Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
Caring for Health

Office régional de la santé de Winnipeg
À l'écoute de notre santé

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July 8, 2015

His Worship Mayor Brian Bowman, Chairperson
Executive Policy Committee
City of Winnipeg
510 Main Street
Winnipeg, MB R3B 1B9

Dear Mayor Bowman and Committee Members,

The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) recognizes the important role the City of Winnipeg plays in creating conditions for good health in Winnipeg. As such, we are pleased to see consideration of the Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies document which aims to maximize the accessibility, comfort and safety of walking and cycling in Winnipeg, conferring health benefits to all Winnipeg's citizens. We heartily congratulate you for recognizing that:

> *"Equitable access to walking and cycling provides greater transportation choices for residents and visitors in neighbourhoods across Winnipeg. This will improve personal mobility, promote healthy living, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, thus contributing to the quality of life and community well-being."*

The WRHA fully concurs that investing in walking and cycling in Winnipeg is an investment in health and well-being at the individual and community level.

The WRHA, led primarily by its Public Health program, focuses on improving population health and health equity in Winnipeg including the promotion of physical activity, healthy eating, mental health, environmental health, injury prevention and safety promotion. Enhancing opportunities for walking and cycling addresses these health priorities directly, as well as contributing towards a positive collective sense of community wellness, social engagement and inclusion.

We are delighted to see many of the important health benefits of active transportation identified in the Strategies (pg. 29), including reduced risks of heart disease and stroke, some cancers, type 2 diabetes, prevention of weight gain and obesity, as well as improved mood and mental well-being. The health benefits are multifaceted and additionally include benefits such as:

- Older adults who are physically active are almost 40% less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease that those who are inactive.
- People who are engaged in active commuting are healthier, happier, have better workplace attendance records and increased productivity.
- Active transportation reduces social isolation, and increases safe options for accessing services (e.g. grocery stores, health care).

Safety and injury prevention are also strengthened because:

- High traffic volumes and vehicle speed are strong risk factors for pedestrian and cyclist injuries. Improving road infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists can reduce traffic volumes and speed and decrease injuries and deaths. Purpose-built bicycle-specific facilities such as on-road bike routes, on-road marked bike lanes, and off-road bike paths reduce crashes and injuries among cyclists.
- Research has shown that there is "safety in numbers" for pedestrians and cyclists – countries with high rates of daily walking and cycling often have lower rates of injuries and fatalities.
- Physically active older adults have better strength and balance and are less likely to fall and are less likely to be injured if they do fall because of healthier bone density. Falls in older adults is the leading cause of hospital admissions for injury.

The cost of preventable chronic disease and injury is very high, most importantly in terms of the burden on Winnipeg's citizens and communities, but also in terms of health care costs. According to the 2013 *report The Economic Benefits of Risk Factor Reduction in Manitoba* by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Manitoba and partners, the total direct costs in Manitoba attributable to the health effects of smoking, physical inactivity, and excess weight in 2012 are estimated at $610 million, while the indirect costs are estimated at $1.37 billion, yielding total attributable costs of $1.98 billion. Active transportation positively contributes to reducing some of these risk factors, as well as risk factors for costly injuries.

It is significant to note that investing in active transportation has the potential to increase health equity, which means closing gaps in health status associated with social and economic disadvantage. Health equity promotion is a priority for the WRHA – transportation and healthy environments are key areas for action in our *Health for All: Building Winnipeg's Health Equity Action Plan* (2013). In partnership with other sectors we seek to promote conditions in which everyone can achieve their best possible health outcomes. We commend you for including an equity analysis as criteria for the proposed prioritization process for infrastructure improvements. Given that the largest group of cyclists in Winnipeg are those with incomes less than $40,000 (31% of cyclists), followed by 22% between $40,000 and $60,000, 9% between $60,000 and $80,000, and only 21% $80,000 and over (as reported on pg. 64 of the Strategies), supporting walking and cycling increases key healthy and safe transportation options for everyone. By reducing the need for a personal vehicle, more walkable communities, coupled with public transit, allow families to apply limited financial resources towards other expenses such as food and rent. For example, in Peterborough, Ontario, families who commute by car spend almost 25% of their monthly income on transportation, whereas those who commute by walking, biking, or transit, spend only 5.6% or less.

In addition to the direct health benefits for pedestrians and cyclists, the resulting investments in active transportation and neighbourhood design would have a positive impact on the health of the community as a whole. A few examples of how more participation in walking and cycling affects the whole community are mentioned below:

- Road traffic is the greatest cause of community noise in most cities. High levels of road noise increases stress levels, blood pressure, sleep disturbances and impair reading and math performance for children. Reducing vehicle traffic reduces noise.
- Vehicle use and traffic congestion creates air pollution. Traffic congestion-related air pollution exacerbates cardiovascular conditions, childhood asthma and lung cancer, and contributes to premature deaths. In the U.S., motor vehicle emissions are the largest contributor of air pollutant-related mortalities.

- Private vehicle traffic is the most significant cause of Greenhouse Gas emissions worldwide. Associated climate change poses very serious threats to health and safety in numerous ways such as severe weather events, changes in the distribution of disease patterns, and food and water supply disruption.
- People who feel good about the community they live in are healthier and happier.
- Youth and young adults are more likely to stay and invest their talents and resources in their community if they perceive it to be healthy, walkable, and vibrant, with a focus on quality of life.

The potential for even more Winnipeggers of all ages and from all parts of the city to engage in increased activity through walking and cycling is significant. Health gains from increased physical activity are more pronounced for those going from inactive to somewhat or moderately active, so the population health improvements corresponding to even modest increases in participation would be significant. Winnipeg is already showing rapid growth in participation. The Winnipeg Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies documents that 48% Winnipeggers want to walk more and 46% want to cycle more. Holding particular promise is the 36% of Winnipeggers that fall into the "interested but concerned" group who report they would cycle more if they felt safer.

Clearly there is a strong health-based rationale for considering actions to increase rates of walking and biking in Winnipeg. We view the Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies as essential to guide an organized, prioritized and equitable approach to support active transportation and active recreation in Winnipeg. We encourage the City of Winnipeg to move forward in exploring opportunities presented through the Strategies with a continued focus on neighbourhood-level community engagement. The Strategies are an opportunity to continue to work towards a more walkable and bikeable Winnipeg- a Winnipeg that is healthier for all.

Regards,



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