

Discourses of Transit Equity in the Winnipeg Transit Master Plan

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Introduction

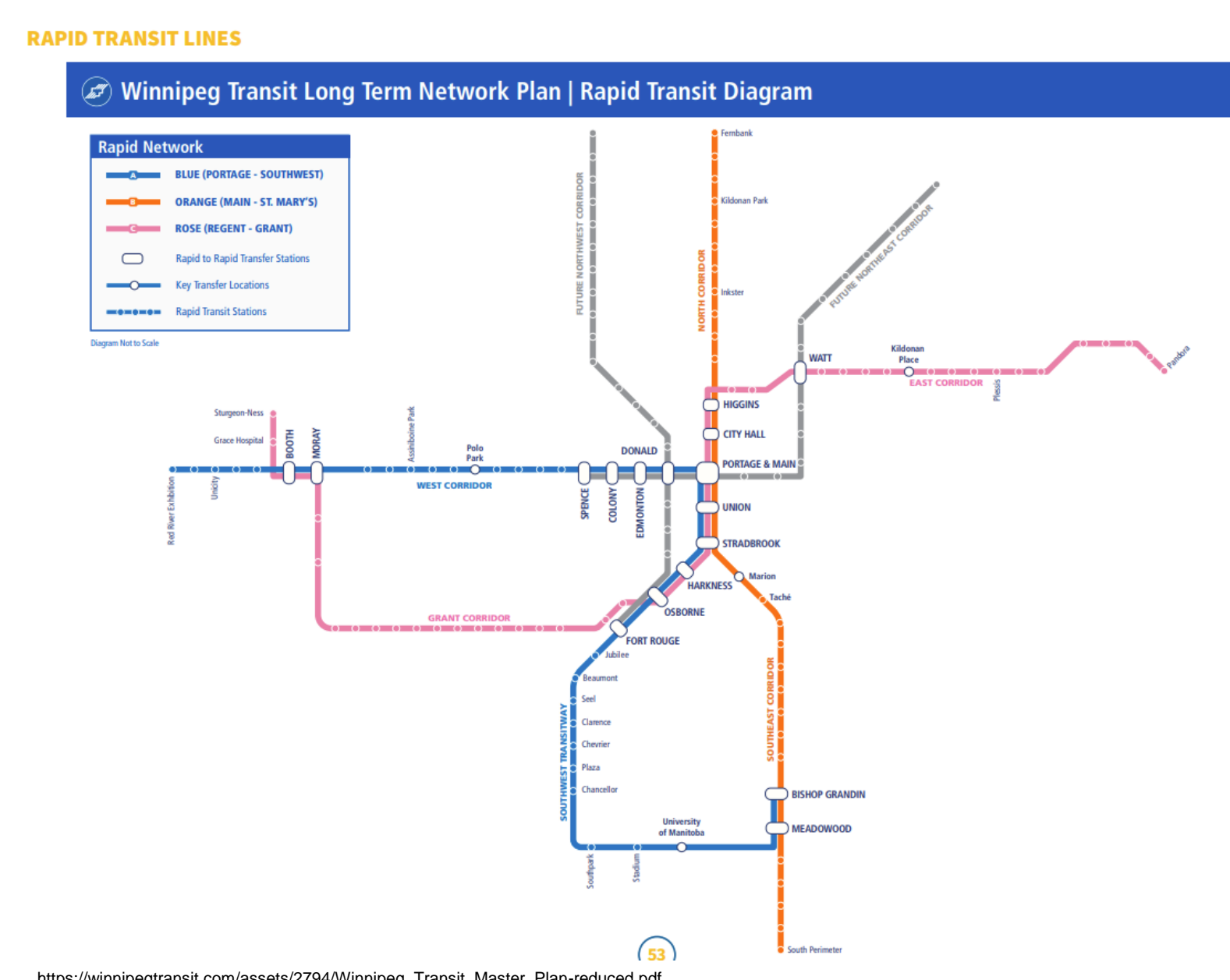
A lack of transport options has been shown to be a barrier for accessibility and social inclusion in contemporary society. Public transportation provides people with mobility and access to employment, community resources, medical care, and recreational opportunities. Robust public transportation systems benefits those who choose to ride, as well as those who are dependent on it for mobility.

This highlights the issue of equity in transportation systems. The distribution of transportation benefits are mediated through planning professionals and elected officials. Despite the importance of equity in transportation systems, contemporary research shows that equity is rarely figured into the design and planning of transportation systems. In addition, there is often a lack of clarity in both defining equity and determining how it should be integrated in planning processes.

There are two approaches to transportation equity. The first, and most common approach, is horizontal equity. Horizontal equity focuses on an equal distribution of benefits and costs across all communities and groups. In the context of transportation planning, horizontal equity is usually the definition and approach chosen. The second approach to transportation equity is vertical equity. Vertical equity provides a basic level of access for all communities while offering additional resources and support to communities that fall short in achieving their baseline.

Transportation equity proves to be difficult implementing due to a variety of factors. There are often competing goals within a transportation plan that limit the scope of other goals such as vertical equity. These can be, but are not limited to: land use goals, increasing future ridership, improving existing riders experience, efficiency, congestion relief, economic development, and improved travel and conditions, etc.

As a result of the planners and elected officials goals for transportation investment, vertical equity oriented goals are often low priority. This brings us to the research question for my thesis: **contemporary transit systems struggle to adequately address both equity and efficiency. This research asks, what compromises have been made in the Winnipeg Transit Master Plan (WTMP) to balance the demands of an equitable transit system with other goals?**



Winnipeg Context

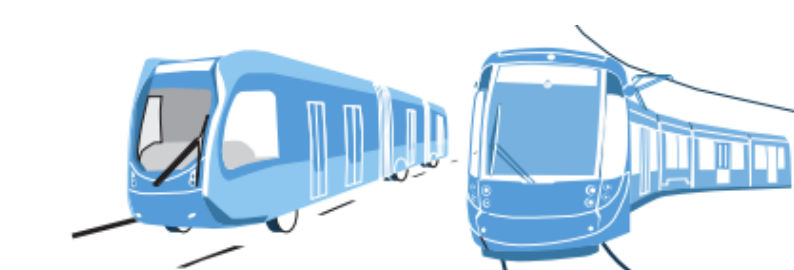


<https://www.mta.ca/transit-history.html>

Until recently, Winnipeg's public transportation system was an archaic model that had been in place for over a century. Due to the city's growth in that period, it had become obsolete and inefficient for contemporary goals. By the 1960's, citizens began to feel frustration with the cities failure to cope with the steady increases in vehicular traffic and transit problems. It wasn't until the 1970's when bus rapid transit (BRT) systems entered the planning stages for the future of Winnipeg's public transportation. However, it would be another four decades before a BRT system would be developed in Winnipeg.

In 2012, the City of Winnipeg completed the first stage of the new Winnipeg Rapid Transit project that would become the basis of Winnipeg's future public transportation system. Stage 2 would later be completed in 2020 connecting downtown Winnipeg to the University of Manitoba. Revealed in 2021, the WTMP outlined the revised future of Winnipeg's public transportation that offers a modern solution to Winnipeg's contemporary transportation issues.

The WTMP is based around the implementation of BRT networks along transit corridors with feeder bus lines that penetrate into residential and commercial areas. Goals for the WTMP are to achieve efficient service for all residents in the city and to offer alternate transportation options to choice riders among other goals.



RAPID TRANSIT CHARACTERISTICS

- Service every 5 minutes or better in peak periods
- Service every 5-10 minutes most of the day, and every 10-15 minutes at night
- Consistent headway (time between buses)
- Consistent reliable travel time
- Stations not bus stops
- Off-board fare payment
- All-door boarding
- Real-time passenger information
- Level door boarding

https://www.winnipegtransit.com/assets/2794/Winnipeg_Transit_Master_Plan-reduced.pdf

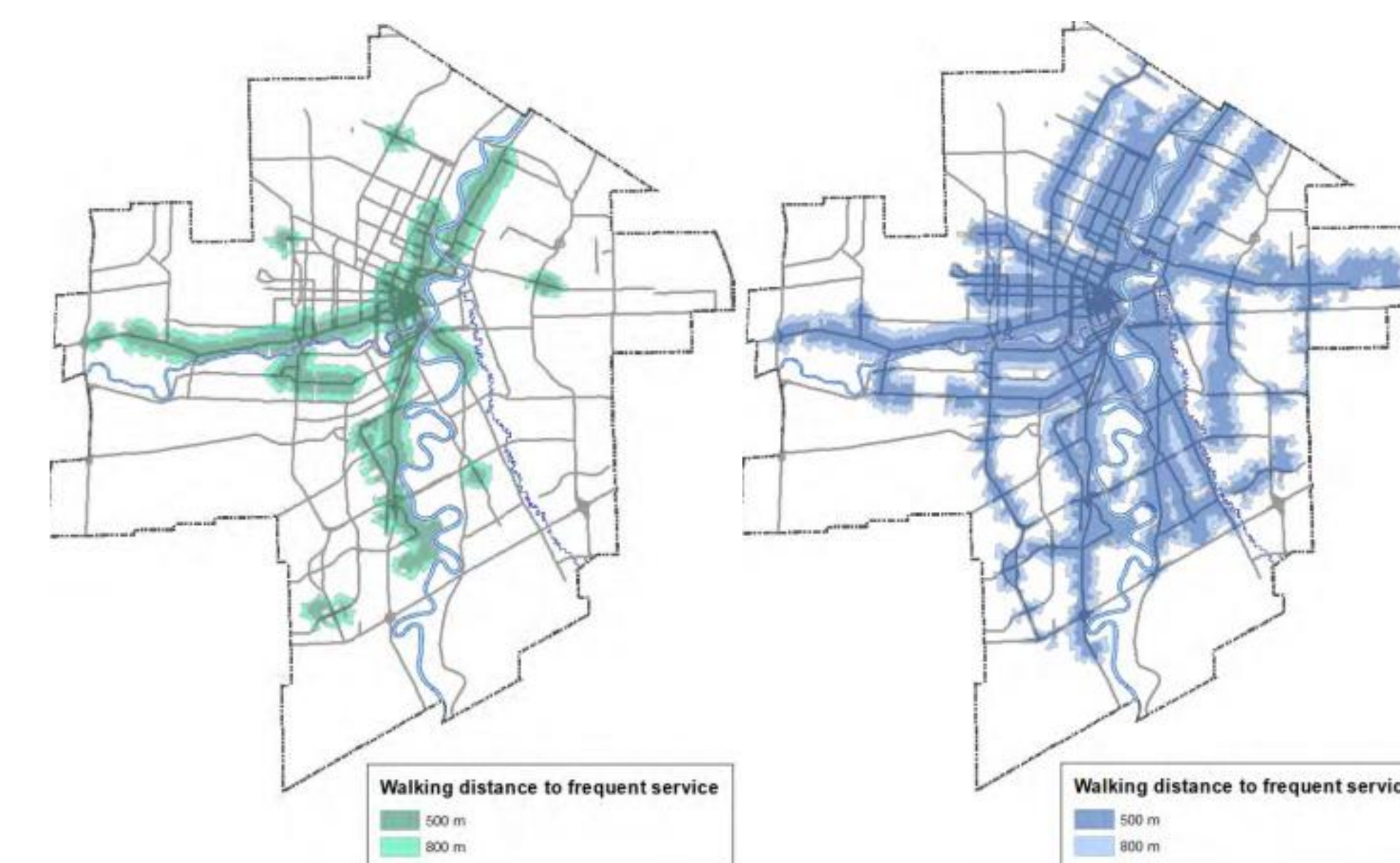
Preliminary Results

Increased Ridership

With the implementation of the WTMP, the City of Winnipeg envisions the reasonable service of up to 73% of Winnipeg's residents.

"The new transit network proposed in the Winnipeg Transit Master Plan brings frequent service, defined as a bus coming every 15 minutes or better throughout the day, closer to where most Winnipeggers live. In the new transit network, almost three times as many homes in Winnipeg will be within a 500 metre walk of all-day frequent transit service."

The issue with the WTMP's increased ridership claim is both in their definition of what "closer" means as well as where the increase in ridership is coming from. The City of Winnipeg defines "closer" as being within 500-800 metres of a frequent service station. Not only is 500-800 metres quite far under normal circumstances, in a typical Winnipeg winter it can be outright oppressive. Furthermore, when looking at the before (green) and after (blue) figures of the WTMP service area below, it can be seen that the majority of the increases come from suburban areas and actual increases in frequent service area to low income and inner city neighbourhoods are marginal at best.



https://www.winnipegtransit.com/assets/2794/Winnipeg_Transit_Master_Plan-reduced.pdf

Equity

As equity is a very important factor in the social function and goals of a transportation system, analysis was done on the inclusion of equity within the WTMP. What was found was only a single mention of the term "equity" which indicates a lack of priority within the WTMP.

"Social equity: Winnipeggers come from all different backgrounds, and respondents wanted transit to be universally accessible by every demographic regardless of where or who they are."

The WTMP's definition of social equity indicates a horizontal definition of the term rather than a vertical definition. Furthermore, consistently throughout the document social oriented goals are listed behind other inequitable focused goals. From this, it can be seen that the WTMP has compromised equitable goals to focus on other prioritizations.

Challenges

Challenges associated with my research question arose with a lack of publicly available design documents regarding the WTMP. The use of FIPPA requests would prove to be inadequate as the time frame required for such requests would not be suitable for this project.

Furthermore, the use of documentational analysis on the limited available documents offers relatively little conclusion on Winnipeg's elected officials and planners view of equity and its priority.

Conclusion

The WTMP offers a modern transit system designed to counteract many problems that large contemporary cities face. However, in doing so they must compromise transportation equity to achieve other goals.

To focus increased ridership, the WTMP offer little improvement to low income and inner-city neighbourhoods in favour of increasing service to the suburban and new developments.

In addition, the WTMP has a low focus on equitable goals only mentioning the term "equity" once. Furthermore, the WTMP definition of social equity uses a horizontal approach rather than a vertical approach. This will result in a focus towards other higher income areas of the city and relatively little improvement for transit dependent riders.

While a step in the right direction, the WTMP's compromises may result in a reinforcement of the status quo for the urban and inner-city poor.



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