Presentation from the Green Action Committee of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg to the Executive Policy Committee December 5, 2011

Mayor Sam Katz and Councillors

On behalf of the Green Action Committee of the Unitarian Church, I thank you for the opportunity to present our views on a portion of the capital budget. The mandate of the Green Action Committee of the Unitarian Church is to make our church a catalyst for environmentally sustainable change in the broader community. We are probably best known to you by the forums on environmental issues that we have hosted. Representatives from the city have spoken at two of these forums.

We would like to address a small section of the draft document on page 2-14, more specifically the five blank spaces on the line that reads "Total Rapid Transit Planning and Design". It appears that City Council plans to fill those blanks by shifting the cost of the development onto transit users, who include some of the most financially vulnerable citizens of our city. The surprise vote last month to fund the system with a $ 0.20 hike in bus fares has shocked many Winnipeggers. The impulse to find means of paying for things we put into the budget is a good one, but the move to single out transit users was a bad decision made in haste, without consideration and without consultation. We all make mistakes, and this is one mistake City Council has a chance to correct.

Apart from the flawed process, there are several other reasons to reverse the decision.

1. The transportation strategy includes several costly upgrades that benefit motorists both directly and indirectly, and motorists are not being asked to bear any of the extra cost. Transit users alone are being singled out.
2. The cost of the transit corridor is being placed on the part of the population that is generally least able to pay, although a relatively small proportion of them will actually benefit from the bus way.
3. The transit increase will put a heavy burden on non-governmental agencies that offer services to people in the inner city and provide their clients with bus tickets.
4. Winnipeg transit users already pay a larger percentage of the cost of transit than the Canadian average.
5. Apart from U of M students and people who live near the stops on the bus way, the main beneficiaries will be the motorists who use Pembina Hwy as a route to downtown, who will face less congestion. They bear none of the cost.
6. The main point of building a bus way is to get more people to use transit by making it a more attractive alternative. The large increase in fare works in the opposite direction and is consequently counterproductive.
7. In the recently adopted transportation strategy, the city has committed to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation sector. Taxing alternative means of transportation is the wrong way to this goal.
8. By far the largest part of the cost of transportation infrastructure is for the benefit of motorists. It is not fair to shift the burden to transit users or to increase the burden on home owners. It is time for motorists to share some, if not all of the cost.

Please revisit this issue and undo what was a careless mistake on the part of some of you.

Our committee supports suggestions made by the Green Action Centre in a brief to the Public Works Committee last week as to how the city should pay for needed upgrades by shifting the cost onto motorists . There are a number of things that the city can do on its own and others that would require provincial action. Such things as surtax on parking spaces that would be dedicated to transportation infrastructure, tolls on bridges, and taxes on fuel and vehicles have been suggested. We also support the amendment by Councillor Dan Vandal to set up a Regional Transportation Authority to implement the Transportation Strategy.

Thank you.

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