



August 27, 2004

Downtown Transportation Plan Implementation Team
Vancouver City Hall
453 West 12th Ave.
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Dear Sir/Madam,

We were pleased to take part in discussions of upcoming downtown bicycle lanes (Richards St. and Beatty St., and possible lanes on Homer St., Robson St. and Georgia St.). Representatives of the VACC participated in discussions at the Bicycle Advisory Committee and members later contributed comments at the public open house. In particular, we were pleased to see measures in place to reduce conflicts between cyclists and right-turning vehicles, an issue which the VACC has brought up with engineering staff in the past.

Consequently, we do not feel there are many major issues with the plans for these routes that have been presented to date. Much of this letter will instead be devoted to more nitty-gritty details along the route. However, there are three major issues we would like to discuss:

- 1) The potential lanes on Homer, Robson and Georgia.
- 2) Double-striping of the Beatty St. bicycle lane
- 3) The intersection of Beatty St. and Nelson St.

In the remainder of this letter, we describe these major issues, and close with a discussion of minor details on each route.

Potential Lanes on Homer St., Robson St. and Georgia St.

The VACC supports development of bicycle lanes on Homer St., Robson St. and Georgia St.

From designs shown at the public open house, a Homer St. route looks quite promising, and makes a natural match for the Richards St. bicycle lane. A couplet on this street makes eminent sense, and we encourage the city to pursue this concept. It has been suggested that this addition conflicts with the goal of expanding the pedestrian realm on Homer St., but we believe a different option could be more productive: reduction of on-street parking. This option would accommodate the higher-priority modes (pedestrians and bicycles) without many negative trade-offs. This could have an impact on Homer St. retail outlets, but we believe that downtown shopping could take a different form from other parts of the city: one-stop parking (in a large structure) followed by pedestrian street shopping. We hence believe that downtown retailers need on-street parking less than other regions of the city.

The case for Robson St. and Georgia St. bicycle lanes is less clear. In the area under consideration (between Richards and Beatty), Robson St. is already a comfortable cycling street, due to slow traffic speeds and wide curb lanes. By placing a westbound bicycle lane on Robson St., the wide curb lane in the eastbound direction is lost, making that side less comfortable. However, a bicycle lane will meet the needs of less experienced cyclists who would not use a wide curb lane; the more experienced cyclists still have the option of taking the vehicle lane in the eastbound direction. On this basis, the VACC supports development of a bicycle lane on Robson St.

A bicycle lane on Georgia St. is also a difficult idea. Vehicle traffic on this street can be intimidating for experienced cyclists, although this may improve once signals are synchronized for 40 km/h traffic speed instead of 50 km/h. We believe that an eastbound lane on Georgia would be useful as a match for the Robson lane, mostly to ensure that cyclists who enter downtown on Robson have an obvious way to exit.

Double-Striping on Beatty St.

In discussions with engineering during the design of the Hornby St. bicycle lane, we established the need for double-striped bicycle lanes in the downtown. Our understanding is that the Richards St. lane will be double-striped for its entire length. However, staff have noted that is not currently possible to double stripe Beatty St.

The reason given has been “event parking needs.” There are special regulations in effect for Beatty St.; during special events (at the adjacent stadiums), parking on the street is stripped to add roadway capacity for cars exiting parking lots adjacent to Beatty. Because of this elimination of parking, the bicycle lane will be between two moving traffic lanes at this time; furthermore, the curb lane will be of substandard width for moving traffic (2.5m), and vehicles will likely be using the width allocated to bicycle lanes. It is expected that event parking restrictions will be lifted on this street in the near future as parking structures in the area are redeveloped, and at that time double-striping could occur.

From our own ride of the street, we could not see many remaining parking lots exiting onto Beatty St. The largest ones in the area, operated by EasyPark, seem to exit onto neighbouring streets. The event parking restrictions seem to date from an earlier time, when surface parking exited on to Beatty St., but these lots have now been replaced by condominium towers.

In our opinion, event parking restrictions should be changed now, not later; this would be cheaper, it would simplify the two-way conversion and it would allow immediate double-striping for the full length of Beatty St.

From what we understand, engineering staff are now investigating an immediate removal of event parking restrictions. We strongly support this move, and hope to see proper double-striping on the full length of Beatty St.

The Intersection of Beatty St. and Nelson St.

This intersection of Beatty and Nelson is particularly awkward, and we have seen few details of the design options for this area. Three lanes of eastbound Nelson St. ramp up onto the Cambie Bridge, while the leftmost lane allows left turns onto Beatty St. or descent to Expo Blvd., Pacific Blvd., and Marinaside. Finally, a little-used westbound lane climbs from Expo Blvd. to connect with Beatty St.

Cyclists have a particularly difficult time at this intersection. Those trying to use the Cambie Bridge are currently expected to use the leftmost lane to descend to Pacific Blvd. and the ramps there, although the signage indicating this is poor. The bridge has a very negative influence on vehicle traffic here, with all cars speeding up substantially, including those in the leftmost lane. There is a definite need to calm speeds in this lane, which could be accomplished quite easily. This would have major benefits for bridge-bound cyclists on Nelson St.

The final issue at this intersection is the connection via Beatty Walk to the intersection of Pacific Blvd. and Cambie St. In the Downtown Transportation Plan, this segment of the Beatty bikeway was intended to be “shared with other users,” mostly pedestrians. While it may seem like an unimportant short section, it could provide a convenient bicycle connection from Downtown South to a future southbound bicycle lane on the west side of the Cambie Bridge, and also makes a convenient connection to the Beatty St. lanes themselves.

Unfortunately, we understand that this route is not city-owned, and the developer would prefer to see it used exclusively by pedestrians. It could be useful to renegotiate the status of the route at a future date, to include cyclist access rights.

Minor issues on Richards St.

The biggest issue on Richards St. is reduction of conflicts with right-turning vehicles. The designs shown to date included right-turn bays at Pacific St. and Smithe St., the two highest-volume intersections on the route; Robson St. was also under consideration. This treatment at these intersections appears satisfactory to the VACC, and should mitigate right-turn conflicts with cyclists.

The second issue on this street is conflicts near parking structures. The designs shown so far have provided zones without street parking near the exits, typically with enough space to give exiting drivers good sightlines for spotting cyclists. After inspecting the route, we believe that most of the garages should be fine, with one possible exception: the ImPark lot at the northwest corner of Robson (Impark #347, at 773 Richards). The entrance to this lot is from Robson, but the exit is onto Richards, right at the intersection. We observed many exiting drivers blocking the (future) bicycle lane while trying to move into the through traffic lane on Richards. This conflict is particularly worrisome because it is at a downhill section of the bicycle lane, when cyclists are likely to be moving quickly. This conflict point should be addressed, preferably by requiring drivers to exit on Robson—a trivial modification of the existing parking structure.

Finally, there could be some conflicts at the ambulance depot south of Davie, which currently has poor sight lines for seeing oncoming cyclists. We suggest stripping the one neighbouring parking spot to improve sight lines, and encouraging the depot to install signal lights in a more prominent location.

Minor issues on Beatty St.

At the open house showing designs for Beatty St., it was proposed that the intersection of Beatty St. and Pender St. could be normalised. As part of any redesign of this intersection, we would like to see consideration for westbound cyclists on Pender who wish to make a left-turn on to Beatty St. The intersection is quite wide, and should be able to accommodate some provision for left-turning cyclists.

In one block, between Smithe St. and Robson St., we observed substantial double-parking activity (in front of the YWCA, for example). If this behaviour persists after bicycle lanes are installed, double-parking vehicles will block the bicycle lane. Given the hotel uses in this block, it may make more sense to provide loading zones than street parking, providing space for short-term stopping.

There are a few locations where sight lines may be an issue near parking garages. The garage on the northeast corner of Smithe and Beatty has poor sight lines due to an onstreet parking spot adjacent to the 7-11; we suggest that this space should be stripped in the interest of safety. The parking lot on the southwest corner of Georgia and Beatty also has poor sightlines, although this is more likely to affect drivers than cyclists.

In closing, we eagerly await the implementation of these bicycle lanes. We hope that the design issues raised in this letter can be resolved in a satisfactory manner. We believe that these recommendations will improve the safety and convenience of downtown bicycle network, the centrepiece of the city's cycling improvements in 2004. Please continue discussions with us as design choices are narrowed down. Feel free to correspond with us directly, or through presentations to the Bicycle Advisory Committee.

Sincerely,

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

Please address future communications to the VACC contact person on this issue:

David Pritchard