

Canadian Federation of Students–Manitoba

# **UPASS BRIEF**

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**ABOUT THE  
CANADIAN FEDERATION  
OF STUDENTS–MANITOBA**

The Canadian Federation of Students–Manitoba (CFS–MB) is Manitoba’s provincial students’ organisation, representing 45,000 part and full-time post-secondary education students. As part of the Canadian Federation of Students, CFS-MB organises services and advocates for accessible, high-quality public post-secondary education in the province and across the country.

## THE BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN A UNIVERSAL TRANSIT PASS

### INTRODUCTION

Access to affordable and efficient public transportation has been discussed in Winnipeg for over the past decade. Within that time, rapid transit has been halted twice, service has remained stagnant while transit fares have increased and students are left wondering when public transit will be made a priority in Winnipeg. At this time, students have never been more eager to see some movement towards a more affordable and valuable public transportation system in Winnipeg.

A Universal Bus Pass (U-Pass) is a transit pass that would give eligible students unlimited access to regular Winnipeg Transit services for fall and winter academic terms for a set price. The U-Pass has proven time and time again to be mutually beneficial to student pass holders as well as the local transit provider. As the U-Pass fee would be added to students' tuition fees, Winnipeg Transit would receive guaranteed revenue that would be put to improving the service across Winnipeg.

In the past, to address the transit needs of Winnipeg students, Winnipeg Transit established a discounted monthly bus pass. According to a 2002 study entitled *The Impact of Discounted University Student Transit Fares on Winnipeg's Public Transit System*, the monthly pass "only caused 15 percent of university students in Winnipeg to use transit more frequently compared to a possible increase of 56 percent if the semester pass were implemented" (Jacobucci, 2002, pg 9).

Starting in 2006, other modest improvements have been made to transit such as adding diamond lanes and priority signals, as well as the most recent "bustext" program and electronic display of bus schedules at the bus stop area, however it is clear that is not enough. Those

improvements do not address where upgrades are needed the most: more routes, more frequent service, and extended transit service in the evening.

A U-Pass would provide a number of immense benefits to make the necessary upgrades to transit service, provide benefits to auto users as well as reduce Winnipeg's impact on the environment. In order to achieve a U-Pass in Manitoba and make progress toward a more sustainable, efficient, and affordable way of traveling, students in Manitoba are looking to the Manitoba Government for leadership and investment.

### A GROWING DEMAND ACROSS CANADA

Students, university and college administrations, and municipalities all across North America are recognizing the benefits of having a U-Pass and are working together. In Canada, students from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Victoria, BC are benefiting from a U-Pass, making those post-secondary education institutions and cities desired places to study, live, and work.

At the May 2010 National General Meeting of the Canadian Federation of Students, students across the country voted to work towards more affordable and accessible public transportation systems, recognizing the U-Pass as the primary way of achieving that goal.

The cost of a U-Pass varies from city to city, and institution to institution ranging \$59 per term at Dalhousie University, to \$51 per term at McMaster University, to \$30 per month, available to all students in BC. What is clear, is in order to make the U-Pass successful in Winnipeg, students must feel like they are achieving a significant enough savings.

With a post-secondary student bus pass, students in Winnipeg are paying \$59 per month, which works out to \$472 per 8 months. The cost of

transportation is a significant piece of a student's budget each year, on top of the large cost of tuition fees, textbooks, housing etc. The Impact of Discounted University Student Transit Fares on Winnipeg's Public Transit System, indicates that the primary means of transportation to and from university is the bus in twenty-three percent of students at the University of Manitoba and fifty percent of students at the University of Winnipeg (Jacobucci, 2002, pg 8).

The above data indicates that students in Winnipeg are frequent users of bus transit services, however there is room to increase the number of students using public transit, especially at the University of Manitoba. Of students that did not take the bus as the primary method of transportation to and from university, forty-six percent would use public transportation more often if a U-Pass was implemented. Of those students, thirty-three percent were automobile users and twenty-two percent of those automobile users, would make the bus their primary method of transportation (pg 10). The implementation of a U-Pass will not only meet the growing demand for more accessible and affordable public transportation but it will make it an easier and a more attractive option for those who do not currently use the bus as their primary mode of transportation.

## **THE BENEFITS**

### **IMPROVED SERVICE**

As Manitoba's largest urban center, Winnipeg should be a leader in sustainable forms of transportation, however, unfortunately with two failed attempts at rapid transit over the past decade along with the urban sprawl that affects Winnipeg's development, Winnipeg Transit has not been able to keep up with Winnipeg's growing need, leaving public transportation out of reach for Winnipeggers.

According to the 2009 U-Pass and Transit Survey conducted by the University of Manitoba

Students' Union, in an open-ended question that asked students to provide suggestion on how to improve transit service, the top three suggestions were more buses on routes, better routes, and cheaper fares for students (pg 17).

When a U-Pass is in place, improvements to transit services are proven to follow. As discussed in the previous section, a U-Pass can make taking public transportation a more attractive option by making it more affordable and convenient. Convenience is cited as the reason why most people opt to take a vehicle rather than taking the bus. Another common reason is the length of time of the commute. With the higher demand for the service, and the revenue to make it possible, U-Passes have made service upgrades a reality for cities that have implemented one, making a U-Pass a win-win for both the transit service provider and the student.

The implementation of a U-Pass for University of British Columbia students is an example of the success a U-Pass can bring to a municipality in improving transit services while keeping them affordable. Since the implementation of a U-Pass in 2003, the use of public transit service has dramatically increased 139 percent over 6 years, up 53 percent in just one year.

A positive cyclical relationship is created through the successes of a U-Pass, which has short term as well as long-term benefits. Not only will Winnipeg Transit see an increase in ridership while students are in school, but with improved transit service, more people will continue to use public transportation well-after they graduate, providing more revenue for Winnipeg Transit to contribute back into service improvement. In Vancouver, commuter culture has started to shift; not owning a car is becoming a viable option for residents.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

It is no secret what climate change could bring to Manitoba in the near future. It is of vital importance

that environmental sustainability must be on the minds of all Manitobans, especially the Manitoba Government.

A major way that Manitobans contribute to climate change is through the carbon emissions released by the many motor vehicles on the roads in Winnipeg. One of the most effective ways of reducing vehicles on the roads and therefore carbon emissions is through an affordable, convenient, and efficient public transportation system. The more people that have access to public transportation, the less of a carbon footprint Winnipeggers will leave.

Fortunately, the Manitoba Government has the opportunity to take positive steps towards improving public transportation in Winnipeg, reducing Winnipeg's carbon footprint, and fulfilling the mandate of the 2008 Climate Change and Emissions Reductions Act, whose purpose is "to address climate change, to encourage and assist Manitobans in reducing emissions." Investment by the Manitoba government in a U-Pass will provide direct action on fulfilling that mandate to move to a more sustainable Manitoba.

## **BENEFITS TO AUTO-USERS**

Since the U-Pass is a mandatory fee that all students pay, the reality is that some students will never use public transportation, however they still receive a number of indirect benefits. With more people taking public transportation, there are fewer cars on the road, which generally reduces traffic congestion, making the drive to school quicker and more enjoyable. Also, with fewer cars on the road, the impact on the roads is reduced, decreasing the frequency those roads need to be maintained and upgraded.

The U-Pass that University of British Columbia students receive is a great example of how a U-Pass can cause indirect benefits for those who may not directly use the pass. With the U-Pass in

place, the number of cars heading to UBC each day has decreased by twelve percent, which is sure to cause a more comfortable drive to campus.

With fewer cars heading to campus, there is also a reduced reliability on parking spaces, so those who still need them have an easier time having access to parking spaces. In Winnipeg, access to parking is always a major concern for students at all campuses, however this need will be greatly reduced with more people making use of public transportation through the U-Pass.

This will be especially important with the new stadium being constructed at the University of Manitoba's Fort Garry Campus where parking is limited as it is. Parking at St. Vital Mall has been factored into the plan for available parking spaces for stadium events, however that is hardly walking distance from campus, making public transportation essential in making it to and from games and concerts.

## **COST**

In Winnipeg, students have been working towards an affordable U-Pass for over six years, however the cost that was offered by Winnipeg Transit was not a significant enough savings for students to support. U-Pass pricing ranged from campus to campus between \$230 to over \$300 per 8 months. According to the 2009 U-Pass and Transit Survey conducted by the University of Manitoba Students' Union, only a slim majority of students at the University of Manitoba are willing to pay \$200 for a U-Pass, which would have a very tough time passing in a referendum on campus. A more plausible price would be \$100-150 per 8 months in order for a U-Pass in Winnipeg to gather a stronger majority within a referendum.

Based on the figures that Winnipeg Transit has agreed to in 2008 students in Winnipeg need the Manitoba Government's help in order to

attain a U-Pass for \$100-150. Students have been investigating funding from university administrations in addition to the province however in order to have this environmental initiative be successful, students in Winnipeg need leadership and investment from the Manitoba Government.

Including students at the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, and Red River College, Winnipeg Transit had offered all students a U-Pass for \$249, which would mean \$9, 720, 462 in guaranteed revenue for Winnipeg Transit. Therefore, in order to attain a U-Pass at \$150, students are approximately \$3, 834, 762 short; a U-Pass at the cost of \$100 per 8 months, student would need \$5, 816, 662 of support. These numbers do not include students at College Universitaire de Saint Boniface, which would provide even more revenue, and therefore incentive, for Winnipeg Transit as well as investment by the province.

## **CONCLUSION**

A universal transit pass will not only be a mutually beneficial agreement between Winnipeg Transit and student in Winnipeg that will improve transit service, provide guaranteed revenue for necessary upgrades, move toward a more sustainable Winnipeg, and even provide a number of indirect benefits to auto users; access to efficient, affordable public transportation is a way to keep people in Manitoba and is a major factor in where people chose to live, work, and study. Investment by the Manitoba Government in a U-Pass for students in Winnipeg would be in an investment in Winnipeg. Students in Manitoba are interested in working with the Manitoba Government on seeing this important environmental initiative through.