

Thursday, January 15th, 2009.

ATTN: Hon. John Baird, MP
Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Dear Minister Baird:

It has been widely reported that the Federal Government is looking for shovel-ready infrastructure projects, with a preference for environmentally-friendly projects that can be begun early and finished soon.

I am writing to urge you to consider using federal money to fast-track the creation of the City of Winnipeg's active transportation network, a project that has unmatched cost-benefit potential in terms of popularity, environmental stewardship and job creation.

Cyclists, pedestrians and wheelchair-users benefit greatly from infrastructure that is designed for their convenience (greenways, bike lanes, pedestrian bridges, bicycle intersection treatments, etc...). Once complete, this new infrastructure *always* increases the number of users, offering a wide range of permanent benefits to a broad spectrum of society, above and beyond just "taking cars off the road".

You noted that "the government will favour projects ready to go immediately and which can't start without a federal infusion." The proposed network is made up of relatively simple infrastructure projects that can be designed and built within a six-month time frame. Both the municipal and provincial governments have begun to contribute and build, but there is still a long waiting list of projects that need to be completed before the network is fully functional.

"We don't want the recession to be over by the time we get infrastructure dollars spent," you said. In fact, if you choose to invest in active transportation infrastructure, it is quite possible that, not only will the dollars be spent but that, uniquely, *the infrastructure itself will be built* before the downturn ends.

It is clear people are beginning to "think green", in more ways than one.

In a period of economic uncertainty, greenways, pathways, bike lanes, sidewalks and pedestrian bridges not only reduce the burden on the planet, but they also ease the *financial* burden on the average Canadian by offering permanent transportation alternatives that are essentially free. Thus, active transportation provides immediate financial benefits to those who need it most: students, persons with disabilities, low-income earners and seniors. They are not alone. Cycling and walking have become increasingly popular for everyone as gas prices soar in the summer. Urban living is on the rise largely because it can free up 13-17% of a family's income by providing more convenient access to nearby destinations.

The healthy-living and environmental benefits of cycling affect everyone. Remarkably, in surveys reaching as far back as 1998, an incredible 70% of Canadians consistently state their desire to bike to work on dedicated cycling infrastructure. This is verified by the experience of similar winter cities in key Northern European capitals where, after years of intense investment in cycling infrastructure, an astonishing 40% of all trips taken are now done by bicycle.

As we invest in safe cycling infrastructure and new pedestrian facilities, our share of green commuters will grow. In the last 2-3 years, the city of Winnipeg has invested 600% more in multi-use trails for cycling, 400% more in sidewalks and has created a new million-dollar budget for bike lanes on city roads. Already, the overall number of bicycle trips is up an estimated 25% this year over last, a fact which was edified by an amazingly successful Bike to Work day with over 2400 registered participants.

Projects that increase this type of activity are ongoing, the momentum is building and the commitment is clear. Both municipal and provincial leaders have offered growing support and recognize the usefulness and popularity of all types of “active and green” projects, but we need federal leadership.

A provincial active transportation advisory committee, which in the future will make this type of recommendation directly to the Province of Manitoba, is currently being developed but is hung up in bureaucracy.

At the municipal level, a long list of specific cycling & pedestrian focused projects just missed a June 2008 deadline for inclusion in the 2009 City of Winnipeg’s Capital Budget process. Thus, they were overlooked for prioritization and construction this coming year. Despite a last-minute grassroots lobbying effort and Council support, no room could be made in an already tight, thoroughly drafted and nearly-approved 2009 budget. Nonetheless, the projects are ready to go, the Mayor has publicly pledged his support and action will result from your investment.

One must look no further than the excitement generated by the North East Pioneers Greenway, the Bishop Grandin Greenway or the new bike lanes in downtown Winnipeg to realize that: if you build it, they will come.

On behalf of the citizens of Winnipeg, I urge you to contact Mayor Sam Katz or Kevin Nixon, the City of Winnipeg’s Active Transportation Coordinator, for more details about specific projects.

Sincerely,

Anders Swanson
Volunteer Project Coordinator, One Green City
Member – City of Winnipeg Active Transportation Advisory Committee

cc: Rod Bruinooge, MP
cc: Shelley Glover, MP
cc: Hon. Stephen Fletcher, MP
cc: Pat Martin, MP

cc: Anita Neville, MP
cc: Joy Smith, MP
cc: Vic Toews, MP
cc: Judy Wasylycia-Leis, MP