

APPENDIX F – BRT TO LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT (LRT) CONVERSION

It is anticipated that the proposed future eastern corridor be a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) format corridor.

BRT provides service that is faster and more predictable than standard transit service. BRT can operate on regular streets or dedicated (bus only) running way, or a combination of the two, with limited stops at safe and attractive stations. When operating on regular streets, infrastructure such as "bus only lanes" and transit-priority traffic signals allow rapid transit vehicles to avoid some of the conflict and delay points common when buses travel in mixed traffic with other vehicles. This flexibility, in being able make use of both dedicated transitways and regular roadways, is one of the advantages BRT has over rail-based approaches.

It is anticipated that this corridor will be designed initially as a BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) system based on its anticipated volumes and connectivity to transit service on Graham Avenue and the Southwest Rapid Transit corridor, both of which are bus-based at this time.

Throughout the Winnipeg BRT Planning and Development Design Manual, considerations for potential future conversion of major elements of the busway corridors are noted and outlined.

The Winnipeg BRT Planning and Development Design Manual (2004) states:

"Where it is judged to be cost effective, the running way line, grade and vertical and horizontal clearances can be designed to be compatible with LRT requirements to protect the option for long term conversion to rail should this ever be necessary."

..."The choice between BRT and light rail transit (LRT) for a corridor rapid transit service is normally a matter of system continuity and corridor densities. LRT may be favoured if it is already part of the municipal system and corridor densities are high. BRT operating experience in Ottawa, Pittsburgh and elsewhere in North America demonstrates that busways usually have lower operating and capital costs than light rail transit (LRT) but similar passenger carrying capacities. Cost considerations therefore usually favour the selection of BRT. Despite an initial decision to adopt BRT technology, however, corridor land uses and the system wide rapid transit strategy can be expected to change over the long term and conversion to or colocation with rail technology might be appropriate at some future point."

..."Winnipeg Transit therefore wishes to provide as much flexibility as is reasonable in the design of the BRT System to allow for a possible future conversion to LRT. Since such a technology conversion is uncertain and unlikely to occur, except in the long term, it is only cost-effective to protect this option if it can be done at little real cost."

BRT-to-LRT conversion is a challenging proposition. Within the report, comment on the potential for eventual conversion of the corridor to LRT, commenting on actual examples of BRT-to-LRT conversions, such as has occurred in Ottawa, ON.