Transit

Winnipeg is often referred to as a 'car city', reflecting the sprawling nature of the city's suburban neighbourhoods. While it is true that the majority of Winnipeggers commute via personal vehicles, a 2025 count shows that over 11 per cent commute to work on public transit, a share that has grown year on year since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.[1] Beyond commuting, Transit is an essential service that provides accessible, sustainable mobility to Winnipeggers.

In 2025 Winnipeg Transit embarked on a complete overhaul of its system, transforming its decades old route map into a new 'Primary Transit Network', a proposal laid out in the 2021 Winnipeg Transit Master Plan. This transformation has not exactly been a smooth one. The Winnipeg Transit Master Plan identified the need for complementary investments in staff and infrastructure to ensure a smooth rollout of the new network,[2] however the transformation was conducted with only the new primary network infrastructure funded over the coming five years.[3] Many Winnipeggers have reported less frequent service, more overcrowding, and more pass-ups on busy routes.[4] While the Primary Transit Network has created a new foundation for expanding reliable, frequent service and a more efficient spine and feeder system, core problems remain; the systemic inadequacy of transit infrastructure and underfunded service are painfully apparent. Additional work and funding is required to ensure frequency and reliability are improved, and to deal with long-standing issues such as a lack of payment options.

Both riders and drivers suffer when the Transit system fails to meet Winnipeggers' needs. To meet their needs for safety, service and convenience we must modernize an antiquated funding model and put those dollars to work. The perceived narrative of Winnipeg as a 'driver

Bus stop on Portage Ave. / Alanna Yuen

city' means there is chronic misalignment of municipal priorities and dismissal of transit. Winnipeg should see itself as a transit city, in identity and investment.

Overview

Investment in Winnipeg Transit provides an efficient means to achieve financial, environmental, and quality of life improvements for Winnipeggers by reducing traffic and providing affordable mobility. Proactive investments are required to ensure the system grows alongside the municipal population and provides a reliable, safe option for transportation.

Finding new revenue sources for transit

As a crucial service, funding must be adequate, consistent, and long term. The Primary Transit Network launch in June 2025 was delivered within the existing operating budget with no new operating funding attached. To make the new system work, new funding is required. Moving forward requires systematic and substantial investment to recover from decades of infrastructure deficits and service cuts.

The 2022 AMB called for the restoration of the 50/50 funding agreement between the Government of Manitoba and City of Winnipeg, and we reiterate this crucial need. By reducing the burden of spending on municipalities, the provincial government can ensure that transit has stable, long term funding that is not subject to the shocks of ridership fluctuations like the COVID-19 shutdown or other service disruptions.

The national report on transit funding, *End of the Line,* recommended municipalities implement vehicle registration fees and parking lot taxes to help fund public transportation.[5] Montreal has successfully used surface parking levies of $12/m^2 to promote the transformation of parking spaces into higher value, dense developments while funding public transit. For more information on the AMB 2026 parking space levy see Fiscal Chapter Part 2.

Vehicle registration fees provide another way to raise revenues for Transit. As outlined in the City Planning chapter, a $60 addition to annual vehicle registration fees could raise an additional $44 million in public transit funding. These fees could be further adjusted to the size and weight of the vehicle, advancing climate goals by scaling up fees for inefficient oversized trucks and SUVs as well as recognizing the additional wear and tear on roads by larger vehicles. The AMB calls on the City to work with the Government of Manitoba and Manitoba Public Insurance to develop a plan for additional Transit funding through returning to 50/50 funding, parking lot levies, and/or vehicle registration fees.

The Canada Public Transit Fund is a $25 billion fund accessible to municipalities for transit infrastructure funding.[6] However there is a deadline for completion of projects by March 31st 2030. As of August 2026, the City of Winnipeg has not applied for any funding from this Federal resource.

Transit system upgrades

The next phase of the Winnipeg Transit Master Plan outlines crucial improvements to the Transit system such as additional bus lanes, priority signals, and infrastructure upgrades that improve the daily working environment for drivers — allowing them to operate safely and efficiently. These same investments reduce stress and enhance safety for riders.

The expected cost of the next phase of investment is $449 million, with the City of Winnipeg's share at one third (the others being the Province and Federal Government) costing $149 million.[7] These improvements are needed immediately to complement the new Primary Transit Network. Committing this money and financing it through debt means construction can move forward immediately.

In addition, investment is needed to bring the construction of the new Oak Point Garage back on track. The Oak Point Garage is needed to service modern buses and also transition to zero emission buses. The project was originally budgeted at $200 million in 2019 but is now estimated at $305M (in 2025 dollars) due to inflation and delays — a $105 million difference.[8] The City's share would be roughly $35 million, with provincial and federal partners funding the remainder. These upgrades are required immediately to ensure that the garage can accommodate parking and maneuvering extended buses.

Furthermore, full funding of the North Garage (Oak Point) is essential not only to address immediate capacity constraints, but to ensure the long-term maintenance and longevity of Winnipeg Transit's fleet. Winnipeg Transit is currently purchasing, on average, roughly 20 new buses per year — well below the approximately 50 buses required each year to maintain a healthy, reliable fleet, and avoid excessive life-extension of aging vehicles. As a result, buses must remain in service longer, increasing maintenance requirements and the need for adequate shop space, lifts, and specialized equipment. According to Winnipeg Public Works Committee discussions and the North Garage update presented in April 2025, the Oak Point facility, as currently planned, lacks sufficient maintenance capacity to meet projected needs, with Transit already anticipating a garage expansion within five years of completion. This risk is compounded by the planned transition to zero-emission buses, which require additional downtime, specialized diagnostics, battery and electrical system maintenance, and on-site charging infrastructure. Building insufficient capacity now virtually guarantees higher future costs through accelerated wear, operational inefficiencies, and construction inflation. Investing fully and correctly at the outset avoids paying twice for the same infrastructure and ensures the garage can support fleet renewal, electrification, and service reliability for decades rather than years.

Upgrades to Winnipeg Transit payment systems are also required to ensure it is easier to pay in more ways. To add fares on the current Peggo system, riders must line up in person at a Shoppers Drug Mart or limited transit kiosks, or have online access and a credit card. For many riders — particularly low-income residents, those with visual impairments, or limited digital literacy — these barriers make it difficult or impossible to pay. Upgrading to a Gold standard fare system would improve accessibility through multiple payment options (including credit and debit cards), online accounts, fare-capping, and reduced fare evasion. The estimated cost is $14.4 million (versus $10.5 million for the Silver option),[9] with annual operating costs of $2.6 million (vs $2.1 million). The additional cost of $3.9 million in capital and $0.5 million in operating costs would draw more revenue every year through increased fare revenue and improved payment access.

Main Street is scheduled for rehabilitation between 2028 and 2031.[10] We must fund the $2.4 million functional design study for the Northern Rapid Transit Corridor (Main St. to Inkster) immediately instead of digging up a brand new street. This ensures the corridor is designed before the road is rebuilt, avoiding millions in future reconstruction costs and traffic disruption.

Reports of violence and harassment directed towards Winnipeg Transit drivers have continued to emerge in recent years. The installation of full shields of driver compartments on Winnipeg Transit buses would help ensure that drivers are safe on the job. A precise cost estimate for installing full body shields across the Winnipeg Transit fleet has not been produced by city staff, however a rough estimate of $15 million was put forward by Transit's director of operations.[11] The City should immediately set aside $15 million for the implementation of driver shields.

Beyond capital construction, sustained Transit operating funding is equally critical. The previously mentioned *End of the Line* report identified service reliability and frequency as the strongest predictors of ridership growth. Without stable operating dollars, infrastructure investments risk being underutilized or deferred through service reductions. Winnipeg's history of balancing transit budgets through service cuts during fiscal pressure has produced a self-reinforcing cycle: reduced service leads to lower ridership, which then justifies further cuts. Breaking this cycle requires treating transit operations as essential infrastructure, not as discretionary spending, to ensure service levels remain resilient during economic downturns and emergencies.

Finally, aligning transit funding with climate and growth objectives is no longer optional. The Winnipeg Transit Master Plan establishes mode shift as a core strategy for managing population growth without proportional increases in congestion, emissions, and road maintenance costs. Every dollar deferred today compounds future costs as infrastructure deficits widen and vehicle dependence deepens. Strategic, immediate investment — supported by diversified, progressive revenue tools — allows Winnipeg to meet its financial, environmental, and social obligations simultaneously. The question is no longer whether the City can afford to invest in transit, but whether it can afford not to.

Actions

- **The AMB will** allocate $2.4 million to the Regional Street Renewal Program to fund the functional design of the Northern Rapid Transit Corridor, ensuring a "dig once" approach for the upcoming Main Street rehabilitation. Financed at an annual interest rate of 5.5 per cent over two years the annual debt servicing cost would be $1.3 million.
- **The AMB will** immediately fully fund the Transit Master Plan to $149 million by financing over 15 years.[12] The annual total cost of this debt at an annual interest rate of 5.5 per cent is $10.5 million.
- **The AMB will** restore the Oak Point Garage construction to the original standard with an initial payment of $14.4 million to get the project back on track and funding the remaining $21.6 million through the Canada Public Transit Fund. Financed at an annual interest rate of 5.5 per cent over five years the annual debt servicing cost would be $3.1 million.
- **The AMB will** upgrade the transit payment system from the Silver to the Gold standard to improve accessibility, convenience, and efficiency, and reduce fare evasion by spending an additional $3.9 million in capital spending and $0.5 million in annual costs.
- **The AMB will** fund the installation of full driver shields on Winnipeg Transit buses at a cost of $15 million. Financed at an annual interest rate of 5.5 per cent over two years the annual debt servicing cost would be $7.9 million.

Notes

1 Statistics Canada. (2025). "The Daily - Number of Canadian Commuters Increases for Fourth Straight Year in 2025." August 26, 2025. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250826/dq250826a-eng.htm

2 See Section 8 of the Winnipeg Transit Master Plan: https://www.winnipeg.ca/media/6901

3 City of Winnipeg. (2024). 2025 *Adopted Operating and Capital Budget*. p. 355. https://www.winnipeg.ca/media/5071

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5 French, Chris and Cooper, David and Gaio, Alex. (2024). "This is the End of the Line: Reconstructing Transit Operating Funding in Canada." Leading Mobility Consulting. May 2024. https://www.leadingmobility.com/endoftheline

6 Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada. (n.d.). Canada Public Transit Fund. Government of Canada. https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/cptf-ftcc/index-eng.html

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8 City of Winnipeg. (2025). "North Garage Replacement." Minutes of the Standing Policy Committee on Finance and Economic Development, item 4. July 8, 2025. https://dmis.winnipeg.ca/DownloadMeetingDocument/777929/PW%2007%2003%20No.%2001.pdf

9 City of Winnipeg. (2025). "Transit Payment System Upgrade." Administrative Report. https://dmis.winnipeg.ca/DownloadMeetingDocument/769694/PW%2005%2006%20No.%2002.pdf

10 City of Winnipeg. (n.d.). Downtown street renewals 2026–2028. Public Works. Retrieved August 14, 2026, from https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/publicworks/construction/projects/DowntownStreetRenewals2026-28.stm

11 Pursaga, Joyanne. (2025). "Transit plans to install better shields to protect bus drivers on cities mean streets." *Winnipeg Free Press*. November 27, 2025. https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/11/27/transit-plans-to-install-better-shields-to-protect-bus-drivers-on-citys-mean-streets

12 Author's calculation based on standard amortization of municipal bonds over 15 years at 5.5%.