy required; DeRiviere and Brojges' report, for example, concentrates on the net benefit of increasing the number of jobs located in the inner city. Nonetheless, we can reasonably conclude — given that inner-city residents need public transit to access jobs in other parts of the city, and given the results of the LITP experience in Calgary— that lowering bus fares for low-income Winnipeggers would improve their lives significantly.

Poverty and social exclusion will not be removed by simply implementing a LITP policy, but such a move is one step in building a comprehensive set of policies that will make a difference. According to "Fair Fares in Calgary":

[The] Fair Calgary lens helped shift attitudes about what causes people to live in poverty and what keeps them there; transportation came to be seen to be an important component of social and economic inclusion.

In stark contrast, Winnipeg seems bent upon adopting policies that make it harder for marginalized Winnipeggers to improve their lives and which move us further from the goals stated in *OurWinnipeg*.

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