



Meeting the moment: Shareholder perspectives & action plan

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Background

To better understand how Winnipeg's business and tourism communities are responding to current economic challenges, Economic Development Winnipeg (EDW) and Tourism Winnipeg hosted a series of roundtable discussions between January and March 2025. Leaders from across the business, tourism and industrial sectors were invited to share their perspectives, identify shared challenges and explore opportunities for growth.

These conversations were designed to encourage open dialogue, surface practical insights and help shape a more coordinated message that can be shared with government, the public and other stakeholders.

The following report is a summary of the discussions that occurred in March with YES! Winnipeg investors and Team Winnipeg partners.

Current context

Canada and the U.S. are closely linked in trade, tourism, business and general economic development. The current tariff threats have created some questions as to the nature of this international relationship going forward. Political rhetoric (notably from the U.S. President) seems to suggest there may be a long-term deterioration in Canada-U.S. relations.

This uncertainty is causing industries to reassess their expectations for future business and economic collaboration in the near future and look to diversify their business development strategies away from such heavy reliance on the American marketplace. Canada's Prime Minister has gone so far as to say that the old Canada-U.S. relationship is "over", necessitating a new path forward.

From a more general perspective, there has been a tonal shift in how Canadians feel about their southern neighbours, with some actions currently including boycotts on American goods and products, cancelling U.S.-based travel plans, and a precipitous decline in Canadians' positive views of the U.S. – a 50% decline since June 2024.

To place this uncertainty in context, international arrivals to Canada from the U.S. declined by 10.9% in February 2025 from a year prior – the first year-over-year decline since March 2021. Meanwhile, Canadian-resident return trip by automobile from the U.S. was down 23%. Both figures highlight decreased cross-border travel and tourism. It is still unclear whether this will become a long-term trend.

Key insights

Tourism

Winnipeg's tourism sector is currently reliant on U.S. residents, who contribute 25 per cent of all tourism expenditures to our local economy. The impacts on trade uncertainties, which may manifest in a decrease of U.S.-resident tourism, is creating a need to confirm and update Winnipeg's overall tourism and visitor attraction strategies.

Short-term impacts

- Both Canadian and U.S. airlines are closely monitoring flight bookings, with Canadian airlines already proactively reducing flights into the U.S. based on Canadian consumer sentiment. This may result in Winnipeg losing key U.S. routes.
- Given the high degree of political rhetoric in U.S. media about Canada, some concerns were expressed about the U.S. media's accuracy on Canadian matters and the direct impact that may have on U.S.-resident travel intentions this year.
- With consumer confidence decreasing, there is a concern that an economic downturn will reduce spending on restaurants and travel (domestically) and for any visitor considering traveling to Winnipeg.
- Growing competition from other jurisdictions, especially major Canadian cities, may undercut Winnipeg's price advantage in conference and event hosting.

Long-term impacts

- A growing anti-American sentiment in Canada may deter U.S. visitors, leading over time to perceived negative perceptions about Winnipeg as a welcoming and friendly travel destination for U.S. residents. Business and tourism leaders noted the importance of shifting the narrative to distinguish political actions from individual Americans.
- Corporate travel may decline as companies tighten budgets and delay event participation. With the long lead times associated with tourism planning, the industry may not feel the full effects of current uncertainty for another few years, potentially jeopardizing large events or conferences already underway.
- Event relocation from the U.S. to Canada has been discussed, but Winnipeg may lack sufficient hotel and meeting space infrastructure to seize these opportunities. Some dates already see the city at full capacity.
- A prolonged decline in tourism demand could result in revenue loss and job cuts in the local hospitality and tourism industry.

Opportunities

- Despite short-term economic challenges, Winnipeg has an opportunity to enhance its reputation as a diverse, welcoming and safe destination for travelers. For instance, the city can diversify its outreach by targeting European markets to spur new visitor growth.
- Canadian domestic visitation is currently on the rise, creating an important opportunity to position Winnipeg as a must-visit destination for Canadians. With its unique blend of arts, culture, festivals, culinary experiences and attractions, Winnipeg can benefit from this trend by attracting more interprovincial travelers.
- One specific area for greater tourism emphasis is Winnipeg's vibrant arts and culture sector. Market research, presented during Travel Manitoba's 2025 Arts & Culture Tourism Summit, shows those aged 45+ view Winnipeg as a cultural hub, while younger audiences are less aware. This presents an opportunity to shift perceptions and promote Winnipeg's diverse arts and culture scene.
- There is also an opportunity to raise awareness of Winnipeg's tourism assets among residents. Encouraging locals to appreciate and share what their city offers helps foster pride, promotes word-of-mouth tourism and contributes to a stronger positive narrative.

Needs

- To help navigate through short-term volatility, governmental financial support for tourism businesses and continued investment in marketing efforts is essential to attract American and international visitors.
- Government messaging must clearly distinguish between anti-policy sentiment and welcoming attitudes toward American people. Messaging should be reinforced ahead of key tourism events like Rendez-Vous Canada and summer travel season.
- Consistent and strategic messaging across DMOs—Tourism Winnipeg, Travel Manitoba, Destination Canada—is critical to ensure alignment in the international tourism market.
- Now is the time to invest in U.S. market outreach—not to cut back. There's also a need for trustworthy, centralized information to counter misinformation and help industry players prepare consistent messaging for travel buyers.

Business

While participants from Winnipeg's business community held some optimism that a long-term positive path exists that will benefit our city, several issues and concerns are creating some potential short-term turbulence.

Short-term impacts

- Constant shifts in tariff policy and implementation dates are creating a "wait and see" environment, making it difficult to plan or secure long-term contracts.

- Businesses are grappling with rising costs and budget uncertainty. Many shared that project budgets are now at risk, and that risk-shifting contract language (placing liability solely on contractors) is becoming more common.
- Labour shortages remain an issue, and concerns about losing Canadian talent to the U.S. are increasing. Changes to immigration policy were also cited as potential constraints.
- Supply chain disruptions are worsening, echoing pandemic-era issues, and could be compounded if Canadian suppliers cannot meet demand. If government does not allow flexibility in procurement practices and specifications, it could limit businesses' ability to maximize Canadian procurement.
- Leaders expressed concerns access to the U.S. market being diminished, which could restrict exports and lead to missed investment opportunities.

Long-term impacts

- Concern exists that incoming tariffs will force Winnipeg-based companies to consider relocating to the U.S. for cost savings, leading to a potential loss of local jobs and investment and reshaping Winnipeg's economic landscape.
- Business leaders are concerned the tariffs will reduce foreign direct investment in Canada because it will restrict access to the U.S. market. Easy access to the U.S. market was historically a benefit for investing in Canada.
- It may be that some businesses will not see repercussions from tariffs for quite some time, at which points government support may no longer be in place.

Opportunities

- Winnipeg has a chance to remove barriers to business growth, such as aligning regulations with other Canadian jurisdictions and encouraging interprovincial trade, which will strengthen the overall national economy.
- Our diverse economy is already a strength. Further developing key strategic sectors, such as value-added manufacturing, while diversifying our export markets will help to build broad economic resilience.
- Positioning Winnipeg as a transportation and logistics hub, leveraging rail and port infrastructure for global trade, is more important now than ever.
- Overall, there has been a positive change in our self-perception as Winnipeggers and Manitobans, and in building local and national pride. The sense of unity and cohesion can be a positive factor for our economic growth as well.

Needs

- Making it easier to do business in Winnipeg can give businesses more leeway to navigate through short-term uncertainties. Tax incentives and direct financial support for

businesses navigating tariff challenges will be key, while removing red tape will allow businesses to focus more resources on future growth.

- Ensuring a clear, stable vision for economic growth will allow for the alignment of federal and provincial priorities. This will also help to align investment attraction efforts, which could help bring new businesses to Winnipeg.
- A long-term strategy to enhance productivity through tax and regulatory reforms will help Winnipeg business streamline operations, lower costs, and increase competitiveness. Reducing business, payroll, and input sales taxes will help to ease short-term financial burdens.
- There is a lot of news around tariffs, making it difficult to stay current. A reliable source for current and objective information for businesses will be valuable for those who are uncertain about current news, supports, and impacts. Businesses called for a nonpartisan task force to serve as a stable body guiding economic support and communication, even beyond current government terms.

Government & economic growth

Short-term impacts

- Tariff and other economic uncertainty is decreasing consumer confidence. As a result, many people are holding on to their money and putting off spending decisions until more certainty exists. This will have a spillover effect into all economic industries.
- The uncertainty and ever-changing policies being recorded by the U.S. president are anticipated to make the situation worse before it can get better. A wait-and-see approach by Winnipeg economic stakeholders is leading to longer timeframes for spending decisions, in the short- and long-term.
- While a notable increase in buying and supporting local is increasing domestic support, some concern exists that actions like taking U.S. products (e.g. liquor) off Winnipeg shelves is communicating to Americans that we are not open for business with them.

Long-term impacts

- Continued uncertainty could spark job losses, reduced buying power and long-term damage to consumer and investor confidence. Stakeholders are increasingly turning to governments for reassurance and guidance.

Opportunities

- In the past, the public sector has stepped up to stimulate the economy during times of economic downturn as a way to stimulate job growth and capital deployment, such as the development of infrastructure projects.
- This may offer a path forward for policies that increase domestic production and local sourcing—encouraging “Made in Canada” initiatives.

- There is an opportunity to reform procurement practices, simplify interprovincial trade, and create alignment across sectors to support future growth.

Needs

- There is a desire among Winnipeg economic stakeholders for a centralized information source with a specific mandate to support and encourage the business community with clear and truthful information, which will help to cut through the high volumes of news media being generated by political leaders.
- Messaging from our government leaders, particularly from civic and provincial levels of government, needs to be clear that we should still welcome American visitors. There is a need to counteract the negative perceptions of Canada in the U.S. media, in particular while U.S. residents are still making their summer vacation plans.
- While 'Buy America' policies seem likely to stay beyond short to mid term tariff impacts, Canada can explore how to further encourage domestic sourcing, or a 'Made in Canada' alternative.
- Policy makers should simplify interprovincial trade and updated procurement practices to encourage local purchasing and support regional businesses.
- Manitoba should assess its key sectors and the supports needed to remain competitive at an interprovincial and international level, providing targeted support and regulatory relief for key and fast-growing sectors.

Action plan & next steps

What we're doing with what we've heard

EDW has been actively communicating the concerns and opportunities shared by business and tourism leaders to our government partners—both through the Government of Manitoba's U.S. Trade Council and in other ongoing conversations.

Provincially, we're encouraged to see that [Budget 2025](#) includes several key commitments related to tariff relief. Both the federal and provincial governments have also taken steps to reduce regulatory discrepancies between jurisdictions. At the municipal level, the City of Winnipeg has [launched an end-to-end review](#) of its development process through the Housing Accelerator Fund program. We hope this initiative acts as a catalyst for broader improvements to the overall development environment and will continue to work with the City to identify key areas of opportunity with respect to improving the ease of doing business in Winnipeg.

That said, there is still more work to do—particularly to ensure long-term, sustained support for businesses and organizations across industries. We continue to meet with Winnipeg businesses and organizations, including those most impacted by tariffs, to uncover specific challenges and identify where support and creative solutions are required. Feedback from our business and tourism community remains vital, and we are committed to continuing to share these

perspectives and collaborate with other partners and government to mitigate negative impacts and forge a path towards meaningful change.

Below are a few action items that Economic Development Winnipeg is taking to help move this work forward.

Supporting the tourism industry

American visitation and perceptions

We are realigning budgets to capitalize on Canadians' growing interest in domestic travel by promoting Winnipeg as a must-visit destination. While we are still maintaining a presence in the U.S. market, it is at a more targeted level. Our approach remains flexible, allowing us to adapt quickly as the situation evolves. We are taking a measured and strategic approach to our messaging, ensuring that American visitors continue to feel welcome and valued.

Monitoring insights and sharing data

We are tracking insights related to traveller sentiment, discretionary spending and job impacts in tourism. We are currently exploring the best way to share these insights with our tourism partners, ensuring they have access to timely, relevant data.

Promote Winnipeg as a desirable destination

We're actively promoting Winnipeg's affordability, cultural richness and safety, particularly in markets like Europe where there is heightened awareness of global dynamics. We're also working to position Winnipeg as a year-round destination for meetings and business events, and while we already offer financial incentives for both winter and summer (which are considered "off-season" for business events), we recognize the need to better promote these supports.

Support domestic tourism and air access

We recognize that some air routes may be reduced, but we remain committed to working closely with the Winnipeg Airports Authority and other partners to protect and expand strategic air service over time. At the same time, we're seizing this moment to strengthen domestic tourism efforts and promote interprovincial travel to Manitoba—highlighting the unique experiences our province offers and encouraging more Canadians to explore what's in their own backyard.

Supporting the business community

Providing trusted information and insights

We've launched a dedicated [Winnipeg Business Support Hub](#) to give businesses easy access to timely information, tools, and guidance. We're also tracking shifts in investment trends and priorities to ensure our strategies stay aligned with current realities.

Supporting workforce resilience and mobility

We're working with our Talent team to explore ways to help workers transition between sectors

with transferable skills. At the same time, we continue to advocate for improved labour mobility and credential recognition across provinces to strengthen our workforce pipeline.

Diversifying investment and expanding market access

We are continuing to actively pursue foreign direct investment beyond the U.S., especially in Europe and Southeast Asia, while also expanding our domestic investment efforts to draw more investment from other Canadian jurisdictions.

Promoting Canadian collaboration

We're fully engaged in Team Canada-style trade missions and continue to foster Canadian business partnerships to reduce reliance on U.S. supply chains and boost domestic collaboration. Within our province, we are also working with an active group of partners to advance solutions and programs for Manitoba businesses.

Advancing value-added production and infrastructure

We continue to view value added processing as a key economic opportunity for Manitoba, and we actively pursue these opportunities across a variety of industries such as agriculture and processing of critical minerals.

Reinforcing business retention and strategic messaging

Through our Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) efforts, we're continuing to support local companies and promote Winnipeg as a place to live, work and invest. We're also ensuring our messaging reflects that Winnipeg is open for business and values cross-border relationships.

Conclusion

While current economic uncertainty has introduced new challenges for Winnipeg's business and tourism sectors, the insights gathered through these roundtable discussions make one thing clear: our city is ready to meet the moment with resilience, collaboration and strategic action.

Winnipeg has long benefited from strong cross-border relationships, but today's shifting landscape reinforces the need to diversify our partnerships, modernize our economic tools and invest in what sets us apart.

Economic Development Winnipeg remains committed to amplifying the voices of our business and tourism communities, advocating for their needs and championing a shared vision for the future. We are all in this together—and by leaning into our collective strengths, we can chart a path toward long-term growth, resilience and opportunity for all Winnipeggers.