

REPORT

Engineering Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: December 12, 2022

From: Lisa Leblanc, Director of Engineering Services
File: 09.1860.30.05
(Doc# 2184985)

Item #: 2022-760

Subject: Feedback from Businesses about Sixth Street Bike Lanes

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receive this report for information.

THAT Council direct staff to consider potential measures to mitigate business and public concerns and to report back with recommendations for Council's consideration.

PURPOSE

An informational report on the Council direction and engagement processes leading to the construction of protected cycling lanes along Sixth Street between the Rotary Crosstown Greenway on Seventh Avenue and the east entrance of New Westminster Secondary School north of Eighth Avenue, and to report back on further business engagement requested by Council on November 28, 2022.

SUMMARY

The notion of a cycling connection between the Rotary Crosstown Greenway on Seventh Avenue and the east entrance of the new New Westminster Secondary School (NWSS) was first discussed in early 2020. Further Council direction, public and stakeholder engagement, and technical analysis have led to the protected cycling lanes currently under construction on Sixth Street. Additional engagement with businesses in December 2022 identified perceived impacts and suggested mitigation measures outlined in this report.

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2022, contracted crews began construction on protected bike lanes along Sixth Street from Seventh Avenue to the east driveway at NWSS north of Eighth Avenue. This route is intended to provide a facility that is comfortable for people of all ages and abilities connecting the Rotary Crosstown Greenway on Seventh Avenue with the civic precinct that includes NWSS, Mercer Stadium, Massey Theatre, and Moody Park Arena.

Since construction began, the City has heard numerous concerns about the impacts of construction and the protected lanes on Sixth Street businesses. Construction is ongoing, with more disruptive work expected to be complete by the end of 2022 (weather-permitting) and final details (primarily pavement markings) to be completed in spring 2023.

On November 28, 2022, Council requested staff to conduct further discussion with Sixth Street businesses to assess impacts and to provide this report back.

DISCUSSION

In the following discussion, several Council resolutions and other reports are referenced. To keep the number of attachments to a manageable level, only references to these documents are provided in Attachment 1.

Uptown Streetscape Vision

In the [Master Transportation Plan](#) (MTP) adopted by Council in 2015, Sixth Street is designated as a “Great Street”. Per the MTP, Great Streets “require planning and design that goes beyond the typical street function of supporting through traffic. Planning and designing Great Streets means providing characteristics that make streets destinations – places for people to be, instead of places to move through.”

Each street that is designated as a Great Street requires more detailed planning to determine what streetscape elements will be incorporated. On November 30, 2020, Council adopted the [Uptown Street Vision](#) (USV), which provides guidance on making Sixth Street a multi-modal corridor focused on walking, cycling, and transit. The focus of the plan is from Fifth Avenue to Tenth Avenue.

Prior to approval of the USV and during construction of the new NWSS facility, HUB Cycling representatives spoke at the former Advisory Committee on Transit, Bicycles, and Pedestrians (ActBiPed) and the former Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), advocating for a safe and comfortable cycling connection to the east entrance of the new NWSS at Sixth Street. This route would connect to a new bike lane along the frontage of the building connecting to Sixth Street and a significant amount of secure bicycle parking on site. Both committees adopted motions to Council in support of this connection. Subsequently, Council passed the following resolutions on March 9, 2020:

THAT Council direct staff to expediently embark upon the design of a safe cycling connection between the Seventh Avenue Crosstown Greenway and the New Westminster Secondary School (NWSS) entrance on Sixth Street;

THAT Council direct staff to incorporate a safe cycling connection from Seventh Avenue to the front entrance of NWSS as part of the planned improvements to the Rotary Crosstown Greenway which are contemplated in the draft 2020-2024 Financial Plan.

In response to this direction, the USV contemplated this connection to NWSS as part of the Sixth Street Great Street corridor. In fact, the draft USV presented to Council initially recommended that the NWSS Connector be located on Fifth Street and connect to the NWSS campus and Sixth Street via a midblock public lane and proposed multi-use pathway. However, with approval of the USV on November 30, 2020, Council amended and passed the resolution with the following language:

THAT Council direct staff to expand the public engagement process for the Uptown Streetscape Vision implementation to include two options for connecting the Rotary Crosstown Greenway to the new Highschool [sic] which includes as an option separated bike lanes along 6th street [sic] and report back to Council with the outcome of the engagement and a recommendation for which alignment to construct.

Uptown Active Transportation Improvements Project

In response to this direction, staff initiated the [Uptown Active Transportation Improvements project](#) in September 2021 with the assistance of a consultant. The project included an extensive public engagement process online and in person.

The first round of engagement in fall 2021 focused on three routing options for the NWSS Connector – Fifth Street (per USV), Sixth Street, and a hybrid option via Fifth Street, Eighth Avenue, and Sixth Street. Techniques for reaching businesses and residents during the first round included:

- Over 2,800 letters delivered by Canada Post to business and residential addresses in the project vicinity announcing the project
- A project video posted online announcing the project
- A walkabout to Sixth Street businesses on October 5, 2021 and hand delivery of letters to let business operators know about the project and upcoming engagement opportunities, plus an invitation to participate in a focus group (walkabout records in Attachment 2)
- 20 posters in the neighbourhood
- 2 pop-up events with 226 participants
- 5 stakeholder meetings

- A website on Be Heard New West with a survey (264 participants), interactive map, and FAQs
- Social media posts promoting engagement opportunities

From the engagement (pop-ups, survey), the routing option via Sixth Street was preferred by the largest proportion of respondents, and the hybrid option was least preferred.

A technical evaluation considering multiple factors concluded that the Sixth Street or hybrid options would be preferred. The Fifth Street option via the midblock lane was not supported because it would be very indirect and much less desirable for users, relied on a very narrow lane with limited sightlines shared with motor vehicles, and had a relatively high level of construction risk due to dependence on an adjacent housing development.

These findings were presented to Council on January 10, 2022 and Council passed a resolution endorsing the Sixth Street routing option, and directing staff to implement an interim facility to test feasibility and evaluate impacts. The resolution passed is worded as follows:

THAT Council endorse routing Option 2 as described in the January 10, 2022, report entitled “Uptown Active Transportation Improvements Project Improvements Projects – Design and Engagement Update for the New Westminster Secondary School Cycling Connector.

THAT Council direct staff to implement an interim New Westminster Secondary School Cycling Connector along Sixth Street (routing Option 2 as described in the January 10, 2022, report entitled “Uptown Active Transportation Improvements Project Improvements Projects – Design and Engagement Update) using high quality lower-cost materials, to test the feasibility and evaluate impacts of the routing option on transit and traffic operations.

In follow-up to this decision on the routing, a second round of engagement was undertaken with residents and businesses, illustrating the conceptual design for the protected cycling lanes. Techniques for reaching residents and businesses during the second round included:

- A walkabout to Sixth Street businesses on February 3, 2022 to let businesses know that Council had approved the Sixth Street alignment, to advise of upcoming engagement opportunities and invite business operators to a focus group (walkabout records in Attachment 2)
- Email outreach to key stakeholders such as Uptown Business Improvement Association, schools, resident associations, etc.
- 20 posters in the neighbourhood
- 1 pop-up event with 150 participants
- 5 stakeholder meetings

- Student sessions at 2 schools
- A website on Be Heard New West with a survey (147 participants)
- Social media posts promoting engagement opportunities

Staff worked with the consultant to develop a design for the NWSS Connector through spring and summer 2022. At the start of construction, a notification letter was distributed to all addresses within the immediate vicinity of the project, advising them of pending construction, potential construction impacts, and contact information for contractors and City staff.

Design & Materials

Although this project has been designed and constructed as an interim installation, it was determined that the materials should be of higher quality and durability, for the following primary reasons:

- Sixth Street accommodates bus route 106, the busiest bus route in New Westminster and one of the busiest in the region. The two remaining bus stops within the project area are heavily used and are a transfer point for buses on Eighth Avenue. For these reasons, bus stop quality, accessibility, and capacity were significant considerations and more substantial construction was necessary to accommodate these requirements.
- With relatively heavy traffic volumes on Sixth Street, cast-in-place concrete is preferable for durability and for the protection of vulnerable road users. Plastic delineators are more challenging to maintain over time, especially on a road that accommodates higher traffic volumes, trucks, and transit. Furthermore, damaged or missing temporary infrastructure could pose a higher risk to public safety. With our limited operations workforce, staff were mindful of these potentially higher maintenance and safety implications with this infrastructure.
- It is anticipated that, if successful, the interim installation could remain in place for several years and be replaced gradually through redevelopment and through the City's capital program. The selection of more durable materials reflects this.
- Concrete is generally more aesthetically pleasing than low-cost materials such as plastic delineators. This was a consideration for the business area.

The bus stops required the most extensive construction to ensure functionality and accessibility, and overall costs were kept lower by eliminating most landscaping possibilities and using cast-in-place concrete (poured on top of the road surface) for the remainder of the project. Most existing curbs and driveway crossings were left in place, and higher cost aspects such as drainage and electrical modifications have been minimized.

Further Business Engagement

On November 28, 2022, in response to a public delegation representing a business on Sixth Street, Council passed the following resolution:

THAT Council direct staff to reach out to business owners on the bike lane section of Sixth Street to ascertain if they have been impacted from the installation of the bike lane, and ask them for suggestions on ways impacts on businesses can be mitigated.

On December 2, 2022, staff sent 34 emails to addresses on file for businesses on Sixth Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, advising them that members of the project team would be visiting on December 6, 2022 and requesting feedback on impacts and potential mitigation measures. The email invited business representatives to call or email staff if preferred.

On December 6 and 7, 2022, two project team members visited and consulted with 24 business representatives, and received one email from a business owner. Records of businesses contacts and feedback are provided in Attachment 2. The following impacts and issues were noted by business representatives:

- Challenges with winter installation (can't see the markings or barriers, no one uses the bike lane in the snow, lack of maintenance increases slips and falls on ice)
- New features were not designed with the elderly in mind (curb barriers, distances for parking, narrow streets and poor sightlines)
- Challenge turning onto Sixth Street from Hamilton Street (too narrow, poor sightlines, forces cars to turn into oncoming traffic)
- Increased congestion from cars turning onto Eighth Avenue
- Challenges parking in the stalls behind businesses (larger vehicles can't access, time consuming to try to pull out due to traffic, stalls are often used by employees and the public is unaware of the stalls that exist). The six parking stalls adjacent to the building have "Reserved" signage posted; customers are unaware they can be used.
- Businesses have seen fewer clients due to the lack of immediate, convenient parking
- Concerns with a lack of access for emergency vehicles (congestion, nowhere for drivers to pull over)

The business representatives suggested the following measures to mitigate impacts:

- Signage directing motorists to off-street parking
- Modify management/allocation of off-street (private) parking lots
- Add parking elsewhere
- Reduce parking rates
- Improve accessibility for seniors (ramps, improved sidewalks, accessible parking)

- Improved lighting and expanded police patrol (for personal security)

NEXT STEPS

Construction on the NWSS Connector is continuing, with most civil works expected to be complete within several weeks. Final pavement markings will be completed in the spring when conditions are suitable.

During this period, staff will consider the mitigation measures suggested by business operators, as well as others, and report back to Council.

Once the construction project is complete, staff will continue to monitor impacts on transit and traffic operations.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The implementation of cycling infrastructure such as on Sixth Street contributes to the City's long-term transportation, sustainability, and climate action goals by encouraging people to choose walking, cycling, and transit for more trips.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The construction of the protected lanes on Sixth Street has been funded from the City's 2022 Capital Budget at a cost of approximately \$640,000. Minor additional measures such as signage can be accommodated within the budget.

OPTIONS

The following options are provided:

1. THAT Council receive this report for information;
2. THAT Council direct staff to consider potential measures to mitigate business and public concerns and to report back with recommendations for Council's consideration; and,
3. THAT Council provide staff with alternate direction.

CONCLUSION

Cycling infrastructure on Sixth Street is being implemented following several Council resolutions and an engagement process outlined in this report. Additional business outreach has been completed at the request of Council.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - References to Relevant Documentation
Attachment 2 - Records of Business Walkabouts

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
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This report was reviewed by:
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This report was approved by:
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