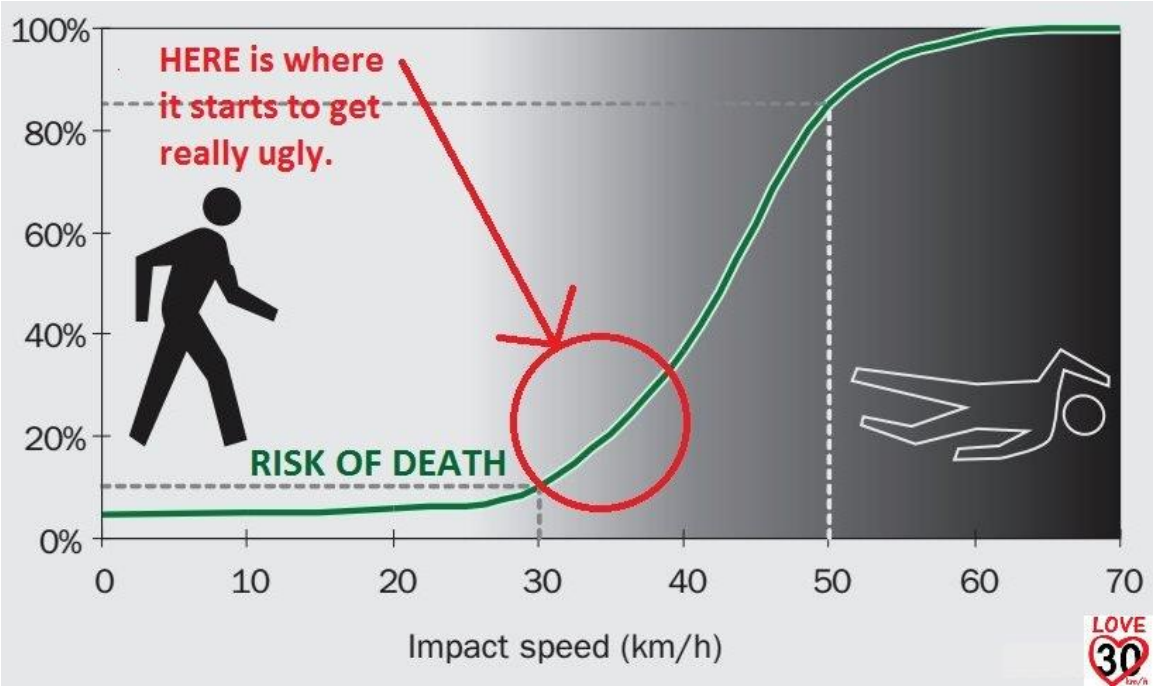
Will You Be Able to Sleep at Night?

Good morning Mayor Bowman and members of the Executive Policy Committee.

My name is Michel Durand-Wood. I am an Elmwood resident, a neighbourhood volunteer, a parent, and I write a fun blog about infrastructure and municipal finance called Dear Winnipeg.

There are many things I could talk to you about today.

I could talk about how safe traffic speeds save lives. How a person hit by a car at 50 km/h will almost always die, while a person hit at 30 km/h will almost always live.



Source: World Health Organization – Speed Management: A Road Safety Manual for Decision-Makers and Practitioners (https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/43915/9782940395040_eng.pdf)

I could talk about how safe traffic speeds don't necessarily make commutes longer. Research from France has shown that speed limits of 30 km/h instead of 50 km/h only add about 18 seconds of commute time per km.

Source: Ville apaisée: Grenoble à 30 km/h depuis le 1er janvier 2016 (https://www.grenoble.fr/actualite/75/103-ville-apaisee-grenoble-a-30-km-h-depuis-le-1er-janvier-2016.htm)

I could talk about how safe traffic speeds have the potential to reduce congestion. Data from Brazil has shown a 10% decrease in congestion following speed limit reductions.
Source: Estadao (https://sao-paulo.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,numero-de-acidentes-cai-30-apos-reducao-de-velocidade-nas-marginais,1746754)

I could talk about how safe traffic speeds help foster healthier communities, since with safe speeds, more people tend to opt to walk or bike. Research in the U.S. has shown that if 1 in 10 adults starting walking regularly, up to $5.6 Billion in healthcare costs could be saved.
Source: Bicycling and Walking in the United States: 2012 Benchmarking Report (https://www.peoplepoweredmovement.org/site/images/uploads/2012-Benchmarking-Report-Final-Draft-WEB.pdf)

I could talk about how safe traffic speeds reduce noise. Studies show that in urban areas, reducing speeds by 10 km/h cuts noise levels by up to 40%.
Source: Speed and Road Traffic Noise (http://www.ukna.org.uk/uploads/4/1/4/5/41458009/speed_and_road_traffic_noise.pdf)

I could talk about how safe traffic speeds are good for business. Research from multiple cities, such as New York, San Francisco, and London, has shown that when traffic speed is reduced, businesses benefit from increased sales.
Source: World Resource Institute (https://www.wri.org/blog/2017/05/need-safe-speed-4-surprising-ways-slower-driving-creates-better-cities)

I could talk about any or all of those things, but I won't. There are already many people here today who are probably better positioned than me to speak to those things.

So instead, I'd like to talk about you.

First, let me tell you a little story:

When my wife and I got married, we got a really nice set of sharp knives for the kitchen as a gift. We used them every day. When we became parents, we knew we needed a knife storage system that would keep our kids safe from injury, and even death.

So we used the system our parents had used, and our parents' parents before them, and our parents' parents' parents before them: we stored one under the sofa, one in the tub, one in each bedroom, and one on top of the TV.

After all, knives were part of our everyday lives. Kids and knives would have to learn to co-exist.

Unfortunately, the results weren't perfect. Many of our kids were getting cut, and some were even dying.

So, we did what any loving parents would do: we went on an all-out public awareness campaign in order to educate both our kids and the knives about personal responsibility. Because safety is everyone's business!

Everyone was going to have to be much more careful from now on.

We taught our kids to look both ways before taking a bath. We had them wear bright clothing around the knives. We showed them to make eye contact with the knives before turning on the TV.

We also rigged up signs with flashing lights all around the house warning the knives when there were children nearing, so they would know to cut more carefully. And we reminded the knives to stay alert!

And guess what? Our children were still getting cut, and they were still dying.

It was obvious that the problem was with the knife storage system itself: it was clearly not safe enough.

And ultimately, responsibility for that system rested solely with us, the parents.

So, despite protests from most of the knives and even some of the children, we had to change the system.

It was the only ethical thing to do. After all, as parents, we are responsible for the safety of our children. And no matter how much we like tomato sandwiches, they're not worth dying over.

Now, let me tell you another story:

On October 29, 2018, a Boeing 737 MAX 8 crashed on its way to Indonesia, killing all 189 people on board.

Following that, Boeing issued an operational manual guidance, advising airlines on how to address erroneous cockpit readings. Translation here: pilots needed to be more careful.

Not even 5 months later, on March 10, 2019, another MAX 8 crashed 6 minutes after takeoff from an airport in Ethiopia, killing 157 people.

According to the Ethiopian transport minister, crew had repeatedly performed all the procedures provided by the aircraft manufacturer, but to no avail. They had used the system as designed and as instructed, and people still died.

Clearly, there was a problem with the system, and public safety was at risk.

It would take less than 3 days after that second crash for government authorities throughout the entire world to take the MAX 8 out of service, launching an investigation into the correction of its system's deficiencies.

Governments recognized that it was their duty to ensure the safety of the air transportation system, and when something threatened that safety, they acted immediately in order to save lives.

Let me tell you one last story:

On March 18th, 2019, 4-year-old Galila Habtegergish, was crossing Isabel St at Alexander Ave when she was struck by a vehicle. The pedestrian corridor lights had been activated, and she was crossing with a parent. No charges were laid on the driver, so the driver was following the rules too.



Galila died, and her mother suffered life-altering injuries, despite everyone using the transportation system as was designed.

Similarly, on February 13, 2018, 8-year-old Surafiel Musse Tesfamariam was killed while crossing the street on the way to school. He too was crossing with a parent, with the corridor lights activated. And no charges were laid on the driver.

Again, the system was being used as intended.

So far this year, 6 pedestrians have been killed by cars. And another 6 will die before the year is out because, on average, 12 pedestrians die on our roads each and every year. Another 130 are injured.

Our urban transportation system, as it is, is unsafe. It reliably and repeatedly kills people.

With any other system, the government in charge would immediately act in our best interest in order to save lives.

Which brings me back to you, Dear Mayor and Councillors.

The City of Winnipeg Charter states the purposes of the City, one of which is to maintain the health, safety, and welfare of the inhabitants.

And as members of Council, it is your sworn duty, and your moral, ethical and LEGAL obligation to ensure that the systems that YOU oversee, and the by-laws that YOU enact, maintain the health, safety, and welfare of the inhabitants of Winnipeg.

At 50 km/h, a person hit by a car will almost always die.

At 30 km/h, a person hit by a car will almost always live.

It would stand to reason then, that a by-law setting the default speed limit in the City at 50 km/h runs counter to the City Charter, if not in the strictest legal sense, then at least ethically and morally.

Responsibility for past pedestrian deaths on Winnipeg streets is not on you. After all, you only very recently gained jurisdiction on traffic speed. But now that the Province has placed it in your hands, it's fair to say that responsibility for future pedestrian deaths on our streets WILL BE on you.

And if you think you can clear your conscience with the trolley car dilemma (is it better to do nothing than to do something?), I would remind you that there is no status quo in this case.

You are passing a new by-law. That is doing something. And not only are you passing a new by-law, but I presume you will also be suspending the rules of Council in order to give this new by-law three readings in a single Council meeting. That's going out of your way to do something.

Your actions on Council have real-world consequences. People have the potential to literally live or die based on the words you put to paper.

At 50 km/h, people die. At 30 km/h, people tend to live. That's just physics.

And look, I realize that the life-saving choice is also the unpopular one.

But where public safety is concerned, it's your duty to act, not to seek consensus from the electorate.

When the MAX 8 was deemed unsafe, responsible governments pulled it from service, they didn't poll the airlines or travellers for their opinion. Lives were at stake.

When salad is found to contain E.coli., responsible governments immediately issue a recall. They don't ask retailers or customers whether they agree or disagree. Lives are at stake.

When an area is endangered by flooding or forest fires or hurricanes, responsible governments immediately evacuate the region. They don't hold a plebiscite with the residents beforehand, because lives are at stake.

The cold, hard reality of this issue is that virtually everywhere in the world where safe speeds were implemented, it was in the face of bitter public opposition. That is, until after it was implemented. In Graz, Austria's second largest city, public support was less than

50% before implementation, but rose to over 80% after implementation. And this has been the case in city after city after city.

And yet city governments around the world have been doing it anyway. Because the laws of physics don't change based on public opinion. Because lives are at stake.

What will your by-law say about you?

Do you believe that a child's life is a reasonable price to pay to shave 18 seconds off our commutes?

Will you be able tell the families of future victims of road violence that you decided their death was worthwhile, so you could avoid phone calls from angry residents?

Are you willing to let a dozen people continue to die every year just to get re-elected?

If so, then I guess we're done here. But when the next person is killed by traffic on our streets, I hope you will remember this moment, and what you chose.

If not, then I urge you to do the right thing by setting the default city-wide speed limit at a safe 30 km/h, unless otherwise posted.

Of course, a safe default speed limit of 30 km/h is only the first step. As the public service can attest, there will still be a lot of work to do afterwards to bring our street design in line with our speed limits.

Yeah, I know. Adulting is hard. Especially when you're the designated adults for all 750,000 of us. With great power comes great responsibility.

We elected you to be the Leaders of this City. So go ahead, lead already.