



ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: October 27, 2009
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Meeting Date: November 3, 2009

TO: Standing Committee on Transportation and Traffic
FROM: General Manager of Engineering Services
SUBJECT: Burrard Bridge Bike Lanes
Status Report, Fall 2009

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT Council receive this report for information.
- B. THAT, following the 2010 Winter Games, staff report back with options for permanent bridge configurations which do not include bridge widening.

COUNCIL POLICY

On May 7, 2009, Council directed staff to implement a re-allocation of the west curb lane of the Burrard Bridge to provide a southbound bicycle lane on the bridge, to convert the east sidewalk to an exclusive northbound bicycle path and to direct all pedestrians to use the west sidewalk.

PURPOSE

This report provides a review of the findings to date resulting from the bridge reconfiguration, which was implemented in July 2009.

BACKGROUND

In May 2009, staff began a monitoring program aimed at assessing the impact of changes to the Burrard Bridge on pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular traffic, on transit operations and on surrounding neighbourhoods.

As an integral part of the project an extensive communications program was undertaken. This campaign included mass media advertising in print and on radio, banners placed on the bridge itself, signage, extensive information on the City's website, social media, and earned media opportunities (over 30 media interviews were done with City staff). Focus group research and a survey were done to understand awareness and attitudes around the issue, the bridge and the options (see Appendix A). The objective was to ensure that drivers knew and would not be surprised by the reconfiguration, and made aware of alternatives - primarily transit and the nearby Granville Bridge.

On the weekend of July 10-13, 2009 changes were put in place on the Burrard Bridge and adjacent streets to create protected bike lanes on the bridge and connecting streets. On the morning of Monday, July 13 the new walking and cycling facilities were opened to the public.

Staff have collected and analysed data over the period leading up to and since the installation of the protected bike lanes. Findings of these analyses are discussed below.

DISCUSSION

Pedestrians

All pedestrians crossing the Burrard Bridge must now use the west sidewalk, which is no longer shared with bicycles. Most feedback from pedestrians has been positive, citing the comfort and safety of a pedestrian only route. Some have objected to the closure of the east sidewalk to pedestrians. The number of walking trips across the bridge has not significantly changed noticeably.

Cyclists

Cyclists can now cross the bridge on northbound and southbound bike paths, separated from both vehicles and pedestrians. Feedback from cyclists has been overwhelmingly positive. Cyclists feel much safer separated from other bridge users.

Cycling volumes are up appreciably. Between July 13 and September 30, 26% more bicycle trips were made over the bridge than would have been made had the reconfiguration not happened. This amounts to an additional 70,000 bike trips. Growth on weekends has been the most dramatic, with volumes up 40-70%. Since Labour Day, the number of new trips has fallen when compared with summer usage, but remains above the level which would be expected on an unchanged bridge.

New cycling trips are not evenly distributed across age and gender lines. Trips by women are up 31%, compared to 23% for men. Anecdotally, many more children are seen cycling across the bridge.

Transit

Transit operations appear to be unaffected by the bridge changes. According to a TransLink analysis of bus running times before and after the reconfiguration "there is little to no negative effect on bus running time since the introduction of the bike lane".

Vehicles

Neither the Burrard nor the Granville Bridge has seen appreciable changes in the number of daily vehicle crossings. The first few days following the re-configuration on Burrard saw some redistribution of traffic to Granville, but that had returned to pre-trial status within a week.

As with buses, general vehicle travel times along Burrard Street are unchanged. Driving trips which approach the north end of the bridge from the east along Pacific are longer by about 30 seconds during peak periods. The most noticeable change to vehicle travel times is for trips approaching the north end of the bridge from the west along Thurlow or Pacific. Accessing the bridge from Georgia street via Thurlow and Pacific now takes an average 1½ minutes longer in the morning peak period and 3 minutes longer in the afternoon.

Safety

The City has received many comments from pedestrians and cyclists who believe that the Burrard Bridge is now safer. Preliminary findings from a University of British Columbia cycling safety study indicate that accident rates have decreased.

In a nine week period in the summer of 2008, three cyclists were injured on the Burrard Bridge severely enough to attend Emergency at Saint Paul's or Vancouver General Hospital. Two of these incidents involved collisions between cyclists and pedestrians with the cyclist falling into the roadway. In the same nine week period in 2009, since the re-configuration, only one cyclist attended Emergency. This southbound cyclist fell onto the adjacent sidewalk after colliding with a wrong-way cyclist.

It needs to be emphasized that these safety-related findings are preliminary, as they are based on small sample sizes and a short study period. A longer study is warranted. Staff continue to work with the UBC researchers running this study.

Business

Businesses in the downtown core do not appear to have been affected. The Downtown Vancouver BIA has polled its members twice to solicit input regarding the bridge trial. There has been no response to these polls, suggesting that these businesses do not perceive any change.

Closer to the bridge, two retailers on Hornby Street have seen drive-by traffic reduced in front of their shops. They have requested that a safety-related vehicle right-turn restriction at Pacific and Hornby be removed. Reinstating this right-turn would create a situation where, in peak hours, approximately 250 vehicles would turn across the path used by up to 200 cyclists. Staff have reviewed options beyond the previous and current arrangements, and are confident that the current arrangement, with vehicle right-turns prohibited, is the safest possible.

Neighbourhoods

Re-direction of traffic onto Howe and Beach, related to the new right-turn restriction at Pacific and Hornby, has been a concern of residents of Beach Avenue. The re-direction of this traffic is considered by staff to be an acceptable consequence of increasing cyclist safety at

Pacific and Hornby. Traffic volumes on these streets remain within norms for downtown residential streets.

East bound traffic queues are a concern for some residents of Pacific, west of Burrard. This queuing is a consequence of the reduced capacity of the Pacific to Burrard Bridge right-turn which resulted from introducing the protected bike lane. The length of these queues appears to have diminished since the summer, possibly as some drivers are choosing other routes across False Creek.

Communication and Public Opinion

The City has received feedback from many bridge users. The opinions of pedestrians and cyclists have been positive and those of motorists have been more critical of the reconfiguration. A public opinion survey of Vancouver residents conducted in September 2009 found strong broad support for retaining the reconfiguration (see Appendix A).

The communications were successful in reaching their objective and the tactics which were notably effective were the use of the Vancouver Sun front page wrap and the television and radio interviews, which was reflected strongly in the survey (as well as anecdotally and in the media). Also evidenced in the research was substantial support for the reconfiguration (by a two to one margin both before and after changes were made) and correspondingly weak support for the more expensive alternatives to either build a new bridge or widen the sidewalk.

Next Steps

Monitoring and analysis of pedestrian, cycling and vehicle use of the Burrard Bridge will continue.

Following the 2010 Winter Games, staff will report back with an updated status report and options for permanent bridge configurations which do not include bridge widening.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications.

CONCLUSION

The reconfiguration of the Burrard Bridge, implemented in July 2009, has generated many positive outcomes and been a successful step forward in our sustainable transportation initiative and our work towards the goal of being the greenest city.

Notable outcomes include:

- the number of cycling trips across the bridge has increased significantly (26% increase in the period July 13 to September 30)
- pedestrians and cyclists feel safer and more comfortable
- the risk of serious cyclist injury has likely been reduced
- gender split amongst cyclists on the bridge is more equal and more women are cycling on the bridge.

- the reconfiguration has shown that the bridge can function with only two southbound vehicle lanes under existing vehicle volumes without significant negative impact on transit or other traffic

The reconfiguration has also created some issues which will continue to be monitored and considered in the report back.

These include:

- some pedestrians remain opposed to being prohibited from the east sidewalk
- travel times have increased somewhat for vehicle trips on Pacific and Thurlow
- redirection of traffic from Hornby to Howe and Beach is a consequence of a cyclist safety measure at Pacific and Hornby, and no acceptable alternatives to this impact have been identified

Given these findings, it is the opinion of staff that the protected bike lanes should remain in place and staff will report back after the 2010 Games with a proposal for the permanent plans for bridge reconfiguration which do not include bridge widening.

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