Executive Policy Committee tomorrow, Presentation
Prepared by the Downtown BIZ
In Support of Opening Portage and Main Intersection
Wednesday June 10, 2015.

On Behalf of the Downtown BIZ Board, I would like to lend support to the Citys; efforts to open up Portage and Main to pedestrians.

It's widely understood that the opening of Portage and Main will be a good thing for the downtown community. And the future of our downtown lies in it being a place for people to walk around from district to district,

The opening of Portage and Main will send development signals to investors that our downtown vision is to connect the Forks, our Waterfront and Ball Park Districts to the Exchange District to the

core on Portage Avenue District, OurWinnipeg the citys' guiding policy framework leads us in this direction and rightfully so. The conversation is more than just about pedestrians crossing a street... its about stimulating further downtown development activity as well.

The opening of Portage and Main will make it easier for people to walk around our downtown, adding life to our sidewalks in ways only pedestrians can. And let's face it, the opening of Portage and Main won't wreak havoc in the lives of Winnipeg's motorists. Adding an additional 55 seconds to their trip will be forgotten after the first week of its opening, the same manner in which the opening of Chief Pequis Trail on Henderson Hwy has added over a minute to the commute times of Winnipegers.

So lets not put fear in the minds of motorists. And we know great engineers and designers can put best practices and technologies to work to make the Portage and Main intersection safe and efficient. Let our City staff dream and create, let's not say this is not possible.

Numerous studies have espoused the urban renewal, development and economic virtues of tearing down the walls! So what are the obstacles in getting this done if it's so good for our downtown?

The reality is that there are dozens of shops and services, now flourishing in the underground concourse, which rely on that underground pedestrian traffic. Some are mom and pop shops, all

create jobs in our economy. No doubt the millions in which the Lombard Concourse and the Shops of Winnipeg Square owners have recently invested in upgrading the underground concourse is meant to attract even more businesses and even more people underground, reliant on that same pedestrian traffic.

So while we all get the importance of opening the Portage and Main , the reality is that there is a perceived risk in hurting business in doing so.

This risk, and fear, is holding some back from re-opening the legal contracts and taking the leap of faith that would be required by property owners. There is a way to make the pie bigger for everyone.

Maybe we need to take a page from New York Times Square pedestrian makeover. Several years ago the local Times Square BIZ wanted to create a public space experiment and create a public plaza in order to reduce vehicle traffic and better accommodate pedestrians, due to the extremely crowded streets which make it hard to get around that area. Widespread opposition was mounted from motorists, to concerned businesses, to taxi cab drivers and office workers who felt **a 6 minute** delay to get through Times Square was not acceptable, to taxpayers who would foot the bill. Eventually there was a compromise and a pilot project was born. If a cheap version did not work, the idea would be abandoned. In the last several years the Times Square Alliance has been experimenting with tables,

chairs, bollards, and more, including staging performances and creating events to celebrate the history of the area. All along they have listened to the feedback and reactions of people, tourists, workers, taxi cab driver and property and business owners. They have worked with engineers, police and public officials. Made adjustment to the pilot from year to year. And the people love the pilot. More came, and there was more business was to be had. The pilot has now evolved into a final design, with the majority of the public demanding the changes proceed. In a few short few years and idea has become a reality, because of the consensus built during the pilot project.

What if in Winnipeg we adopted the same approach for Portage and Main? A means of managing and mitigating risk to our

businesses underground, but more importantly really showing there is nothing to fear.

What if there was consensus to simply partially rip down the aging barriers, not worry about a final design yet, and simply assess different traffic options and ensuring critical information over a one year pilot, and see if the hypothesis, business underground won't be affected, is right?

Information like: How many people have decided to use the intersection? Is there a change in pedestrian traffic? In particular, have the 4 million tourists at the Forks decided to venture past that world class site and into the downtown? Have sales dropped in the businesses below or increased? Have development opportunities and subsequent small business opportunities at

street level emerged? Is pedestrian safety compromised? Are Winnipeggers supportive and understand the vision?

Let's put the idea to a test and move forward collectively and collaboratively with everyone, and move forward.