Greetings Mayor Bowman and members of the EPC,

My name is Mel Marginet and I am part of the transportation team at Green Action Centre. We work with individuals, employers, schools and organizations to reduce the drive-alone mode share in Winnipeg.

Here we are, nearing the end of budget time in the midst of a pandemic. This is a great time to check-in and ensure you're passing a budget that is building a resilient city, meeting the goals and vision statements you've put forward in the Climate Action Plan, the Transportation Master Plan, the Our Winnipeg Strategies, the Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies and the Sustainable Transportation Direction Strategy. These are big documents, so I'll just run through a key hit-list for your consideration.

Climate Action Plan

The Climate Action Plan commits to the goal of reducing emissions by 20% by 2030 and by 80% by 2050. This budget will not achieve that goal.

The Climate Action Plan states that the transportation sector must reduce GHG emissions by 17% by 2030. This budget will not get us there.

The Climate Action Plan recognizes the need to reduce sprawl and increase infill development, stating that by 2030, 50% of development must be infill. This budget reduces impact fees by 5% and further incentivizes greenfield development.

I want to state how incredibly difficult it is to commute within these developments without a car, let alone from these developments to the rest of the city without a vehicle. Indeed, the amount of kids who are driven to school in these developments is staggeringly high, as my colleague Sean Carlson presented last week from his work in Active and Safe Routes to School.

Our Winnipeg
The Our Winnipeg visionary document has the goal to increase the use and efficiency of public transit. This budget does not support this vision.

In Our Winnipeg, the city envisions an increase in active transportation, and the resulting reduction in traffic congestion. This budget will not achieve this goal.

By focusing on the Our Winnipeg strategies, we would create a city with options to getting around, "recognizing that a livable, desirable and affordable city of the future will have options like public transit and active transportation routes that support walking, cycling and other human powered forms of transportation." This budget further entrenches the personal vehicle as the only form of transportation for Winnipeggers, unless you're willing to sacrifice your comfort, convenience and safety.

The Our Winnipeg document connects our transportation system to our health and wellness, envisioning a Winnipeg that enables "opportunities for all age groups to be active as part of their daily lives … promoting walking and bicycling as healthy forms of exercise and transportation." Winnipeggers are recognizing their need to be more active and to reduce their GHGs, but in my experience conducting Transportation Demand Management (TDM) surveys, over and over the survey respondents say they have "no choice" but to drive, even though they desire other opportunities.

2011 Transportation Master Plan

The Transportation Master Plan sought a transportation system that supports active, accessible, and healthy lifestyle options, and in the section The Time To Act Is Now, the need for urgency is clearly laid out. The city has not moved with urgency, and this budget continues the sluggish pace.

The Transportation Master Plan calls for “a safe, efficient and equitable transportation system.” The current budget sees record investment in the mode of transport that is the least safe, least efficient, and least equitable.

The Transportation Master Plan calls for the city to provide efficient and effective transit service to all areas of the city. The current budget is reducing service on essential routes and does not enable a frequent system.

The 2011 TMP called for a rapid transit network to provide a viable alternative to single occupancy vehicles. This budget does see the city open it’s first rapid transit line. But no improvements for anywhere else.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION

I want to highlight how Winnipeg’s 2015 award-winning Pedestrian and Cycling Plan was supposed to be a 25 year plan, but you’re currently funding it to take over 80 years to complete.

At this point, you can get a sense that there’s a theme to these vision documents and plans, so I’ll simply highlight the five goals in the Sustainable Transportation Direction Strategy with Our Winnipeg.

A transportation system that is dynamically integrated with land use.
A transportation system that supports active, accessible and healthy lifestyle options.
A safe, efficient and equitable transportation system for people, goods and services.
Transportation infrastructure that is well maintained.
A transportation system that is financially sustainable.

I want to highlight that this budget does have some good things in it (free transit for kids under 12!), but all of these good things are being implemented at the cost of other good things (farewell U-Pass). Why are you putting the record spending into roads, which have the lowest ROI, at the expense of investments with much higher ROI, that also meet the goals and strategies above?

Green Action Centre knows from the results of commuting surveys that the U-Pass has unquestionably increased ridership in Winnipeg. This is a success story. But not one that should be taken for granted. Please, don’t believe that 98% of these students will continue to bus if the U-Pass is cancelled. The fact that the cost is already incorporated in their student fees is as important as the subsidy itself. "I am paying for it anyway so I might as well use it." The loss of U-Pass will lead to a loss in ridership and more vehicles on the road. It is a self-perpetuating cycle to justify more investment in roads rather than in transit.

The task in front of you probably seems impossible. You are leading a city that has prioritized the convenience of personal vehicles over the comfort and safety of those walking, biking and taking transit for decades. And while most citizens will say that they have “no choice” but to drive, you probably feel like you have “no choice” but to spend a record amount of cash on roads, but you DO have a choice.

When Enrique Penalosa was elected as mayor of Bogota, Columbia he inherited a city with a chasm between the rich and the poor, a high crime rate, traffic congestion, not to mention an influx of refugees, poverty and more. Truly, a city feeling like it was a “have not” place. Did Penalosa table budgets that chipped away here and there on some good things, while maintaining the status quo? No.

Penalosa recognized that “a city can be friendly to people or it can be friendly to cars, but it can’t be both.”

He tossed out the highway budget, and poured the money into bike paths, parks, pedestrian plazas, libraries, schools and daycare centres. He built a rapid transit system using buses (and yes, this system was created during

his term as mayor, it didn't take 25 years). While offering these "carrots", he also balanced with "sticks", raising gas taxes and banning drivers from commuting by car more than three times a week. Never forget, you have to have carrots and sticks if you want to create behaviour change.

Bogota changed, and it changed dramatically. Rapidly.

A quick note on weather. Yes, winter happens. It's no excuse, cities like Oulu, Finland show us that it's not our weather holding us back, it's our infrastructure.

A new Winnipegger might say that creating a path network on our rivers in the winter is madness, and visiting the Forks this year, it'd be hard to argue. Our October flood means there's no infrastructure on the river this year, and consequently, few folks are using it. Some people still do, let's call them the "extreme" river walkers. But we know that, in the years where we have those paths on the river, tens of thousands of Winnipeggers use them, all ages & abilities. They create a vibrant network through neighbourhoods, a place for Winnipeggers to use for pleasure, or for a practical commute. They clearly demonstrate the incredible opportunity to have these types of paths and networks available to all Winnipeggers year-round.

To conclude, budgets are about values. Who and what do you value, as our civic leaders? In the midst of a pandemic, Main Street Project is working on plans to keep vulnerable Winnipeggers safe with few resources, while the Jets only agreed to pay their event staff for the 4 missed games after a massive outcry. One is seeing a cut, the other an increase. Roads deliver the lowest ROI of all transportation options, while also ensuring you meet none of the goals in any of your strategies, but roads are getting the record increase at the expense of healthy, sustainable transportation.

We're in a dramatic time, and that calls for a budget that will foster dramatic change. But dramatic changes are possible, and they have been done elsewhere, and we have the plans and strategies to achieve them here.

What's standing in the way is our budget.

Now is the time to act.

Vote no.