Mayor Katz and Members of the Executive Policy Committee:

I am here today to speak to you regarding the administrative report "Future Transit Fares and Low Income Transit Passes". I would like to clarify some matters and ask some questions about this report. As you know, in November 2008, the original Motion was moved by Mayor Katz and seconded by Councilor Pagtakhan to take the issue of bus fare increases away from City Council and that Council direct the public service to review these fees regularly.

At that time, in my presentation to you, I recommended that the Public Utilities Board (PUB) of the provincial government (an independent board) be given authority to hold public meetings concerning bus fare increases. Then, the PUB could increase or decrease bus fares, depending on Transit's needs.

I am shocked to see that on December 17, 2008, a Motion was recommended that a by-law be passed that would delegate authority to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) to increase transit fees and charges up to the rate of inflation. As a result of the adoption of this policy, Transit will no longer require City Council's approval for any transit fare adjustments.

This is completely unacceptable! By using a by-law from December 2008, you are leaving out public participation and Council participation. In fact, this by-law was never meant to be applied to Transit and might just be illegal according to the City of Winnipeg Act.

Are you aware of which part of the Act allows such a by-law to be passed?

While I recognize that Council has difficulty in dealing with fare increases every year, the PUB could, instead, take over this role and allow public input during fare increase considerations. But what if Transit increases are needed <u>above</u> the rate of inflation because of other cost increases? Who will make the final decision then, the CFO or would it go back to Council?

Low Income Bus Passes

I am pleased to note that the City of Winnipeg staff has been in touch with the Province's staff at Family Services and Housing's Disability Programs and Employment and Income Assistance Program to discuss how a low-income bus pass would be implemented and what impact the province's involvement would have on their staff complement. I also understand that the EIA program provides bus passes for some recipients.

However, I am not talking about welfare recipients. I am talking about the sector of citizens who are low income - working, yet living below the poverty line (which is about $22,000 dollars a year) - having to go to food banks to get by. So why can we not implement the Low Income Bus Pass for this group of citizens, as we are not talking about people who are on welfare who already receive bus passes? The suggestion that a low income pass program would decrease Transit revenue in the range of $850,000 to $2 million is simply not accurate because of the increased ridership that these passes would bring (principally, immigrants who don't go on Income Assistance, work at low paying jobs and take public transit).

Off Peak Bus Passes

This concept would provide low income cut-off passes at more affordable prices during "off peak" hours. The suggestion that this be considered after Transit's fare collection system update project is completed, is like putting the cart before the horse. I was involved in the fare collection system update community consultation and fully support the recommendation that the fare collection hardware and processes replace Transit's current fare collection system by the end of 2009. During the consultation I asked whether it would be difficult for the "Smart Card" to incorporate "off peak" passes as well, and he said, absolutely not. All kinds of Transit fare discounts can be incorporated if City Council approves. So, if you favour off-peak passes, then implement them immediately! The technology for the fare collection system is already built in with the "Smart Card".

Off peak passes will increase ridership significantly, to the point where bus fare increases will not be needed for a number of years to come.

Thank you.

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Nick Ternette is a community and political activist, freelance writer and broadcaster.