

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY MANITOBA

Low-Income Bus Pass: Community Perspectives Position Paper

January 2019

To City of Winnipeg Mayor and Council:

Collectively, we congratulate and are excited about the City of Winnipeg's proposal to implement a low income bus pass as part of the 2019 Budget process. Affordable transit is foundational to building a socially equitable community, as well as for achieving our city's environmental obligations. A low-income bus pass will play an essential role in making transit more affordable for everyone, as well as serving as a crucial part of the City of Winnipeg's role in reducing poverty.

Last year, Make Poverty History Manitoba published *Winnipeg Without Poverty: Calling on the City to Lead*, the community's call to action for the city to develop and implement a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. Our community vision is for the City of Winnipeg to take a strategic approach to reducing poverty by identifying realistic goals to help guide decision making, as well as considering all city policies through the lens of how they impact those in poverty and the most vulnerable in our community.

Within this report, we examined the best practices of poverty reduction strategies in other communities across Canada. A low-income bus pass was a key, game-changing idea within an overall poverty reduction strategy that we included in our report. Naturally, our members were excited to see this proposal being seriously considered by the City of Winnipeg with broad support from the general public.

In Calgary and Edmonton, this was a key part of their municipal poverty reduction strategies. In Calgary in particular, the cost of transit, as a result of negotiations with the province, has been reduced to a sliding scale with a subsidy as high as 95% for the lowest income residents, reducing the cost of transit to \$5 per month.

We support the implementation of a sliding scale low income bus pass program, fully integrated with the Transit Plus program. We also support reduced general fares and improved service across the city.

Last year, Winnipeg city council raised bus fares by \$0.25 making transit unaffordable not only for the lowest income riders, but for working families and households trying to reduce their environmental footprint. As documented in the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives State of the Inner City 2018 report, *Green Light Go: Improving Transportation Equity*, increased bus fares have heightened transportation inequity in Winnipeg. It is vital that a low-income bus pass program be integrated with a reduction in general fares to make transit affordable for everyone. Transit riders in Winnipeg already pay one of the highest ratios of fare to service revenues of any

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major city in Canada. A 2016 City of Edmonton report on transit fares and subsidies found Winnipeg had the highest ratio among 14 Canadian cities. Winnipeg also spends less per capita than comparable Canadian cities. Data collected by Functional Transit Winnipeg show that Winnipeg spends only one third as much on transit operating subsidies as Ottawa or Edmonton. A low-income bus pass cannot be implemented at the cost of higher fares for other riders.

We welcome consultation and the steps you are taking to implement a low income bus pass in Winnipeg. We note a sliding scale low income bus pass offers dignity and choice to low income people. The reality is that a low income bus pass of 50% of full price is still out of reach for many low income people. Calgary for example, saw uptake of their low income bus pass double in size and exceed expectations once the sliding scale model was introduced. How the bus pass is designed and delivered matters, and we encourage you to consult meaningfully with people with lived experience in designing the pass.

We would like to offer our support to the city in obtaining assistance from your provincial government partners to realize a truly affordable transit system and a comprehensive low-income bus program. We note that the provincial government currently spends at least several million dollars on transit subsidies for Employment and Income Assistance recipients and participants in other provincial programs in Winnipeg. This included 3,100 bus pass, 2,400 partial passes and 7,500 tokens or tickets each month for the EIA program alone in 2017/18. As in Alberta, a sliding scale low income bus pass program would be well- implemented with provincial funding support. However we cannot wait on the provincial government for the City to act on this important program.

In conclusion, we offer our support for a well designed, sliding scale and truly affordable low income bus program. This program will be an important step to providing transportation equity in Winnipeg, and a welcome policy decision from low-income Winnipeggers, those who work directly with them, transit operators, and community members in general.

Prepared by:

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