



# Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

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Adapted from presentations to both Executive Policy Committee and Council:

The Social Planning Council of Winnipeg has almost 100 year history of working to improve the lives of Winnipeggers through community led development. We operate on the basis that the people most effected by an issue have the better understanding of the harm done and what supports are needed to equip them to address it. Our vision is for a community that is sustainable, just, equitable and caring. We tend to focus on matters related to poverty as poverty is the largest barrier to full social inclusion.

Over the years, we have often played a supporting role in creating and maintaining coalitions. The last time such a stark transit fare increase was proposed at City Hall under the last Mayor and Council, SPCW played a leading role in bringing community together to oppose it through reasoned and evidenced based arguments. Along with some good old fashioned community activism. As this Council may have noticed, the community's commitment to safe, affordable and accessible public transit is as strong as ever.

Understanding fully the difficult position this city Council and Mayor have been put in by the provincial government, never the less, we are here to oppose the proposed transit fare increase as it will exponentially harm those living in poverty. We are here representing 39 coalition members, however, as some act as representative organizations themselves, we are here on behalf of over 100 organizations concerned as to how this will affect their participants and the city as a whole.

I realize that even with this increase, Winnipeg's transit fare will still be one of the lowest across the country. However, comparing our system of buses to others with buses, streetcars, subways, Go Trains etc... is not a fair comparison. A better comparison or perhaps lense, would be to examine a city's intent in providing a public transportation system. How does it best benefit all citizens?

Ottawa is one of the eight cities currently offering a low-income bus pass. Granted it has a larger population base than Winnipeg but neither does it receive any provincial funding. While the uptake in ridership as a result of this move did not meet expectations, instead of scrapping the pass, Ottawa is 'doubling-down'. They are bringing in a reduced fare on single tickets as well realizing that for some, even the reduced monthly pass still represents a significant amount of their income and unless they need to take the bus twice a day every day, it is not worth taking away from food and other necessities. Calgary has really set the example though by charging the same amount for a low-income pass at about the rate of one regular round trip.

It is also imperative when comparing Winnipeg with other cities to note that we are the

capital city of the province with the highest child poverty rates, a full 10% above the national average, in Canada. Two of the three federal ridings with the highest child poverty rates are Churchill, Manitoba as the highest, with one in northern Saskatchewan being the second and Winnipeg Centre being the third. Winnipeg also remains a transient city for many as they cycle in and out unable to sustain themselves in their home communities or simply looking for more opportunities but continue to struggle here as their ability to access support programs, education and employment opportunities, is hampered by the lack of a fully resourced and robust transit system.

We are part of the Make Poverty History Manitoba coalition currently working on the community led poverty plan for the City of Winnipeg. Our main role has been to ensure broader community engagement beyond 'the usual suspects'. To that end, we added community meetings in Charleswood and St-James knowing that while the inner city neighbourhoods still have the highest rates of poverty, there are pockets of poverty throughout as evidenced by the increasing expansion of food banks. In these sessions, transit was noted as key because the vast majority of programming and other supports still remain downtown. Even at the mid-point report back session this summer, attended by over 60 on a beautiful summer evening, the report's recommendations on transit garnered by far the most interest even above public safety and the Winnipeg Police Service.

We understand that infrastructure, namely road repair, has been identified as the top priority of the majority the city has surveyed. However, transit was second. We also have to note that those living in poverty are notoriously under-represented in such surveys. Again, we understand the position that the province has put the city in, however, public transit does have wide support. In fact, more and better transit is the goal of the even broader coalition that has come together around this issue.

We also understand that election promises were made around property taxes and Council feels an obligation to abide as best you can by those commitments. However, we want to let you know that we understand that property taxes were kept artificially low, as in unsustainable as evidenced in our decaying roads and other infrastructure, under the last Mayor and Council. The infrastructure deficit, like all deficits, was created much more quickly than it will take to reverse it. We are here to urge you all to look at the cost of increasing the social deficit that poverty represents as an unacceptable trade off. Even if only in the name of enlightened self-interest. We all pay for poverty one way or another.

Finally, SPCW is a community partner in developing Our Winnipeg's priorities for the next five years. At the community meeting we co-hosted, we were asked to focus on five areas: quality of life, how we grow, how we get around, health and safety and civic engagement and governance. How public transit affects the first four is easy enough to see. I could also make the argument that public transit is also essential for civic engagement. However, the subject of governance sparked a conversation around the

relationship between the city and provincial governments.

Given that the majority of Manitobans live in Winnipeg and that is only set to increase in the coming years, and 31 of the 57 provincial ridings are also in Winnipeg, I would like to assure you and the rest of Council of our support in rallying those numbers to engage with the province to reinstate the 50/50 funding agreement. However, first we need you to hold off on this fare increase. Even the promise to consider a low-income bus pass is not enough at this point. Even if you chose to adopt one based on the study we sent you all, it is not enough. It will still take time to implement. January 1<sup>st</sup> is just around the corner. Too many will struggle as they try to incorporate yet another drain on their already scant resources.

Unfortunately the perception that those struggling in poverty are there due to some lack of character persists. The belief that everyone is supposed to be able to 'pull themselves by their own bootstraps'. Perhaps not in this room as the evidence refutes this belief. Poverty is simply too demoralizing and dehumanizing. However, even if one believes that everyone should be able to succeed if they just 'put their shoulder to the grindstone' etc... taking away the opportunities for education, employment and supportive programs that affordable public transit offers does not make sense. Deprivation does not teach resilience. Deprivation relies on resilience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Kehler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kate Kehler,  
Executive Director