

# Completing Streets in Winnipeg:

## Creative Strategies to Engage the Community

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Portage Avenue at Garry Street (Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, 2014)



Sherbrook Street Bike Lane (Destination Winnipeg, 2014)

### Abstract

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engagement,  
community, public,  
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In recent years, the City of Winnipeg has been improving the safety, efficiency and connectivity of Winnipeg's cycling network through the development of on-road bike lanes, off-street pathways and protected bike tracks. In 2015, Winnipeg City Council approved a 20-year Winnipeg Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies plan, providing a long-range policy framework for the expansion and maintenance of the city's sidewalk and bicycle network. In accordance with the strategy, and in collaboration with the City, MMM Group is currently planning for the Downtown Bike Lane System and West Alexander Pedestrian and Cycling Corridor. For the first time, the firm is working together with the City of Winnipeg's Office of Public Engagement to assure consistency in sharing information with residents. From the project outset, innovative and targeted strategies have been used to engage with the community and ensure the development of innovative ideas from interested parties. Ranging from online and on-street survey to stakeholder meetings, the public was provided with ample opportunity to voice their opinions on how best to improve Winnipeg's active transportation network in the downtown. In collaboration with Chris Baker from MMM Group | WSP, this case-in-point examines the Downtown Bike Lane System branch of the Study as an example of "best planning practice", outlining the creative methods used in the preliminary round of public engagement and how the people's vision is being applied to the process of design development.

## Introduction

The goal of the Downtown Bike Lane System study is to develop a plan to upgrade the existing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, renew the roads for all modes of transportation and enable active transportation for people of all ages and abilities (City of Winnipeg & MMM Group, 2016). Such a plan hopes to improve downtown vibrancy and community well-being. Furthermore, it hopes to engage Winnipeg residents and collect input that will be reviewed in the final design of the project.

Created on January 30, 2015, the City of Winnipeg's Office of Public Engagement (OPE) follows the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)'s core values to ensure consistency in sharing information with residents (City of Winnipeg, 2015, 1). For the public engagement portion of the study, this project saw the successful first-time collaboration between MMM Group and the OPE.

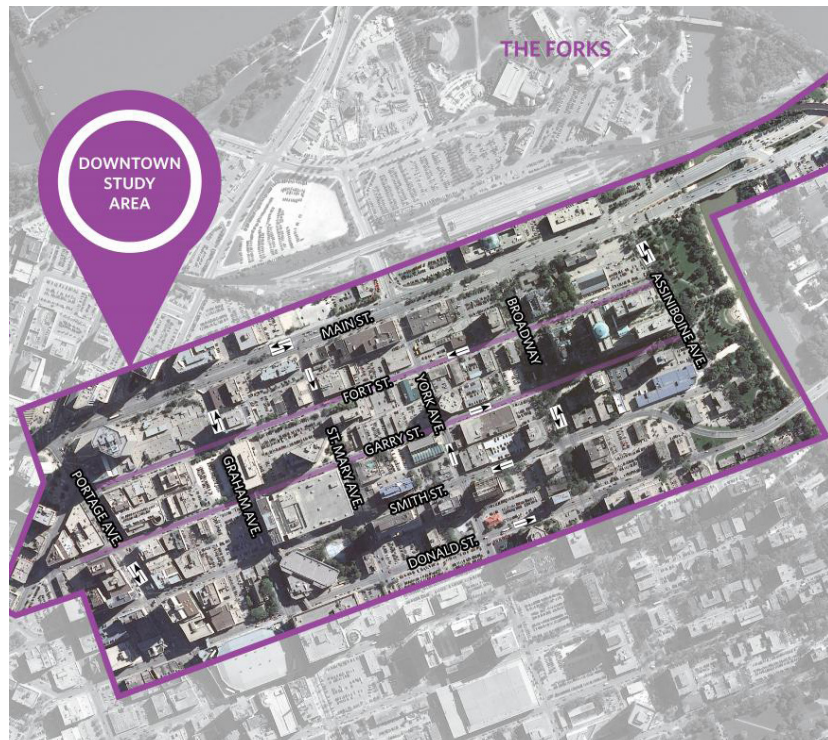
Multiple strategies were used to create a variety of opportunities for Winnipeg residents to voice their opinions on the creation and design of bike lanes on Fort and/or Garry Streets downtown. The result was a rich response from the public, both from the targeted study area and the broader communities of the city. Such a response will hopefully

provide the study team with the tools to plan for bike lanes that residents will be happy with, as well as the vision to engage a wide audience on future projects.

## Background

Located in the geographical centre of Canada, in the heart

second strongest in Canada, behind Alberta. It is projected that by 2031, Winnipeg and the surrounding area will near one million residents, placing increasing pressure on the city's transportation system. A review of long-term municipal development plans has helped to influence the establishment of Winnipeg's Pedestrian and



Downtown Bike Lane System Study area (MMM Group | WSP, 2015)

of the prairies, Winnipeg is the growing capital of Manitoba. According to Statistics Canada, the country's population growth rate was 1.1% from 2011-2014 (CBC News, 2015). Over the same period of time, Manitoba's growth rate was 1.21%, as a result of high birth rates and rates of immigration. Statistics from the period July 2014 to July 2015 indicate that Manitoba's current growth rate is the

### Cycling Strategies.

The intent of the Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies is to improve the comfort, safety, and accessibility of walking and cycling, encouraging them as plausible modes of transportation for people of all ages and abilities (Urban Systems, 2014). Stemming from Winnipeg's 2011 Transportation



Master Plan, the strategies will stimulate healthier communities, with a broad range of social, environmental, land-use and economic benefits for all (City of Winnipeg, 2015, 2). Seven overarching goals support programs and infrastructure investments to direct short, medium, and long-term plans for improvement (Urban Systems, 2014). One of those goals is to maintain a transparent process by continuously engaging with the community to develop the Strategies, and implement the initiatives identified within. In accordance with the Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies, this study intends to engage citizens in such a way that public input may be considered in the final design of downtown bike lanes.

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### **IAP2's Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation**

- 1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.**
- 2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.**
- 3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.**

**4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.**

**5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.**

**6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.**

**7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.**

(International Association for Public Participation, 2016)

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## **Community Engagement Strategies**

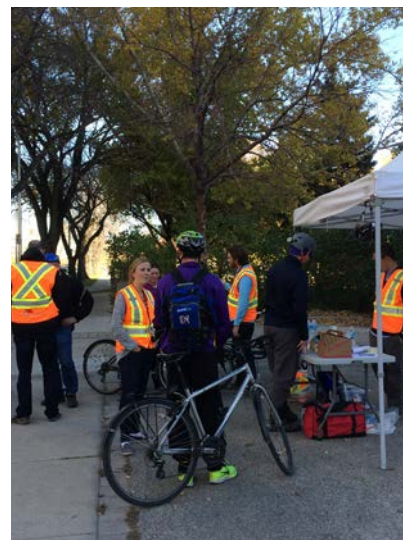
**PHASE ONE** of the project's public engagement process included stakeholder meetings, Tire Talks, Metroquest surveys, and open houses, with the intent of collecting as much information as possible.

### **Stakeholder Meetings**

Hosted on October 15, 2015, two stakeholder meetings were the first step of the study's public engagement strategy. The meetings provided participants with an opportunity to discuss the Downtown Bike Lane System

study. The intent was to hear perspectives on the existing conditions of Fort, Garry, and Main Streets, as well as ideas for possible future improvements to the same locations. In addition, the events gave landowners, businesses, and other stakeholder organizations the chance to be introduced to project materials prior to broader public engagement. Exercises conducted included facilitated table discussions and a mapping exercise to help plot issues and opportunities.

Emergent themes were wide-ranging, including the cost/benefit of bike lanes to various downtown businesses, snow clearance required for new infrastructure, public education needs, and opinions of two-way versus one-way design of bike lanes (City of Winnipeg & MMM Group, 2016).



Tire Talks, Assiniboine & Fort (MMM Group | WSP, 2015)

## Tire Talks

Set up on October 19 and November 2, 2015, “Tire Talk” events saw project team members set up tents, tables and signs along Assiniboine Avenue at Garry Street during the afternoon rush hour to engage in discussion with passers-by. These events were intended to provide opportunity for existing users of pedestrian and cycling facilities to discuss the project. Moreover, team members staffing the Tire Talks were also cyclists, in order to demonstrate to the public that those designing new facilities are also users. To foster the feeling of informal, “user-to-user” discussion, conversation

highlights were recorded by team members only upon completion of each exchange. Fifty-five conversations were recorded, with 80 project flyers distributed.

“There is a public health benefit of a separated lane.”

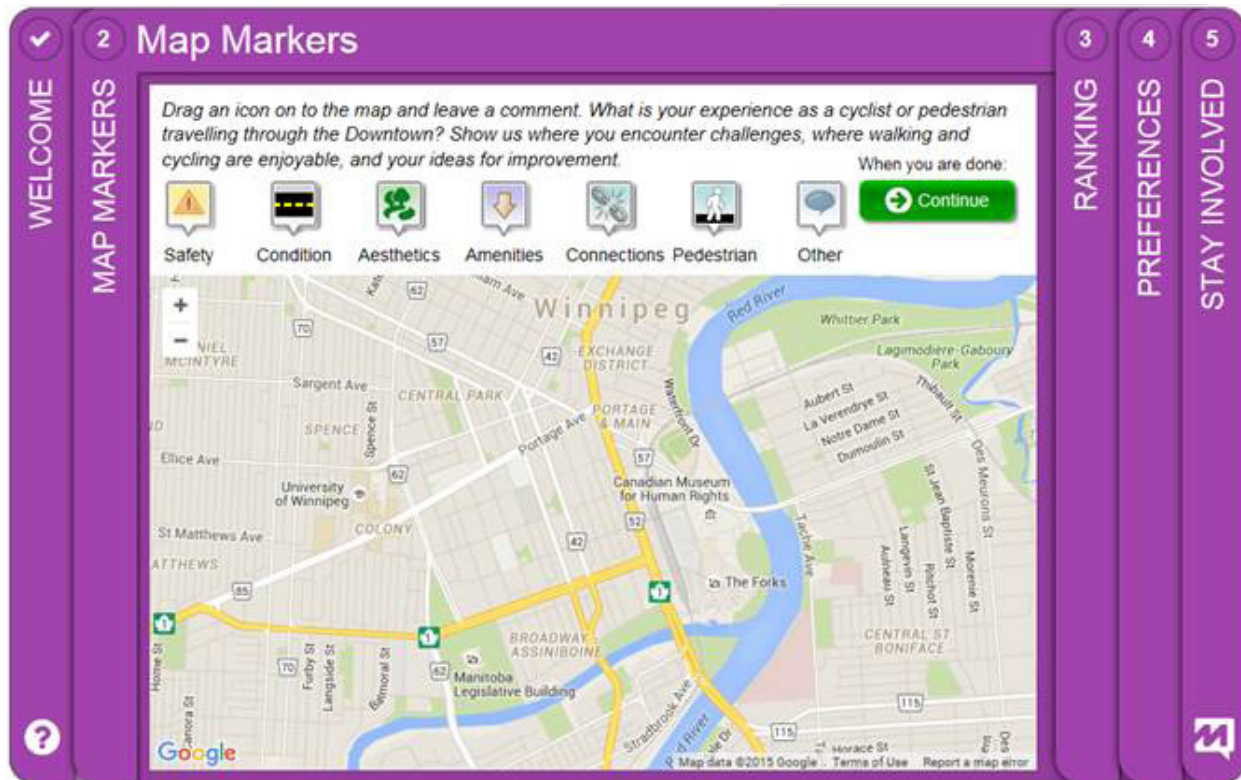
(recorded during Tire Talk events)

Main topics of conversation included safety, types of bike lanes, maintenance, connectivity, and wayfinding (City of Winnipeg & MMM Group, 2016).

## Interactive Online Survey - Metroquest

As part of the greater process of public engagement, a Metroquest survey was used to collect input on the design options for the Downtown Bike Lane System Study. Between October 19 and November 10, 2015, 470 respondents (53.11% of those who visited) completed the survey through an external link accessed via the City of Winnipeg website. The purpose of the survey was to be fun and engaging in an attempt to gain input from a wide range of residents who may be attracted through the popular online medium.

Based on the demographic



Metroquest interactive online survey (MMM Group | WSP, 2015)

information collected, surveys completed came from each of the city's north, south, east and west quadrants, however the majority of respondents live within a five kilometre radius of the downtown centre (defined as Portage Avenue and Main Street). Furthermore, 43.2% of respondents indicated that cycling was their primary mode of transportation. These results indicate that the survey is helping to access a primary, targeted audience.

Top priority items to emerge from the Metroquest surveys include producing a safe cycling environment, a focus on safety and comfort, and accessibility for all users (City of Winnipeg & MMM Group, 2016).

### **Downtown Public Open House**

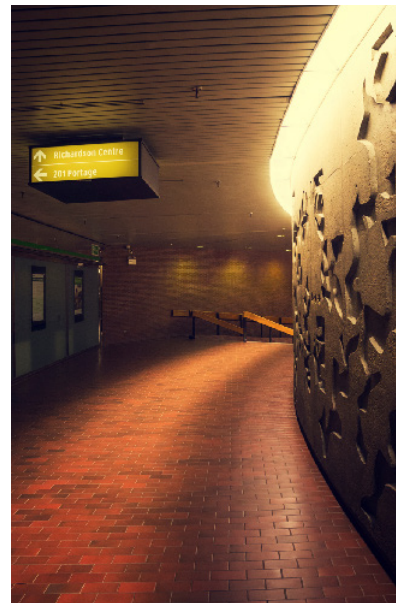
The Downtown Public Open House occurred on October 20, 2015, from 4:00-7:00 p.m. at the Manitoba Children's Museum. Promotion of the event occurred using several methods, including invitations being mailed to businesses, landowners and residents along Fort and Garry Streets, hand-delivered to businesses along Hargrave and Carlton Streets, and emailed to 119 stakeholders who were encouraged to share the invite. The event was also advertised in local newspapers, via Winnipeg press release, City of Winnipeg Social Media (Twitter and Facebook), and through the Tire Talk events.

Seventy-three people attended the open house. Display boards presented information, and attendees were encouraged to discuss the project with team members or leave comments on the boards using sticky notes. Key themes to emerge included a desire for bike infrastructure to be maintained during winter months, a preference for physical buffers over painted bike lanes, the need for more bike parking, and a desire to improve upon pedestrian facilities (City of Winnipeg & MMM Group, 2016).

**PHASE TWO** of the project's public engagement included online publication of the results of the Metroquest survey and in-person events. Design options were presented at another round of stakeholder meetings, pop-up events hosted at the Rotunda connected to Winnipeg Square, Fort Garry Place and The Forks. These events were coupled with a second online survey. As this phase of the project occurred just prior to the writing of this case-in-point, much of the resulting information was still being distilled.

### **Survey #2**

The second round of surveys was web-based, showcasing graphic representations of the design options for the bike lanes. Respondents were asked to provide feedback regarding which design they preferred, as well as reasons why they liked



One of the pop-up event locations: Portage and Main Underground Rotunda (Bryan Scott, 2012)

or disliked each option. The total number of respondents to complete the second survey was 306.

### **Pop-Up Events**

Hosted in collaboration with the Office of Public Engagement, the pop-up events were an initiative seeking to engage with people in places they already frequent. In order to reach the targeted downtown audience, three events were set up at different locations, including Portage and Main Underground Rotunda, Fort Garry Place, and The Forks.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Ensure review time**

The collaboration between MMM Group and the City of Winnipeg's OPE proved productive, with



the combined brainstorming adding depth to the project. However, with the OPE being responsible for the review of all public engagement materials, it is important to consider the additional time required for this task. Increased communication and commitment to a scheduled review process is required of all parties to assure plans can be carried out on time.

### **Experiment with engagement strategies**

A broad range of tactics helped connect the project team with a wide range of Winnipeg's residents. By using a range of engagement strategies, from traditional open houses to innovative Tire Talks and Metroquest surveys, the project benefited from the diverse ideas gathered in unique ways.

### **Speak a common language**

As with many other professions, planning-specific jargon can muddle communication. When working with the public, it is important to establish a basic level of understanding of the topic at hand. Communicating ideas graphically, as with the online surveys, and poster boards during open houses and pop-up events, can help explain subject matter to those who may be unfamiliar with more technical terms.

Furthermore, employing project team members who identify as cyclists created an informal user-

to-user discourse with the public that resulted in richer responses.

### **Go to the people**

Whether by attracting the pervasive online community or planning events in busy locales, seeking venues where people already converge is a useful way to engage a broader audience.

Lane System study benefited from the variety of ideas gathered through the collection of events.

At the time of this writing, responses were still being processed from phase two of public engagement. However, a number of useful lessons have already been gathered from this project. Experimenting



Tire Talks for West Alexander Cycling and Pedestrian Corridor sister study, McDermot at University of Manitoba Brodie Centre (MMM Group | WSP, 2015)

## **Conclusion**

The collaboration between MMM Group | WSP and the City's OPE added depth to the plan review process, producing engagement strategies that are creative, comprehensive, and feasible. Ranging from traditional to innovative, the Downtown Bike

with engagement techniques, speaking a common language, and going to the people will prove effective and efficient strategies for planners hoping to engage with citizens on future projects in Winnipeg and elsewhere.

## Resources

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(Bike Winnipeg, 2015)