**Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition**

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*The Lower Mainland's Cycling Advocates*

March 19, 2006

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

On behalf of the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition, I am writing to you today to express qualified support for the Dunsmuir bicycle lane. We are definitely glad to see this project go ahead, but we believe more work is needed before it will be complete.

This is a vital route: it will be the only continuous westbound route near the central business district, with good connections to the Lion's Gate Bridge and east Vancouver. We would have preferred to see a route on Pender St. instead of Dunsmuir St., but we believe the Dunsmuir route will still be useful.

Our two issues on this route are *continuity* of the bicycle lane and *connections* to other bicycle routes.

Continuity of the route is fairly good, but is still broken at one point. At the western end of this route where it follows Pender St., no bicycle lane is proposed between Jervis St. and Georgia St. (near Cardero). We understand the space constraints at this point, but a bicycle route is only as strong as its weakest link, and by dropping the bicycle lane for two blocks the value of the entire route is diminished. Mixing bicycles with the busy vehicle traffic on Pender St. is not acceptable.

The final issue is connectivity. Left turns are difficult for cyclists, particularly on arterial streets like Dunsmuir where a conventional left turn would require crossing three lanes of heavy traffic. We are extremely glad that staff have adopted “bike boxes” for left turns; we just wish they could be used in more places, including Dunsmuir at Burrard St.

We look forward to the implementation of this project, and the ongoing work on the Downtown Transportation Plan.

Sincerely,

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

# Appendix

## *Motivation*

This bicycle route is truly one of the most vital routes in the downtown network. It is the only east/west route that comes near the heart of downtown, and it is one of the most direct east/west routes in the network.

On its east end, the route will connect to the Adanac bikeway---the most popular in the city---serving eastern Vancouver and Burnaby commuters. It will also likely be the best route for connections between the north end of downtown and the Ontario Greenway, serving southern Vancouver and many suburban commuters. (From the south end of downtown, the Cambie St. bridge is likely more convenient.)

On its west end, the route will connect to Coal Harbour, Stanley Park, and the Lion's Gate Bridge. It will likely be a popular route for north shore commuters, and Vancouver residents accessing recreation in Stanley Park or the north shore.

The alternatives for commuters are limited. The Comox/Helmcken Greenway (a few years off) and Haro/Nicola routes will give west end residents access to the southern part of downtown. The Pacific/Expo routes serves a similar function for east side residents. The Waterfront Rd. route will eventually provide an alternate east/west bypass at the north end of downtown, but will never connect well to downtown destinations, and remains a very distant prospect. The Pender/Dunsmuir route is really the only east/west route planned to connect to the central business district.

For this reason, we see this as a particularly important route, and we want the best possible treatment.

## *Continuity*

Continuity is widely seen as an essential part of a bicycle route. If a bicycle lane stops suddenly—even just for one or two blocks—cyclists often describe feeling “abandoned” as they are brought part-way and then left to fight traffic. This discourages less proficient riders from using the route at all. To compound the problem, bicycle lanes are usually dropped in the most challenging parts of the route, with limited width for bicycles and cars to pass each other. A bicycle route is only as strong as its weakest link, and by dropping the bicycle lane for one or two blocks, the value of the entire route is diminished.

This is exactly what has happened on the western end of this route. Westbound cyclists will have a straightforward ride in a westbound bicycle lane along Dunsmuir St., will make a smooth transition onto Melville St., and then the route will veer north at Jervis to intersect Pender St. Cyclists make a left turn there onto Pender St., intending to continue west along the designated route to Georgia St. However, staff have proposed to have no bicycle lane westbound on Pender St. between Jervis and Georgia. This represents the only missing link on the westbound route: from Georgia, cyclists can move smoothly along the Stanley Park Causeway and across the Lion's Gate Bridge.

We understand that space is limited in this section of Pender St. However, staff have not really tried to address the issue.

## *Connections*

In North America, connections between bicycle routes have usually been completely omitted by traffic engineers. Even if two bicycle routes cross each other, it can be quite difficult for cyclists to switch from one route to the other. While right turns are easy to make, left turns are a real challenge. Cyclists typically have two options open to them: a “vehicular” left turn from the leftmost lane, or a “pedestrian” style turn, where they dismount and use the pedestrian crosswalks to make the turn.

On downtown arterial streets, vehicular left turns are very intimidating, requiring the cyclist to make several lane changes in heavy traffic to reach the correct position for a left turn. Pedestrian-style turns, however, are frustrating: there is rarely enough room on crosswalk or sidewalk for a bicycle (or frequently several bicycles), it inconveniences pedestrians, and it is annoying to have to dismount for such a common manoeuvre. As a result, many cyclists have invented their own solutions, often illegal or dangerous. The safest option is to ride on the crosswalk, but this is even more inconvenient for pedestrians, and is illegal.

We proposed an alternative for left-turning cyclists: the use of the “bike box” to give cyclists space on the street to make their turns. Staff agreed with this idea, and included a diagram showing this design in their report. The proposal is similar to the designs commonly used in Denmark, where these “indirect” left turns are legal and normal. We would like to see this design adopted at all intersections of bicycle routes on arterial streets where left turns are need. Along this corridor, the turning movements are: Dunsmuir left onto Richards; Hornby left onto Dunsmuir; and Dunsmuir left onto Burrard. Staff have agreed to include the first two, but not the final one.

A safe and legal option for left turns should improve compliance with the law, and improve cyclists' safety.