

Focus on Climate Not More Roads

I'm delighted to report that based on recent announcements, Brian Mayes, city councillor for St Vital and Chairperson of the City's Water Waste and Environment Committee is on a bit of roll these days.

Not only did he second Cindy Gilroy's motion that Winnipeg sign the Montreal Biodiversity Pledge, which will help ensure the city acts on its upcoming Greenspace Plan and Biodiversity Policy, he recently introduced a motion to get the City moving on retrofitting public buildings to sustainable energy sources.

A number of climate action groups, such as Sustainable Buildings Manitoba have been lobbying hard for the city to accurately assess what it's paying in carbon taxes, to demonstrate the savings that might be had by retrofitting civic and public buildings. Given that roughly 39% of Winnipeg's emissions are the result heating, retrofits are a good first step toward reducing our carbon load.

That said, I hope the Mayor and councillors also know that there's a lot of Federal money available to help them get the job done and the capacity to do even more.

The Federal Green Municipal Fund offers low interest loans and grants to cities that cover up to 80% of the cost of retrofitting civic and government buildings. Also available is the Community Retrofit Fund (CRF), which is already helping municipalities, from PEI and Nova Scotia to Toronto deliver low interest loans to homeowners for sustainable energy retrofits.

Additionally, there's even more money to be saved, if the city accesses the Federal government's Zero Emissions Vehicle Infrastructure Program, which will help pay for the installation of public chargers. Switching the city fleet of cars and trucks to electric would also save money and more importantly reduce emissions.

There's just one hitch.

While councillors like Brian Mayes and Cindy Gilroy are taking action to make Winnipeg more climate resilient, others, like Transcona's Jeff Browaty, seem more interested in building new roads, to the tune of \$1 Billion, to accommodate more vehicles and possibly pave the way for yet more suburban sprawl.

In fact the city's recent strategic plan indicates that the mayor and council intend to initiate projects to widen Kenaston Avenue and extend Chief Peguis Trail, even before they receive the results of the \$2.8 million feasibility studies they itemized in this year's budget.

Sound like a disconnect to you? It does to me, because road building is a carbon emissions nightmare, both at the front and back ends. In fact, according to the Sightline Institute,

constructing just 1.6 kilometers of urban highway results in the release more than 100,000 tons of CO2 emissions over fifty years.

Multiply that by say, 10 kilometers - the projected length of the Chief Peguies extension - and you can almost guarantee that whatever emission reductions are achieved by retrofitting public buildings are more than cancelled out.

All of this when city center's Arlington and Louise Bridges are in very bad shape, the city can't pay to repair the roads we have and a plethora of studies indicate that longer, bigger roads do little or nothing to "facilitate trade" or ease congestion.

What's the solution? The City needs to harmonize it's climate action plan and accurately assess, based on hard empirical evidence, where our tax dollars should be spent - and more importantly where our money should not be spent - to reduce Winnipeg's carbon footprint.

As an inner city resident, I am just a wee bit sick and tired of my tax money being used to underwrite road projects that only benefit heavy construction and the suburbs. More importantly, I'm incredibly worried about how we, our kids and future generations will weather the climate chaos that's already bearing down on us.

Just this March, the International Panel on Climate Change issued its most dire warning yet. Reduce emissions immediately or prepare for irrevocable damage in the form of more intense heat waves, droughts and floods that will endanger the lives of millions of people.

In summing up, UN secretary general Antonio Gutterres observed, "Our world needs climate action on all fronts: everything, everywhere, all at once."

Bottom line? We don't need longer bigger roads to accommodate more motor vehicles. What we do need is a plan to retrofit this city, green our infrastructure and dramatically reduce our emissions, not in 10 years-time or even 6 years-time, but now.

If you agree, let your councillor know, and while you're at it take a few minutes to thank the citizen groups and councillors who are working to make Winnipeg a more sustainable, climate smart city.

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