Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition

VACC
www.vacc.bc.ca

Box 0074, 641 Columbia St.
New Westminster, BC
V3M 1A8
(604) 878-8222

The Lower Mainland's Cycling Advocates

July 29, 2005

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are writing today in response to the latest Granville St. Redesign Open House. After careful consideration, the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition's preferred designs are (from best to worst):

1. An option that staff chose not to study in detail: to extend the bus mall to the entire length of downtown Granville St., from the bridge to Cordova St. We support the bus mall concept, since bicycles can reasonably share the space with buses in the existing bus mall.
2. The One-Sided Flex design is good. This option will likely have the slowest speeds and the least vehicle traffic, while still allowing bicycles to travel in both directions.
3. The Enhance Existing design is reasonable. This design extends the bus mall, and has slightly wider lanes in the non-bus mall section, allowing cars and bicycles to coexist better than the at present.
4. The Two-Sided Flex option is unacceptable. The regular lanes would be too narrow to allow buses and bikes to pass each other, and the sidewalks would be too cramped to allow bicycle parking.
5. The One-Sided Flex North of Smithe option is unacceptable. This design reduces the bus mall, and has the most vehicle traffic.

Also, Granville St. is a major shopping and entertainment destination, and many of its visitors arrive by bicycle, and still more will in the future as the City works toward its goal of a higher cycling mode share. None of the 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 deserves attention here and in all of our city's commercial districts.

In the appendix to this letter, we elaborate on our reasoning for this ranking.

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

Appendix

Overall, the VACC is 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." The bus mall is a very effective design for transit and pedestrians, and can accommodate cyclists reasonably. We were therefore disappointed that none of the design options built upon the successful mall concept by extending the existing mall to the entire length of downtown Granville St.

One-Sided Flex

Of the options presented, this is our preferred design. We see one key issue with the design: 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. The current proposal from staff is a 3.7m bus lane, which is quite acceptable.

In the consultants' original 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 this concept 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 volumes and speeds, both of which are quite important for cyclist safety and comfort

The disadvantages are:

- 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.

Enhance Existing

This option is not quite as good as the single flex lane option, but is worthy of consideration.

From a cyclist's perspective, the advantages of this design are:

- It extends the current "bus mall" section of the street. The bus mall is a proven bicycle-friendly design, so any extension of that concept is desirable. The extension of the bus mall comes close to our vision of a transit mall from the bridge to Cordova.
- Wider lanes than today in the non-bus mall section, reducing friction between cars and bikes.

The disadvantages are:

- Likely to have heavier traffic and possibly higher speeds in the non-bus mall section, since more general-purpose lanes are provided.

Two-Sided Flex

At first glance, the two flex lanes option looks like a reasonable variation to the single flex lane concept. It does offer one key advantage over that concept:

- Cyclists can choose either the flex lane or the bus lane in both northbound and southbound directions.

However, there are a few flaws that make this a poor choice for cyclists:

- The bus lanes are a narrow 3.2m instead of 3.7m. This leaves no room for buses to pass cyclists (or vice versa), which will increase frustration for both cyclists and buses.
- Very little room is left on the street for sidewalks or street furniture. This means that it will be extremely difficult to find room for bicycle parking. This street is a major destination for cyclists, and adequate bicycle parking is essential to its success.

These flaws are substantial enough to make this option unacceptable to our organization.

One-Sided Flex North of Smithe

We strongly oppose this option. It runs counter to the City's stated transportation priorities by featuring the shortest bus mall and the longest, fastest moving general vehicle lanes of all options. It combines the disadvantages of the One-Sided Flex (complexity of operating a flex lane) with the disadvantages of the Enhance Existing option (even heavier traffic and higher speeds). We see no benefits to this design relative to the other options.