Observations on the Rapid Transit Report Sept. 21st, 2006

I have been a Winnipeg resident since 1970 and a taxpayer from 1979. My interest in Rapid Transit developed from two factors. I travelled a lot and actually used Rapid Transit or Subways in Europe, Australia, South America, The United States and Canada. The other reason was the construction in the eightys of a light rail transit system in my home town Edmonton. It was built partly underground and opened in time for the Commonwealth Games in 1986, a time when Edmonton's population was close to what Winnipeg's is now. I was impressed at how it changed the dynamics of that city.

Rapid Transit systems act as a strong catalyst for development near the stations and particularly at each end of the route. In Winnipeg this would be important for downtown development. These systems tend to offset urban sprawl and make travelling from residential areas to business and entertainment centers much easier for large numbers of people. The need for increasing and repairing road infrastructure is lessended by encouraging public transit instead of cars for commuting. The air quality is improved when many people use one larger vehicle instead of many small ones. However, motorists will not leave their cars unless the alternative rapid transit is faster, reasonably priced and appealing to use.

Previous studies in Winnipeg have shown that a corridor should be developed along Pembina Highway, en route to Transcona, and to North Kildonan. The current report recommends building the transit corridor with specifications that will allow it to be converted to rail later.

Other cities in Canada have already developed Bus Rapid Transit Systems. Ottawa was one of the earliest, but the York District of Toronto north has opened a new system called VIVA in September 2005. This project was only started in 2002 after studying systems in Vancouver, Seattle, and Portland. It travels on designated bus lanes for now but will start building dedicated right of ways in its stage 2 this year. York concentrated on user appeal and bought articulated buses from Belgium which feature TV, Computer tables in the back for business people, GPS positioning information, and even WI-FI connections.

This study recommends financing of passenger traffic studies every three to five years. This information has already been studied and would only delay the start of this project. Further delays will only add to the problem of Winnipeg's deteriorating status. We could reach a point of no return where we will no longer have the will or financial base to even attempt this project.

Provincial and Federal subsidies are available now and are being used by other Canadian cities.

We have to compete with other Canadian cities for new businesses, new residents, and tourists. We need to improve the downtown, and make access from one part of the city to another easier and more appealing. Rapid Transit is a strong statement to businesses and residents of other cities that we are planning for the future. It will be costly, but can we afford not to do it now?

Gordon Linney