



March 28, 2005

Mayor and Council
453 West 12th Ave.
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition is writing today regarding plans for a bicycle lane on Burrard St. We fully support this project, and our top priority is to see it built promptly, before the construction of the RAV project causes major disruptions in downtown traffic.

We are happy with the general layout of this route. The southbound bicycle lane is in an unusual position, but we believe this is the best possible solution for this difficult street. This design has been quite successful in other cities, including Ottawa and Madison, WI. The main benefit of the layout is a reduction in conflicts between buses and bicycles, and between right-turning cars and bicycles. The design also elegantly accommodates parking in the rightmost lane during off-peak periods.

In the appendix to this letter, we outline our preferences regarding the details of this routes. Our main requests are:

- ***coloured surface treatment*** for the full length of the route
- ***an extended bus-only period***, preferably covering 7am - 7pm
- ***a bike box*** at Pacific St.
- ***accommodation of left-turning cyclists at Helmcken St.***
- ***removal of some parking*** at Hastings St.

In June 2003, council approved a staff plan that included completion of the Burrard St. bicycle lane by December 2005. We would still like to see this route completed by that date. This southbound bicycle lane will be one of the most important parts of the downtown bicycle network, and we are eager to ride it in the near future.

Sincerely,

H-JEH (Jack) Becker
Chair, VACC Vancouver Committee
Director, Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition

Appendix: Detailed Discussion

Coloured Surface Treatment

We have argued in the past for colour surface treatment on all bicycle lanes to raise awareness of the presence of cyclists, particularly for right-turning drivers. City staff have preferred to wait until the Transportation Association of Canada has chosen national colour standards.

Burrard St. has a large number of right-turning vehicles, and it also has one extra reason favouring colour treatment: the position of the bicycle lane on this street is quite unusual, between two lanes of moving traffic. Given this unusual location, we believe it is particularly important to make other road users aware of cyclists, and a coloured lane is the best way to increase awareness of bicycles on the roadway.

Extended Bus-Only Period

This bicycle route works best when the rightmost lane is used as a “bus only” lane instead of being used for parking. During these periods, bicycles and buses almost never cross paths, and right-turning cars shift into the right-hand lane before the intersection, which is preferable to shifting at the intersection. When the rightmost lane is used as a parking lane, buses must cross the bicycle lane to get around the parked cars, and right-turning cars must shift into the rightmost lane at the intersection. Both of these increase the frequency of potential conflicts with bicycles.

While we prefer the “bus only” configuration, it may not work well outside of daytime hours. During evening and late-night periods, there is low bus traffic and drivers may be tempted to use the curb lane illegally. This would leave cyclists in a dangerous position between two lanes of moving traffic. We therefore suggest only a slight extension of the bus-only period, from the current 3pm-7pm period to a longer 7am-7pm period in the southbound direction.

In the northbound direction, no special bicycle facilities are to be provided since cyclists will primarily use the Hornby St. bicycle lane. However, there is no reason to prohibit bicycles from using the northbound “bus only” lane. We believe it would be useful to designate this lane for “buses and bicycles” with an additional allowance for right-turning vehicles. Without such a designation, there will be no good place on the roadway for northbound bicycles, since the vehicle lanes will be too narrow to allow cars to comfortably pass cyclists in any other position.

We also support the Bicycle Advisory Committee’s recommendation that the northbound bus-only lane stay in effect 24 hours. This action would benefit two high priority modes (bicycles and transit) at the expense of a low transportation priority (parking for private automobiles), and should have no negative impact on motor vehicle speeds or congestion.

Pacific St.

At Pacific St., we would like to see a bike box installed in the curb lane. This is the only solution that properly addresses conflicts with right-turning vehicles here, and simultaneously eases cyclists' movement from the normal bicycle lane to the curb edge for access to the bridge. A bike box would also serve cyclists approaching the Burrard Bridge from the future eastbound bicycle lane on Pacific St.

In the longer term, more options need to be explored at this intersection as part of the Burrard Bridge detailed design phase.

Left Turns at Helmcken St.

The Comox/Helmcken greenway will be a major east/west route for cyclists in the downtown. We would like to see some accommodation for cyclists make left turns at the Helmcken St. intersection. A low-cost temporary solution would be acceptable until a more sophisticated approach is devised during the design and construction of the Comox/Helmcken greenway. We have discussed a number of design options with engineering staff, and we believe a solution can be found.

Hastings St.

During periods when parking is allowed, we suggest removing a small number of parking spaces to reduce conflicts between bicycles and right-turning cars. The right-turn volume at Hastings St. is the highest along the entire route (177/hour), and there is almost no space for motor vehicles to queue prior to the intersection. As a result, they cut off bicycles as they try to make their right turns. The removal of a few parking spaces here would be very beneficial. Without removal, this location will probably experience frequent conflicts between turning vehicles and bicycles.

City staff have recently agreed to remove two rush hour parking spots at this location, and we are satisfied with that solution.

Minor Issues

- The curb bulge at the southwest corner of Cordova St. needs to be cut back to allow through cyclist traffic.
- The two parking spaces in front of the Sutton Hotel should be removed. The hotel has a loop for drop-offs, and drivers exiting from this loop will be unable to see oncoming cyclists while waiting in the roadway; the parking blocks their view. Given the presence of the hotel's loop and adjacent underground parking, the on-street parking is unnecessary.
- The south curbcut in front of the Shell gas station in the 1100 block should not be used as an exit. The ramp is too close to Davie St., and cars leaving the gas station via this route will frequently conflict with the bicycle lane at the intersection. If this was used exclusively as an entrance and the north ramp used as an exit, we would have no complaints. Otherwise, exits on Davie St. could be used.