

Concerns about the Bus Rapid Transit project's Active Transportation component

March 19, 2009

The Active Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC), the Rapid Transit Coalition (RTC), and Bike to the Future (BttF) have raised some of these concerns already, and remain wary that we may soon be too far along the process to have these issues properly resolved. Due to the secrecy surrounding the process, there is concern about what is happening (or not happening) behind the scenes. We have no guarantees that there will be further opportunities to comment, or that these concerns will actually be addressed.

1) There has been complete lack of transparency in the design process.

In spite of frequent requests from the RTC and BttF (and probably many others), there has been minimal communication, and thus far the only real attempt has been a presentation to ATAC. However, ATAC was given little notice and had no real warning that this would be the only opportunity for concrete input. No formal process was set in place for ATAC to go back to the greater community for further input. Mentions have been made of a future open house, but there is concern that this will be a 'formality' as it will then already be too late to incorporate the input of future users into the actual design process, which will be nearly complete by that point. BttF highly recommends an Integrated Design Process (IDP) for future such projects because the most effective solutions can only be found when all issues and concerns are considered from the outset of the design process.

2) It appears that this has been a Transit driven process and Active Transportation (AT) is being treated as an afterthought, and is only being incorporated 'where convenient'.

The problem with this process is that when AT is only considered 'after the fact', then the solutions are harder to find because the entire BRT system was designed with minimal consideration given to where AT fits into the picture. It appears that the BRT engineering drawings were already developed before the Landscape Architect was brought onboard for the development of the AT options. There are significant bottlenecks posed by the new BRT infrastructure that are precluding the use of certain AT options. There is a real possibility that many of these issues could have been avoided if AT had been considered as an integral part of the design from the outset. The irony is that almost all Transit users rely on some form of AT (walking, cycling, etc.) to get to Transit stations.

3) There appears to be a lack of concerted effort to find quality AT solutions to various challenges.

This is especially significant because many issues were not resolved under the earlier Winsmart pathway system because there was a perception that the eventual AT component of the BRT (now unfolding) was meant to deal with these. (e.g. South Osborne / railway underpass choke-point.) However, the options unveiled to ATAC made it clear that these issues were not going to be addressed as part of the BRT project. Most of the issues raised by ATAC, RTC, and BttF are supposedly too complex / expensive / insurmountable to resolve. We find this strange given the countless millions being spent on the BRT component to build major tunnels and bridges, yet what is comparatively minor extra complexity for acceptable AT solutions was not considered as part of the design process.

4) When BttF and other cycling / trails / pedestrian representatives raised concerns at the ATAC meeting about the many issues that were being left unresolved by the new BRT / AT corridor, we were told that these things were beyond **BRT's 'scope of work'**. This is very problematic. Winsmart was always meant to have been about creating both a BRT and AT route in the Pembina corridor, and it is resultantly alarming that AT is being considered only where convenient. It would be absurd to build the BRT without connecting the bus routes into existing roads and routes, and yet we find a hodge-podge of AT routes that do not connect into the greater community because this is beyond the 'scope of work'. What is especially alarming is that parts of the BRT AT route (along Donald St.) are now being paid for out of the City's AT budget instead of as part of the BRT project.

5) It would seem that major funding is coming from the Provincial and Federal levels of government, and it appears that this money was meant to have been available for addressing the AT component as well.

6) **Connectivity**, as alluded to in some of the points above, **is completely lacking in the options that are currently proposed**. There are no formal connections proposed to the area south of Jubilee, let alone any attempts made to connect across the tracks towards the West and North of BRT so that AT users can get to and from the places they are going to. **The issue here is that if these are not addressed then ~90+% of AT users would still have to use Pembina or South Osborne for their main routes**. It is unreasonable to expect all AT users to reach their destinations by passing through the Forks / Winsmart gravel trail, which is currently the only official connection to the proposed BRT AT route. At minimum, the following issues must be considered:

- Connecting to the South of Jubilee to allow access to Pembina / Riverside Drive / Elm Park (BDI) pedestrian bridge / Churchill Drive.
- Connecting to the West of the tracks to allow access to River Heights / Corydon Village.
- Connecting to the North of the South Osborne railway underpass to allow access to Osborne Village and Downtown.
- Connecting from Stradbrook / Main to Assiniboine Avenue, which is slated to become an important AT access route to downtown. (It is not reasonable to expect AT users to cross 6+ lanes of Main St only to double back across the same multiple lanes of traffic 400m down the road.)

8) Current plans propose a single multi-use pathway to be shared by all AT users, and the City is not prepared to spend more money (truly insignificant compared to the BRT expenses) to create separate cyclist / pedestrian paths. As illustrated by the success of the NorthEast Pioneers Greenway (Marconi), these multi-use paths are extremely popular and are easily flooded by both pedestrians and cyclists (in addition to all other forms of AT), which leads to cyclist / pedestrian conflicts due to the fundamentally different characteristics of each.

9) BttF has raised these issues, and even suggested some ideas that hadn't yet been fully considered. However, it is important to note that the role of the volunteers behind these organizations is not to have to find solutions on behalf of those that should have addressed them in the first place. If none of the options raised out of desperation by RTC, BttF, and others work, then it is up to those designing the BRT / AT corridor to find solutions that do work, without resorting to arguments of 'scope of work', 'impossibility', 'BRT is in the way', 'too expensive', etc.

10) We eagerly await further propositions from those steering the BRT design process and sincerely hope that they will take these issues seriously. We are concerned, however, that these issues will not be adequately addressed due to the already late stages of design, and that by the time this becomes officially evident, it will be too late to do something about it.