Presentation by the Sierra Club of Canada (Winnipeg) to EPC
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December 10, 2007

Thank you your Worship and Councillors for the giving Paul and I, members of the local Sierra Club of Canada an opportunity to speak to your decision to allocate the Winnipeg share of the federal gas tax revenue to the construction of a bus garage versus the active pursuit of bus rapid transit (BRT). The Sierra Club of Canada is a grassroots network working to protect the integrity of our global ecosystems.

As you are aware, the world is facing a climate change crisis – which is why world leaders, scientists and bureaucrats are currently gathered in Indonesia. All levels of government must take immediate action to avert any further damage to our global environment. I have not read the city's full budget to better understand the steps they are taking to act locally to combat climate change, such as retrofits to reduce energy loss in city buildings, implementing a no idling policy for all city vehicles, etc. And, although, I am a commuter cycling activist, I am not here today to talk about that very energy efficient transportation mode as there are other delegations here this morning to do that.

In reviewing the Rapid Transit Task Force, September 2005 Final Report, it stated, on page 6:
"Numerous studies undertaken by the City of Winnipeg have determined that implementation of a Rapid Transit System is required to meet the travel needs of Winnipeggers" and "Results of Public Interest Group Presentations and Public Workshops undertaken by the Task force reinforced the need for a Rapid Transit System in Winnipeg with Speed, Service Reliability and Frequent Service as the most important attributes by participants."

In reviewing other jurisdictions, the task force noted benefits that would be realized in Winnipeg with the implementation of a BRT. These are:

1. Reduction in travel time
2. Significant improvements in service reliability
3. Increases in frequency of services
4. Increases in ridership
5. Modal shift from private automobile to transit
6. Reduction in green house gas emissions
7. Improved productivity in transit services
8. Improved general traffic flow

The Task Force report gives the City of Winnipeg the information it needs to do its part in reducing the level of carbon emissions that our city is contributing to this worldwide issue. Certainly, the Sierra Club applauds the City's decision to switch over some of its fleet to biodiesel to cut down on carbon emissions from its transit fleet. As well, the City

is making improvements in its bus waiting facilities. But we don't believe that will be enough to get car drivers to switch to bus transportation. What people are looking for are efficient and time sensitive travel alternative we would see a reduction in the number of cars on Winnipeg streets and a lowering of our green house gas emissions as well as an easing of our traffic congestion problems at rush hour.

As Plan Winnipeg states: "The city shall provide an integrated transportation network that supports its commitment to sustainability, compact urban form and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions."

The Task Force recommended the implementation of Quality Corridors; the Southwest Corridor has been on the city's agenda since the 1970's. These corridors would facilitate the city's current commitment to active transportation by allowing bicycle and walking pathways to be built alongside these bus corridors, as well as the many other community wide benefits outlined in the report.

Why is the city not investing any money into these rapid transit initiatives?

Over the next six years, the City will be receiving over $225 million from the Federal Gas Tax.

In spite of this federal funding, which in some cities is being used to fund significant improvements to transit, Winnipeg is doing very little for Transit and basically nothing to fund Bus Rapid Transit.

We're very disappointed that there is less than $150 million budgeted for the transit system over the next 6 years.

To present the big picture: In fact, the 2008 transit capital project authorization is down by 60% compared with 2007.

Not once in the next 6 years are transit capital project authorizations scheduled to get anywhere near the 2007 amount.

And for bus rapid transit? According to the 2005 Task Force Report by the city, we need to allocate $5.5 million annually for Phase 1 of the plan and $3.5 million for Phase 2. Why is that not in this preliminary budget?

The same Task Force Report by City determined that it would only cost $270 million to complete the first two stages of rapid transit. With funding from the Province and the Federal government, this is an affordable investment in a more modern and environmentally responsible city. Rapid transit can and should be a priority – right now.

Unfortunately, the city's current approach to transportation is very telling from the photo on the front cover of the preliminary budget. It shows a busy new underpass filled with

We urge EPC and Council to amend the preliminary budget to improve funding for transit to make it more accessible, affordable and fast. We also urge you to begin funding bus rapid transit for Winnipeg.