

## 2014 City of London Budget Submission

### BACKGROUND

The University Students' Council at Western is the voice of over 30 000 undergrads living and studying in London. The USC recognizes that city policy and practices have profound impact on the educational experience of Western students. Transit services influence students' ability to get to class; urban development and by-law enforcement have tremendous impact on students' quality of life; and economic development strategies can help students connect their classroom learning to the workplace, during their study years and beyond.

The budget is the governing document for the future of the city. While plans, speeches, and public forums have tremendous roles to play in shaping our city's future, it is the allocation of funding that truly shows where London is headed. As the voice of Western students, the USC is committed to participating in discussions about the allocation of this funding. While this is the USC's first year formally engaging in the city budget, the USC is committed to ensuring students' voices are heard in years to come, and that students are established as a permanent and reliable partner in the city's future.

### TRANSIT AND MOBILITY

Students depend greatly on public transit as their main means of mobility in the city. Their participation at school, in the economy, and in the culture of the city depend on a consistent, reliable, and accessible public transit system.

The USC firmly believes that a mobile citizenry is an engaged citizenry, and that public transit must be a priority in London. Unfortunately, some challenges do exist to providing a consistent, reliable, and accessible public transit system in London. Firstly, London Transit has been historically underfunded. In fact, the LTC operates with the lowest funding, per-capita, of any transit commission in Canada. The USC believes the lack of investment in public transit has hindered the development of service improvements such as the provision of Bus Rapid Transit to the London area.

The lack of investment in transit overall has hindered the development of a multi-model city, incorporating public transit, full-use roads, and active transport options.

The Transportation Master Plan articulates a plan for the development of many of the listed transit priorities of students. It recommends the development of Bus Rapid Transit, the creation of full-use roads including bike lanes, and the encouragement of a multi-model plan for transit. The development of these transit options will increase mobility for students in the short term, and potentially lead to an increase in student retention in the long-term, as London's transit capacity increases to meet the expectations of Western students, 60% of which come from the transit-heavy GTA.

**Recommendation:** Western students are calling on City Council to investment in the Transportation Master Plan's recommendations, with first priority being given to the development of a Bus Rapid Transit system.

### NEIGHBOURHOODS & COMMUNITIES

Another major factor that increases student quality of life is the vibrancy of the neighbourhoods in which students live. Western students support a number of planning and investment changes, as city planners and councillors divvy funds to urban growth.



Firstly, students support the development of mixed-use neighbourhoods. The City can do major benefit by planning and developing a compact city that focuses on having a good mix of services, stores, and restaurants within neighbourhoods. The creation of more mixed-use communities can help further relationships between students and long-term residents, and avoid some of the issues that can result when thousands of students are segregated in single areas, isolated from other communities.

Secondly, students support a new focus for the Near-Campus Neighbourhoods region, namely one that goes beyond simple law enforcement. In the past, any city discussion in the near-campus region has revolved around Project LEARN or other by-law enforcement. It is crucial to recognize that the issues leading to Project LEARN are symptoms of a larger issue, which is the lack of development and the ‘ghettoization’ of student neighbourhoods. To address the issues around Project LEARN once and for all, the city, Western, and the USC need to “blur the lines” between students and the city, as discussed in the 2008 Great Neigh Campus Neighbourhoods Strategy.

**Recommendation:** City council should make urban development a priority by investing in mixed-use centres, the Downtown Master Plan, and infill development, to create a more vibrant student living experience.

**Recommendation:** City Council should direct investment in the Great Near Campus Neighbourhoods Strategy, and specifically focus on “blurring the lines” between campus and the community. This must be done by providing services to integrate students and neighbours, and focus on developing community.

## BUILDING A PROSPEROUS CITY

Students have heard loud and clear from Mayor Fontana that 6000 new residents must be attracted to London, every year, for London to achieve its growth potential as a city. Students firmly believe that they have the tools, knowledge, and passion to participate in London’s growth as a Canadian city. As well, Mayor Fontana has indicated that the city must attract new numbers of international students, to add to both the cultural and economic growth of the city.

Students believe that the best way to encourage general student retention is to build the best possible quality of life for students during their study, to attract them to stay after graduation. In addition to recommendations on transit and neighbourhoods, students believe that London can support young leaders and entrepreneurs as they attempt to start the new businesses that can drive London’s economy. As well, if London is looking to attract new numbers of international students, it is vital that those students receive the supports and encouragement to make the most of their time in London, be it during their period of study, or beyond.

**Recommendation:** City Council should support and invest in a specific stream in the Small Business Centre to support young entrepreneurs, and to link this work with the campus-linked accelerators, for example BizInc, developing at Western and Fanshawe.

**Recommendation:** City Council invest in support services (orientation events and specific city resources) to support international students in their transition to life in London.

