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RE: Report 22, Sidewalk Snow Clearing

Greetings to the Chair and the IRPW Committee Members;

Thank you for the opportunity to connect with you today about this important issue. At Green Action Centre, our vision is all Manitobans "Living Green and Living Well", and our Sustainable Transportation team brings this vision to our transportation systems.

We support this motion requesting the public service to investigate new ways to improve the sidewalk and bike lane snow clearing in Winnipeg. There are many reasons to support this motion, but we see as the top priorities:

1. Equity

As noted in the motion, it is the responsibility of the City of Winnipeg to ensure freedom of movement for all Winnipeg residents in order to achieve article 13 of the Human Rights Charter. But, we don't need this outside charter to know that our current snow clearing policy falls short. We simply need to look at the Vision Statement for Winnipeg: To be a vibrant and healthy city which places its highest priority on quality of life for all its citizens. Our transportation system affects everyone, everyday. Who has access to jobs, school, services and recreation, and who does not? In Winnipeg, especially in the winter, we know that those without personal vehicles are left behind.

It is essential for the IRPW committee to understand how trapped Winnipeggers are by our current policy. The current policy, to plow to a hard pack, means that our sidewalks are often slushy, icy and rutted. We are living through climate change, and seeing the impacts on our current policies. We are experiencing more fluctuations in temperature, meaning this "hard pack" of snow is often slush or ice instead. It is critical for the IRPW

committee to understand that all Winnipeggers deserve access to their community, not just those who drive personal vehicles. It's also essential to understand that sidewalk snow clearing is directly tied to transit accessibility as transit trips begin and/or end with a walk. Currently transit does a good job of clearing transit stops; however, if the trip from the front door to that stop is mired by slush, ice and ruts, that transit stop is not accessible.



A person pushing a wheelchair on their knees, Winnipeg Free Press

We also saw from Stockholm and other cities in Sweden that they analyzed their snow clearing policies through a gender lense and discovered their policies are sexist, and they have now implemented a gender-balanced approach. Women in Urbanism's recent post, Snow Clearance Isn't Gender Neutral, looked at Canadian policies and they noted:

> While there are differences, a consistent theme across many Canadian cities - and even around the world - is that snow clearing policies and practices often prioritize men over women. This is demonstrated through the modes, locations, and methods that are applied to winter maintenance.

We believe that the policies in Winnipeg are sexist as well, and we can learn much from the cities, like Sweden, who have made changes to their policies to be more gender neutral.

Whether it's kids walking or biking to school, seniors visiting their local recreation centre, or folks with disabilities living their lives with dignity, the

City of Winnipeg's current policy does not allow all of its residents the freedom to move.

2. Sustainability

The City of Winnipeg needs to dramatically reduce the number of people driving for many trips in order to achieve its climate goals. We currently have over 80% of people driving for trips in this city, and most often they are driving alone. We need to reduce the number of driving trips to 50% by 2030 to meet our climate action goals. We know that Winnipeg has the highest number of trips in Canada that are less than 5 kms, with the lowest amount of people walking or biking for those trips. We also know that the demand exists for safe infrastructure.

When we work with workplaces on TDM (transportation demand management), one thing we regularly do is a survey to understand how folks are currently traveling, how they'd like to travel and what the barriers are to getting to that point. Over and over, we see the high numbers for driving alone, and how that number dramatically drops when asked how they would "prefer" to move. Comments then describe how the person has "no choice" but to drive due to how our current transportation system prioritizes the convenience of driving over the comfort and safety of those who walk, bike and bus. This has to change.

To begin, we have to look at those short, simple trips that are often within neighbourhoods. How are kids getting to school and programs at the community centre? How are seniors moving around? If they give up their license, are they reliant on costly taxis or having family shuttle them about? Are those with disabilities reliant on handi-transit and costly taxis?

Having safe, clear sidewalks that invite folks to move about their neighbourhoods and to the bus stop are critical. Our current snow clearing policy is a barrier. For so many people, it traps them in their homes for days, weeks and sometimes months at a time.

It's too easy to blame winter and it being "too cold." But we know that isn't true. We can see the thousands of people who visit the Forks all through the winter to enjoy our frozen rivers. What's the difference between the Forks

and our communities? It's the maintenance of the infrastructure that is the biggest draw to the Forks, and the deterrent from our neighbourhoods.



Nestaweya River Trail, The Forks, *Globe & Mail*

We also know that other winter cities have been working on finding snow solutions and they are doing great. Let's learn from them!



Oulu, Finland. Photo by Pekka Tahkola

3. Financial

It's tempting when talking about improving snow clearing, to lean into Winnipeg's precarious financial position. And we agree, our finances are distressing. But, is it those who are walking, biking and taking the bus who should suffer the consequences? We believe the opposite.

The cost to move a person in a vehicle is 7-9 times the amount of moving them on foot, by bus or on a bike, according to cities who have studied this. To get a handle on Winnipeg's snow clearing spending, let's take a look at the analysis Michel Durand-Wood did on his blog, Dear Winnipeg, in his post *Snow Money, Snow Problem* in December 2022. To summarize, in the 2020 financial year:

- Winnipeg spent $338,250 each time it cleared the sidewalks
- Winnipeg spent between $4.5 to $8 million dollars each time it cleared the roads
- In just the over budget amount of snow clearing in 2020, the city could have cleared the sidewalks *every day* from November 1 to April 9th.

In short, it is VERY expensive to clear our streets, which puts a lot of pressure on our budgets. But that is a problem that needs to be solved by requiring less streets, less people dependent on personal vehicles for almost all of their trips, and getting a better handle on financial decline. We don't need to make those who require the least amount of resources sacrifice their freedom of movement for the bottom line of the budget here.

As also noted in *Snow Money, Snow Problems*, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that municipalities can be sued over injuries caused by improperly cleared snow. We've heard councillors say that they know the current policy results in injuries, but the cost for improvement is too much. But, how many suits would the city need to face for knowingly keeping a policy that results in injury before that policy becomes a financial liability? Another math question worthy of discussion!

In conclusion, we know that the status quo is not working. And we know that other winter cities are working on solutions. What are some things that could work here? The motion before you has some great ideas (brine, equipment etc). Other suggestions we have:

- We don't like that the current system is complaint based. This means those who walk/bike have to have a terrible trip and make a complaint to see improvement.
- When complaints are made about the sidewalks/bike lanes, we've been told that public works will "drive by to investigate." We believe those in

Public Works and those operators with contracts to clear snow should be on the ground, walking and biking through the winter. We see in Oulu that operators are required to walk and bike on the network after they clear it to keep their contracts. This experience would be great for operators to have.

- We appreciated Cllr Lukes' efforts to gather community and Public Works together this past winter for a session. However, only those most engaged and informed on this topic would attend such a session. We'd encourage Public Works and operators to be out gathering feedback from those walking and biking at various locations and times through the winter. What better way to learn about the experience of the users than talking to the parent pushing the stroller to school, the senior with the walker trying to get to the grocery store, or the person in a wheelchair traveling to the bus stop. This would be great for building understanding and trust.

Thank you for taking the time to read our feedback. We're sorry to not attend in person, it's a very busy time of year for those of us working in transportation! We are always happy to hear from you if you'd like to engage with us outside of this meeting.

Sincerely,

Mel Marginet, Sharee Hochman, Ariel Desrochers, Katheryn Loewen
Sustainable Transportation, Green Action Centre