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W Pg Labour Council
EPC - Dec 12, 2013

Special Meeting of the Executive Policy Committee

12.12.2013

The Winnipeg Labour Council is pleased to have an opportunity to present its views before this Special Meeting of the Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works committee. We believe public safety must be enhanced on Winnipeg Transit and this is an important first step in addressing those concerns. We would like to thank St. Vital City Councillor, Brian Mayes, for his continued effort to improve public safety on Winnipeg Transit. Councillor Ross Eadie has also offered public support for increased transit security measures as well. We are supportive of the principles behind this initiative, however we believe there are concerns that need to be addressed moving forward.

Winnipeg Transit operators are still at risk on the job. As of October, 2013, 36 assaults have been reported against Winnipeg Transit operators. Further evidence of the perils faced by operators became evident in October of this year when Winnipeg police released a video of a brutal assault against an operator, seeking the public's assistance in tracking down the assailant. The incident demonstrated to the public how quickly situations can escalate into violence and the need for increased safety and security on Winnipeg Transit.

Operators are not the only individuals at risk. The public has also bore the brunt of lax safety and security on buses. Recent FIPPA requests obtained by the Winnipeg Labour Council indicate that between 2007 and 2012, assaults occurring at bus stops, bus shelters and aboard buses more than doubled from 13 to 34. Increased security presence on buses can help put the public's mind at greater ease. The report outlines that a greater security presence was effective in other jurisdictions.

The report concludes that six FTEs with Special Constable status be submitted for the budget and that enhanced by-laws be established to further empower the six positions. As these by-laws have yet to be written, we are cautious in moving forward with this proposal. We believe the six FTEs should be granted the powers necessary to detain suspects, however the report appears to limit powers to the issuance of tickets for a listed number of offences. There is also concern that should the by-law provisions be unclear, the six new positions would simply be used for management purposes of Winnipeg Transit.

The Winnipeg Labour Council is supportive of increased safety and security on Winnipeg Transit. We believe the situation has reached a crisis point and the time for action has come. The WLC is concerned about the scope of the by-laws proposed and wishes to see greater enforcement powers granted to the Special Constables. We believe clear language governing the activities of the Special Constables is necessary to ensure effective enforcement and a focused scope for their use.