



Bike to the Future

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Response for Green Prosperity Act Consultation

Bike to the Future was incorporated as a not for profit organization in 2007. Our mission is to encourage more Manitobans to cycle more often, and to encourage government authorities to do what is necessary to make that happen. We have more than 780 members and more than 1,600 people subscribe to our e-newsletter. On an average summer day this year, some 13,000 Winnipeggers commuted to work by bicycle. That figure is up 64 per cent since we began bicycle counts in 2007.

In 2012, Bike to the Future adopted a Cyclists Bill of Rights, which states in part:

Whereas cycling is in the public interest because it promotes fitness and reduces health care costs; it reduces congestion on the roads; it reduces emissions into the environment; and cycling facilities cost less than infrastructure for motor vehicles;

Whereas cyclists are vulnerable when they travel among motorized vehicles;

Whereas cyclists are citizens and taxpayers with the same rights, privileges and obligations as motorists;

Therefore, be it recognized that cyclists have a right to:

...

- Communities designed to encourage cycling, with a cycling network that provides safe and convenient routes to all destinations

...

- Legislation, Regulations, policies, funding and law enforcement to support these rights

...

We believe that one of the many reasons people choose to cycle is because it is environmentally friendly and sustainable transportation. We are very concerned that the Government's transportation and community planning programs are unsustainable because they encourage ever greater reliance on personal motor vehicles. We believe the Province's drive for sustainability requires significant changes in goals, policies and programs transportation as soon as possible to make Manitoba communities more friendly to active transportation.

Does the government's internal structure need to better reflect a commitment to sustainability? For example, is it necessary to have a central co-ordinating body that ensures the adoption of sustainability across government?

How can the roles and functions of various government agencies be more fully co-ordinated to achieve goals such as those presented in TomorrowNow - Manitoba's Green Plan?

Within Government, managing sustainability should be the responsibility of a central agencies; not of an individual department.

There should be one agency that is well integrated with Treasury Board, assessing every proposal coming forward to Cabinet, so that there is consistent professional management to ensure each Government action enhances sustainability.

In addition, Manitoba should establish a "Sustainability Auditor" who reports to the Legislature, and is independent of the Government of the day, similar to the current Provincial Auditor. This auditor's role would be to report the impact of the Government's actions on Manitoba's sustainability, and track the Government's performance in achieving sustainability goals.

Any Manitoba government will have a natural tendency to launch policies and programs to do the "convenient" things, like converting buses to electrical power, or setting up rural industries to convert primary sector waste to biomass fuel. However, in order to achieve sustainability, governments must also take tougher measures, such as reducing consumption at some inconvenience to consumers and businesses, which could trigger somewhat negative political consequences, and are therefore harder for governments to do.

The Sustainability Provincial Auditor would play a key role by assessing how all government policies and programs affect our sustainability, and by measuring progress toward achieving sustainability in the long term, and draw the issue of meeting sustainability targets to the public's attention at least once a year.

For instance, as an active participant in the transportation sector, Bike to the Future welcomes the occasional project which enhances travel by bicycle in one neighbourhood or another, but the overall direction of transportation expenditure is directed to unsustainable transportation "infrastructure".

However, moving toward sustainability will require moving away from dependency on personal motor vehicles. This requires politically challenging changes to how our communities and our transportation infrastructure are designed so that greener forms of travel are more convenient than the personal motor vehicle. This is a change that Manitoba Governments are politically motivated to avoid.

To ensure that Government policies and programs – including transportation and community planning -- promote a sustainable future, someone has to keep the Government of the day's feet to the fire. Experience has shown that citizen's groups like ours can't achieve that, and that internal consultative committees can't either. An independent auditor within government, with direct accountability to the Legislature, access to internal government information, and public visibility could play that role.

Does the name the Green Prosperity Act adequately reflect the government's intent to

use the principles of sustainable development to foster a green and prosperous society? Sustainable development is classically defined as "...meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Should the new act continue to be built around the classic definition of sustainable development or should it adopt a new approach to, and definition of, sustainability? How do you define sustainability?

Are there any other elements that could be added to the purpose statement? What do you think is the best way to achieve the three elements mentioned above?

"Sustainability" sounds more authentic than "Green Prosperity". Many consumers are skeptical about products that are called "Green"; many of them do not seem significantly less harmful to the environment than the other products on the same shelf.

The legislation's purpose statement should refer to providing guidance on sustainability on all government initiatives and obligations, rather than referring just to the government's sustainability initiatives and obligations. Almost everything the government does has an impact on sustainability, and should therefore be subject to the test of whether it is contributing to sustainability. It is not sufficient to evaluate how a subset of government initiatives contributes to sustainability.

Bike to the future is concerned that transportation and community planning be subject to sustainability evaluation, because we are concerned that much of what is being done at present in both those domains is still leading away from sustainability, to the extent that most additions to our built environment make it harder for many people to live day to day without using a motor vehicle.

Do the sustainability priorities outlined above adequately reflect the priorities of Manitobans now? Will they reflect the priorities of our province 20 years from now? If the priorities evolve over time, how could these changes best be captured in future? How can Manitoba ensure that the new act evolves and remains current? Should it be prescriptive, or set out only basic principles and guidelines with more prescriptive regulations created as needed?

The Green Plan priorities are laudable, but they do not address many of the fundamental changes that are needed in order for Manitoba to become a sustainable community.

Bike to the Future recommends that the health of Manitobans be a key sustainability priority; government initiatives are more sustainable to the extent that they enhance the health of Manitobans. For instance, transportation has a direct impact on many aspects of health, including diabetes, heart disease, cancer and obesity. More Manitobans will be healthier if they choose to spend less time sitting in automobiles, and make short trips under their own power; on foot or by bicycle. Many Government programs affect how people will choose to travel, including the design of the built environment, school transportation policies, public transit policies, traffic management, etc. In determining how these programs contribute to sustainability, one important criterion is how they will contribute to the long term health of the population, not only because a healthy population is a goal in its own right, but also because the Province bears the costs of coping with bad health.

Currently, Manitoba is still designing and building infrastructure that was deemed suitable before the concept of environmental sustainability took hold. The roadways, shopping centres and the suburban neighbourhoods under construction today are the antithesis of what is deemed appropriate in jurisdictions that lead in sustainability.

This Green Plan refers to the necessity to train the upcoming generation to plan and design for sustainability. This is important, there is an immediate need to provide sustainability training (Professional Development) to the existing managers and professionals who are doing today's planning, building and management. Failing that, those currently in charge will spend a significant portion of our Gross Provincial Product to leave a tragic legacy for the next generation to fix. The government should engage post-secondary institutions in the Province to establish sustainability certificate programs, and require Manitoba's managers and professionals – at least in government and in organizations receiving government support -- to earn sustainability qualifications as soon as possible. It would be unconscionable to hand over to the next generation both outdated facilities and the enormous debts which we incurred to build them.

The Act must set firm sustainability goals, in order to create an obligation which all Government departments and agencies have to fulfill. As written, the priorities are vague; they need to be translated into measurable targets. Setting a direction is a laudable, but the government will only be accountable for achieving higher standards once there are measurable targets to be met, as we saw in the Kyoto accord. Those standards must affect transportation and planning as soon as possible.

What role would you like to see the Manitoba Sustainability Advisory Council play in the implementation of a sustainability vision for Manitoba?

A Sustainability Advisory Council should report to the Premier and Cabinet to ensure that sustainability is a Government priority, and not just a departmental one. It should also be integrated with the most senior economic advisory council in the Government, to ensure that sustainability and economic development evolve hand-in-hand. The council needs independence and resources to develop materials which will help the Government identify sustainability issues and priorities. It is essential that they have the opportunity to examine and comment on the activities of all Government departments and agencies that have a significant impact on the environment. With respect to transportation, this should include not only Infrastructure and Transportation, but also MPI and Local Government.

Do the proposed principles sufficiently reflect the concerns and issues surrounding Manitoba's society, environment and economy?

Will they reflect Manitoba's sustainability concerns 10 years from now?

Do you have any recommended changes to these proposed principles or guidelines?

As presented in the consultation document, the proposed revisions to the principles remove much of the prescriptive language that exists in the Sustainability Act: The principles in the existing Act refer to what "should" occur, whereas the proposed principles refer to what "Manitobans should recognize, ... acknowledge, ... appreciate, ... etc." We submit that the principles should revert to a more prescriptive

format. Time is of the essence; let's make a clear list of what we have to do to become a sustainable province, by defining real goals, rather than an aspirational wish list.

As we noted in discussing the "priorities", we submit that the principles should emphasize the importance of enhancing the health and well-being of the population. Many aspects of our environment which are influenced by government affect our well-being, including healthy neighbourhoods, pedestrian/cyclist friendly streets, more and better opportunities to get around on foot and on bicycle, etc.

Do you have any questions or comments about this proposed provision (Sustainability Agreements)?

Rather than being optional, Sustainability Agreements should be a part of every major government expenditure, contract or partnership agreement. Whenever the Government delegates authority to another organization, be it public or private, that organization must agree to meet sustainability objectives. Lessors, local governments, and builders must be legally bound to ensure that their impact on land, water, air and people is sustainable to the standard that the Government sets for itself.

Should government develop long-term strategies to address key environmental issues? What is an appropriate timeframe for long-term planning?

Yes, the government should establish long term strategies and plans to address sustainability issues, especially in high-impact government activities. This process needs to be managed to allow immediate action on broadly defined objectives at the outset, while carrying on research to refine sustainability objectives, so that important changes start immediately, rather than carrying on with unsustainable practices to allow time for study. For instance, there is ample opportunity in transportation and community planning to immediately change policies and projects that encourage motor vehicle dependency.