Presentation to the Executive Policy Committee by the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities

December 7, 2005

Your Worship Mayor Katz and Members of the Executive Policy Committee:

My name is Emily Ternette. I am the Communications and Program Assistant at the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities. The MLPD is a non-profit, human rights advocacy organization that works towards the full inclusion of persons with disabilities through lobbying to change policy and legislation.

I am here today to speak about the proposed increase in bus fares scheduled to be put in place on January 1, 2006. I would first like to say that over the past few years, the MLPD has felt encouraged by the City's actions in embracing the concept of universal design. This will, hopefully, go a long way towards including people with disabilities as fully participating citizens in Winnipeg. We are also pleased that staff at Handi-Transit have been willing to meet and work with us on issues that are of concern to consumers of the Handi-Transit system, and we have also seen an increase in low-floor buses on the regular Transit system.

However, we are outraged at the regressive steps that the City has taken over the past couple of weeks. It began with the Mayor attempting to dismantle the Access Advisory Committee, a committee that consists of citizens with disabilities. Had this committee been dissolved, it would have significantly lessened citizen participation in our city government, especially for people with disabilities.

Now the City is once again entertaining a proposal by the Transit Department for yet another increase in transit fares, and not the same proposal that is put forth every year at this time - a 5 cent increase. No, this year, the Transit Department has gotten really creative and developed a two-tier bus fare system. Those who are able to afford to purchase bus tickets in bulk or a bus pass, will see a 5 cent increase. However, those who pay their bus fare with cash will be hit with a whopping 15 cent increase! *We've heard all sorts of reasons for this type of* proposal - from encouraging people to buy bus tickets in bulk or a bus pass, to offering transit users a 10 cent **break** by purchasing tickets or bus passes.

But the reality is, that the majority of people with disabilities live on a low or fixed income. There is no way that most of these individuals can even entertain the idea of buying bus tickets in bulk or a bus pass. They are, for the most part, living day to day financially. And it is even more unreasonable to expect them to try

and budget a 15 cent increase per bus fare in a month if they pay in cash! So, it is those people who are most disenfranchised and who cannot afford bus tickets or a bus pass that will be the ones that are most negatively affected by the proposed bus fare increase.

We are, frankly, stunned that the City would even consider such a bus fare increase - especially in the dead of winter! For people with disabilities, winter is a particularly difficult time of year to get around. Handi-Transit services are sadly lacking, leaving many without rides to doctors' appointments or recreational activities. So, why not use the low floor buses, you might ask? After all, they are being put on the road to, hopefully, take some pressure off of the Handi-Transit system. Well, if the City kept sidewalks and streets clear of snow and ice, this might be an option. However, I can't even get down my street - on the sidewalk or the road - because of the ice and snow build-up. And for seniors and people who are ambulatory with disabilities who do try and walk to bus stops in order to take the bus, they're lucky they don't break a leg or a hip with the current sidewalk and street conditions!

So, you see, with the continued poor service in the Handi-Transit system, despite past bus fare increases and injections of extra government funds, as well as poor road and sidewalk conditions which make the use of low floor buses an unreasonable alternative, we're having difficulty seeing the justification for yet another bus fare increase.

If this proposed bus fare increase is passed by City Council, the negative ramifications for people with disabilities living in Winnipeg will be enormous. Not only will those living day-to-day financially not be able to afford bus fare, but mental and physical health costs will rise as people with disabilities become more isolated and less active in Winnipeg life. It has been well documented that all human beings do much better physically and emotionally if they are involved outside of their homes.

You must stop this proposal right here, right now. It is your responsibility, as the Executive Policy Committee, and as City Councillors who govern our city, to make Winnipeg a fair and equal opportunity place to live. Thank you.

Emily Ternette is the Communications/Program Assistant with the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities.