His Worship, Mayor Scott Gillingham
City of Winnipeg
510 Main Street
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 1B9

June 16, 2024

Re: Report of the Standing Policy Committee Meeting on Public Works dated June 11, 2024 – Item 4. Primary Transit Network Service Implementation Plan

Dear Mayor Gillingham,

Despite having been part of a citizen delegation called Wolseley for Fair Transit, this written submission is being made as an individual citizen. It does not represent the views of the group, but mine alone.

A week ago, on June 11, three of us presented to the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works as part of the citizen group. We brought to the committee the concerns of 467 Wolseley residents who had signed an in-person petition requesting that Transit and the City pause the implementation of the Wolseley leg of the plan and consult properly with residents. This petition represented the concerns raised in over 500 conversations with neighbours in the last three months. We found that residents did not know that the changes to bus service were coming; we also heard over and over again that specific features of the route were causing alarm. These concerns are outlined in more detail in the group's June 11 written submission. We suspected that other neighbourhoods might have similar concerns.

That request to pause and consult was denied when the committee voted to implement the Primary Network Plan as is.

The request was not made out of naivety, however. Firstly, we had invitations from both Transit and Councillor Janice Lukes to come up with and present ideas to address the concerns. But, more importantly, we felt it important to point out to elected officials that critical decisions were being made without adequate consultation with the people most profoundly affected by the proposed changes. Even the people who signed the petition are only a sliver of the key demographics that should have been consulted.

It was pointed out during the committee meeting on June 11 that this will be the biggest change Transit has undergone in 70 years. Nonetheless, we were told that parts of the planning process were accelerated. We heard the suggestion that, for a variety of reasons, Transit did not advertise the consultation stages sufficiently. That the methods used by the Engagement department may not have been adequate. We learned that residents are – mind-bogglingly - not considered stakeholders. We know from City documents that only 1.2% of Winnipeg's population was consulted before the plan was first presented to Council in 2021.

All of these points should have been reason to *extend* the planning process, not accelerate it. *More* resources should have been made available to communicate with Winnipeggers. The methods of the Engagement department should have been reviewed to ensure accountability for such a critical project. Underlying assumptions true before the pandemic should have been tested to ensure that they still applied. Post-pandemic budgetary realities should have been re-assessed. Essential research should have been completed; the traffic study along the route in Wolseley has not even been started, never mind completed and analyzed, so the same has no doubt happened in other areas. Residents should *absolutely* be considered the most important stakeholders. A 1.2% sample would never be considered adequate consultation by a serious researcher.

What lies ahead now? Councillor Wyatt said that Wolseley may be the "canary in a coalmine" because other neighbourhoods do not even know yet that these fundamental changes to transportation are coming. People across the city will find out that their means of public transportation is removed or moved with no recourse. A review of the new transit system will not take place until September of 2026 and required changes will be "prioritized" by some as-yet unknown criteria. Those who rely most on public transportation – especially vulnerable populations – will of course be most affected.

Kevin Sturgeon, Senior Transit Planner, commented during the subsequent Transit presentation that people will be upset for a week and then "they will settle down". That paternalistic attitude, that blatant lack of concern about the massive social experiment being unleashed on the City, is breathtaking and disrespectful at best.

I get the sense that Transit is genuinely proud of the "engagement" they have done. However, "engagement" is not the same as consultation, which they purport to have done. When asked in the committee meeting about the amount of consultation completed, Kevin Sturgeon responded by describing the promotion done by the department. However, promotion is about convincing people that you have a great idea; *consultation* is about asking people what they think and what concerns they might have, so that later problems can be avoided. This distinction should be obvious. Several times during the discussion, Councillor Wyatt suggested that a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis be done on the new Transit Plan over the summer. Each time he raised it, the idea was dismissed and ultimately the suggestion was struck down by the Chair.

And so, we move towards June 29, 2025, with an under-informed, under-reviewed, accelerated Transit plan that was devised *for* us but *without* us, a cardinal sin in progressive community development circles. And we're expected to just get over any misgivings that we may have as citizens with lived experience whose community will be significantly impacted.

The underlying belittling attitude, suggesting that raising questions about the new Transit Plan comes from an old-fashioned, anti-bus state of mind – as has been suggested by various people on social media and in the press - is misguided. Rather, I would suggest that anyone in a position with civic or community decision-making authority who is afraid or unwilling to hear and

integrate a variety of perspectives is not serving the citizens but instead serving their own agenda … with taxpayer dollars, no less.

I urge the City to take a closer look at its “consultation”, planning, and decision-making processes, in particular for those issues that most affect the daily lives of citizens: safety, food security, housing, community life, and transportation, among others. I also urge Transit and the City to add “community wellbeing” and “social impact” to the criteria that will be used when the new Transit Plan is assessed in 2026.

Respectfully,
Margerit Roger