Your Worship Mayor Katz, Members of the Executive Policy Committee, my name is Paul Hesse and I'm here representing the Winnipeg Rapid Transit Coalition.

The Coalition was initiated by the Sierra Club of Canada Winnipeg and in the short time that the Coalition has been in existence, it has received the support of Downtown Biz, West End Biz, Osborne Biz, the Canadian Mennonite University, the University of Winnipeg Students Association, High School Students at Fort Richmond Collegiate and Kelvin High School, Urban Shaman Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Cinemateque, Resource Conservation Manitoba, the Social Planning Council, Plug In ICA, the Manitoba Audio Recording Industry Association and numerous other organizations.

In the last week, we've gathered over 3200 signatures in support of our petition for rapid transit and we'd like to provide them to EPC this morning.

We created the petition before of the opportunity presented in the recent federal budget. As you know, that budget contains $500 million in funding for transit projects committed to publically by March 31st, 2008.

The Winnipeg Rapid Transit Coalition is calling on the city to commit by March 31, 2008 to building the first phase of its approved Rapid Transit Plan and to negotiate matching funds from the Province of Manitoba.

The support of our members demonstrates that Winnipegers of all walks of life recognize the importance of rapid transit. Winnipeg is the biggest city in Canada without a rapid transit system. Across the country, from Vancouver to Quebec City, our cities big and small are investing in rapid transit systems. It benefits the economy, the environment and most of all, the people who live and travel in our cities. It provides a real alternative to car use during a time of ever rising gas prices.

We thank the Mayor and Council for recognizing the importance of rapid transit by proposing a Rapid Transit Infrastructure Reserve. But with respect, we don't agree that money should be saved each year in the hope that decades from now, ground will actually be broken to start building a rapid transit system. That's not how the city builds other infrastructure projects. It doesn't save put money in a trust account each year and say, "once we've saved up enough money, then we'll build that bridge or repair that bridge". The city says "this bridge is important" and we're going to build it, and in essence finance it with a mortgage – through bonds or some other financing. Rapid Transit should be no different.

But the beauty of committing to rapid transit now is that the city can get federal government and, we believe, provincial government funding as well. It's a better deal than a bridge or road extension. Because the city will get a lasting improvement for Winnipeg at a fraction of the cost.

We ask EPC and Council to join the Coalition and its members in supporting rapid transit and by making a public commitment by March 31, 2008 to the first phase of rapid transit for Winnipeg. Thank you.