



October 21, 2004

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

We are writing today in response to the recent Granville St. Redesign Open House. Several members of our organization attended the open house, and one of our members represented the VACC in the stakeholder group.

The main points raised in this letter are:

1. Our preference would be for the bus mall to extend the entire length of downtown Granville St., from the bridge to Cordova St.; however, at a minimum, we would like to see the bus mall extended to cover Granville St. from Smithe St. to Cordova St., as suggested by the consultants.
2. Of the options presented, we support concept #1 with the caveat that the bus lanes must be at least 3.65m (12 feet) wide.
3. We would like to see bicycle parking facilities included in the final design.

Overall, we are unhappy with the low consideration of cycling in this project. We recognize that the Downtown Transportation Plan does not suggest bicycle lanes on Granville St., that transit service is the priority in this corridor, and that it can be difficult to combine bicycle lanes with heavy bus traffic. However, because of its relatively low traffic volume and its flat profile, the mall section of Granville is popular with cyclists. Given enough room for safe passing, the mall can be an effective place for buses and bicycles to “share the road.” We were therefore disappointed that none of the design options built open the successful mall concept by extending the existing mall to the entire length of downtown Granville St.

Of the options under consideration, we prefer concept 1, the “Bus-Auto Boulevard” with two bus lanes and a single northbound general-purpose lane. With this design, we see one key issue: the bus lanes should be *a minimum of 12'* (3.65m). This width is enough to allow buses and bicycles to make occasional passing manoeuvres; anything less is potentially dangerous.

In the consultants' diagrams, they marked a two-block bus-only section from Robson St. to Dunsmuir St, but also suggested that the bus-only section could be extended to include everything from Smithe St. through to Cordova St. We strongly support this extension to a longer bus-only section.

From a cyclist's perspective, the advantages of concept 1 are as follows.

- Depending on their comfort level, cyclists could ride in the bus lane or northbound in the general-purpose lane
- The general-purpose lane would likely move no faster than a comfortable cycling speed
- The flexibility of the general-purpose lane could sometimes be used to restrict motor vehicle access while still allowing (low-speed) cyclists
- The design would probably offer the lowest traffic speeds, which is quite important for cyclist safety and comfort

The disadvantages are:

- The general-purpose lane is a wasteful use of valuable downtown space. It will serve relatively few users, and the parking spaces will serve even fewer. This could be mitigated by converting the lane and/or parking spaces to pedestrian/cyclist uses at appropriate times.
- The general-purpose lane is described as a "special boulevard with slow moving vehicles." The consultants suggested that vehicle speeds should be near a walking pace, and have noted that the lane "introduces complexity for pedestrians." To reduce conflicts, they suggested special design features: narrow width, special pavement treatment, elevation to sidewalk level, etc. These details of the design will prove critical to the success of the lane; if done incorrectly, dangerous conflicts between motorized and non-motorized modes will arise.

By contrast, concept 2 is a peculiar design, with motor vehicle access only on alternating blocks. To our organization, it seems inferior to concept 1, but still acceptable. It allows vehicle access, but the discontinuous access would likely leave the general-purpose lanes relatively unused by motorists. It could also prove awkward for cyclists: they would need to use the bus lane to continue straight along Granville St., riding left of the general traffic lane. It is an unusual position for cyclists, and both beginners and visitors might be tempted to ride next to the curb, requiring them to cross vehicle traffic at the intersections.

The "Rejuvenating Today's Granville" design (concept 3) is not a desirable solution. Contrary to the City's stated priorities, private vehicles appear to have the highest priority in this alternative. Vehicle traffic would be heavier than in the other concepts, making cycling much less comfortable. With the retention of two vehicle lanes and parking in each direction, this design leaves little space for pedestrians or cyclists.

Granville St. is a major shopping and entertainment destination, and many of its visitors arrive by bicycle. None of the three concepts addresses one issue of great importance to cyclists: short-term bicycle parking. Facilities for bicycle parking on Granville St. have been poor for many years, and recent redevelopment has reduced the supply even further. This is a very easy problem to fix, and deserves attention here and in all of our city's commercial districts.

While it may not be feasible to include bicycle lanes on Granville St., it is still important to consider cyclists' needs when selecting a design. To date, the design process has virtually ignored the impacts on cyclists, focussing instead on the needs of pedestrians and transit users. However, all modes will benefit if bicycles are accommodated. If adequate road space is provided, buses and bicycles can safely pass each other, reducing bus delays. If the road accommodates bicycles, cyclists are much less likely to ride on the sidewalk illegally, increasing the safety and comfort of both cyclists and pedestrians.

In closing, we repeat our support for concept 1, and we urge you to include extensions of the bus mall from Smithe St. to Cordova St. as suggested by the consultants (or even to the Granville Bridge), and we suggest that you consider the addition of parking facilities for cyclists along Granville St. We feel that this approach will bring a more vibrant Granville St. to the heart of Vancouver, while supporting our city's top transportation priorities: pedestrians, cyclists and transit users.

Sincerely,
Hans-Jürgen (Jack) E.H. Becker
Chair, VACC Vancouver Committee
Director, Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition