



CIVIC ELECTION 2022

Good roads key to Winnipeg's growth, progress



L eading candidates for Winnipeg's next mayor say a dependable transportation system is key to the city's growth and future as a progressive community where all can thrive.

The renewal of roads and infrastructure is an important to keeping Winnipeg vibrant, healthy and growing, says Glen Murray, who currently leads in the public opinion polls for the city's mayoral race.

"Roads and infrastructure are foundational to generating wealth in a city and building the economy," Murray said. The MHCA sent mayoral candidates a questionnaire on a range of economic and road renewal issues, including where they rank road renewal as a priority.

Murray said road renewal would rank as No. 1: "It needs to be done in a visionary and sustainable way that accommodates all modes of transportation and reduces our environmental footprint.

"While roads must be designed well for their mobility functions, they also must be platforms for commerce and culture, and designed to build prosperous and beautiful communities."

Scott Gillingham said road renewal has been a high priority – and will continue as such – in every budget he submitted as Finance Chair of City Council for the last 5 years. But road renewal must be done in tandem with safety improvements, as a matter of social equity.

"Road renewal will be the single largest consistent item in our budget after policing, and the single largest general budget in our capital plan," Gillingham pledged. "My budget will include additional investments beyond those record levels."

Coun. Kevin Klein said as mayor he would make a 'safer city' his No. 1 priority, which beyond crime means ensuring all infrastructure is safe.

"I will not tolerate structural collapses or major sinkholes and will strongly advocate for the funding to address such repairs as priorities in a new strategic infrastructure management plan developed with the co-operation of industry stakeholders and professionals," Klein responded.

All three candidates tied road renewal to a broader, strategic view of Winnipeg's transportation network plans, to serve commerce and development for a stronger economy. And they spoke to the value of CentrePort Canada and the capital region, as a magnet for industry and commerce.

Shaun Loney, who has experience in social equity enterprise, said he favours shifting the infrastructure priorities to a "fix it first" approach, doing a better job of looking after existing infrastructure before building in new areas. Loney would focus on transportation electrification and green infrastructure, such as solar.

The annual budgets for local and regional street renewal have been under pressure in recent years as councillors look to the revenues raised by the "dedicated" 2% annual road tax to fund other priorities. In 2019, bridge repair became eligible to dip into the reserves raised by the 2% annual tax, for example, and more recently there have been calls to make the revenues available to fund active transportation facilities.

Gillingham noted he voted for the capital budgets that broadened the funding criteria to include bridges.

"If bridges are not financed, built or repaired, it will not matter much to drivers if the roads leading to them were renewed, since a closed bridge will do a lot more damage to our network than a broken road," he said.

Murray said the dedicated 2% tax increase, in conjunction with federal and provincial financing, has enabled significant upgrades to the road network. However, a lot of work is ahead to catch up on the infrastructure deficit and support all modes of transport, he added, noting the solution lies in negotiating a better city-financing deal with the province.

Klein said he believes the city has not managed its finances well, and lacks accountability and transparency, which he would address. Still, the 2% tax revenues raised for infrastructure "will not be shelled out to other areas – we will stop the process of mixing accounts."

The MHCA has proposed that Winnipeg City Council establish a design specification and resource management committee, to bring industry and administration together on how roads are constructed and the materials used, along with resource-management practices.

The candidates said they supported such a collaborative initiative; Loney noting he would be keen to discuss the idea. Murray said he would go further and develop Winnipeg as an infrastructure innovation lab, built on a wider partnership that included academic input.

Gillingham said such a committee would also be tasked to negotiate an annual, joint "construction inflation price adjustment" based on data, added to pre-tendered road renewal contracts that can be signed three years ahead of annual capital budgets.

"I would like to see Winnipeg at the international forefront of developing infrastructure solutions for cold weather climates," noted Klein.



Phil Hossack photo