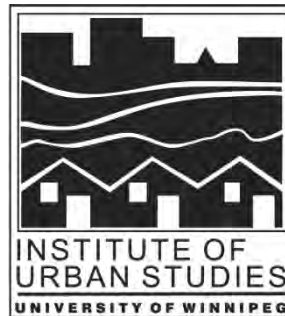
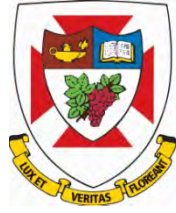


Planning for Winnipeg's Future

by **Terry J. Partridge**
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The Institute of Urban Studies





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presented to

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by

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Institute of Urban Studies
University of Winnipeg

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Planning For Winnipeg's Future

Introduction

Winnipeg is now passing through a critical phase in its development towards the big city leagues. With a population just over 500,000, the city still retains a considerable community atmosphere and relaxed way of life. In comparison to larger cities elsewhere, problems of poverty, crime, social segregation, housing, pollution, and transportation are relatively minor.

Beyond this point, however, the natural forces of urban growth will initiate fundamental changes in the city's character, requiring appropriate responses from the planners.

Over the past five years, several dramatic events, typical of North American experience elsewhere, have already begun to take shape. The base road system is reaching free flow saturation in the peak hours, with every additional vehicle now slowing down the total flow. Land and house prices have begun to escalate at an increasing rate, with ever spreading suburbs, and massive high rise commercial and residential buildings springing up from low density surroundings.

With a projected population growth of fifty percent more over the next twenty years, an understanding of urbanization processes and policy options is now of major importance.

Urban Processes

It has long been felt that decentralization of upper and middle income families to the suburbs has been encouraged by the decline in physical quality of core dwellings. As higher income families

move out, it was argued, the central city tax base declines, taxes increase, house prices fall, and landlords caught in the squeeze reduce maintenance costs. This process was assumed to be aided by neighbourhood effects which create a disincentive for individuals to maintain their own dwelling in a declining environment. The consequence was a stagnating core, spreading suburbs, and increased demands on the road system for commuters working in the centre.

More recent theories suggest a somewhat different interpretation of events. In the first place, it is now argued that decentralization has been largely due to increasing incomes and declining transport costs through use of the private auto. Secondly, the causes of under-maintenance of older core area dwellings are now attributed to the high prices of low quality dwellings relative to high quality dwellings. When the cost of maintaining a dwelling at high standard is greater than the loss in value through deterioration it will be allowed to decline.

Urban Policies Past and Present

These different theories suggest quite different planning responses. In the past, public urban redevelopment was seen as the answer to decentralization and a stagnating core. Large areas were expropriated, buildings demolished, and sites cleared for growth poles such as art centres, and convention centres. The aim was to stimulate further demand through a new physical environment. Public housing was built to compensate some displaced victims of the program, and more roads were built to cater to the increasing commuter traffic. The results too frequently have been, increased price pressure on the remaining older homes, greater crowding of low income families, and the consequent

deterioration of adjacent areas.

Some recent policies, suggest that a few of the lessons of the past, and principles of the newer theories are taking hold. Prompted by the 1968 Hellyer Task Force Report on Urban Development, the Federal Government has declared for the time being a moratorium on federal subsidies for mass urban demolition and renewal programs. The Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation, has dramatically increased the supply of public houses directly for low income families and the elderly. This should reduce upward price pressures on low quality homes thereby increasing the economic incentives for maintenance. And, finally, the mill rate equalization introduced with the creation of unicity should prevent the decentralizing effects alluded to in the early theories.

There are, however, several indications that there is more to be learned. The Winnipeg Area Transportation Study, which was adopted by the former Metro council, and has yet to be discarded by Unicity, calls for a massive freeway construction program costing around \$800 million over the next twenty years. This, plus continued federal encouragement of new homes for middle income families, both accentuate the forces of decentralization.

At the same time, the city government has developed a comprehensive plan for downtown development, which includes publicly subsidized parking, to reduce the trend towards decentralization. Land give aways to developers, such as the Trizec deal at Portage and Main, encourage further downtown growth, and increased traffic congestion in the wrong places.

Several of these policies involve subsidies, that not only favour the well off, (when poverty is a basic urban problem), but they

also tend to cancel each other out, creating a wasteful and ineffective burden on the tax purse. Some have no spatial purpose, but are aimed solely at growth, a factor, which some people are saying, we should provide rural incentives to stop.

Policies For the Future

A different course for policy, that is both advantageous, and realistic is outlined below.

1. Limit road expenditure to an amount that is worth the value of time savings created, with all environmental costs taken into account. Economic analysis of the sort now being used in Britain would very likely suggest a dramatic cut in current plans, including elimination of most freeways for a city of Winnipeg's population. It is, however, quite likely at this stage of development that city council would be reluctant to accept such economic evidence as a guide to policy. The following is therefore suggested.

2. Terminate immediately all Federal and Provincial shared cost incentive programs for urban roads. With 50% or greater grants from senior governments, it is in the interest of local governments to propose programs that return only 51 cents of benefit for every dollar spent. If local governments were given equivalent sums in general tax support grants, they would have more freedom to trade off roads for other priorities such as public transport, homes, parks, and recreation. Shared cost programs should only be retained for the promotion of national social objectives such as environmental improvements, and the elimination of poverty. There is no reason whatever, why senior governments should artificially encourage the building of roads. A significant

opportunity to improve the quality of urban living will soon be available when intown railway yards are removed. The opportunity to reclaim riverbank property for parks should also be taken now.

3. Within the transport sector, a number of alternatives to high capital cost roads should be considered. Examples are:

a) Traffic restraint through higher parking charges. Public parking ownership, and taxes on private lots should produce net revenue for local government. The principle of peak pricing is normal economic policy in other industries.

b) Subsidies to public transport would further relieve congestion and better serve the young, the elderly, the handicapped, and the considerable proportion of the population without cars available.

c) Reserved lane busways and concentration of road improvements at bottlenecks and junctions should be seriously considered.

4. Zoning powers should be used to encourage a greater mixture of residential and commercial activities. Greater attention to planning detail could avoid conflicts from non-conforming uses. At present, large areas zoned single family residential accentuate economic pressures towards social segregation and increase reliance on the automobile for services concentrated in large, widely separated shopping centres.

5. Further expansion of government housing can provide housing directly for those who need it, and at the same time create an economic climate conducive to a very desirable renewal and rehabilitation of substandard core dwellings and neighbourhoods.

Conclusion

These proposals do not involve a radical restructuring of our city as we know it today. They do, however, represent a substantial departure from the direction many other automobile age cities have taken. With the growing trend towards urbanization it is important that such issues be a subject of public education and debate. They should not be decided by small groups of technocrats and politicians behind closed doors.