

Gillian Day

Subject: FW: bike lane impacts - letter to businesses between Seventh and Eighth Aves
Attachments: SScans22022420100.pdf

From: Bart Slotman <bart@upg.ca>
Sent: Saturday, December 3, 2022 11:56 AM
To: Blair Fryer <bfryer@newwestcity.ca>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: bike lane impacts - letter to businesses between Seventh and Eighth Aves

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I am writing on behalf of the Uptown Business Association.

Thank you for reaching out to inform us of the City's renewed effort to reach out to businesses in the 700 block of Sixth Street to assess the impact of the bike lanes.

Now that the project is real, and the impacts are felt, we are not surprised by the reaction by the affected businesses.

Attached is a copy of the letter to the City dated February 24, 2022, and we would like to resubmit this letter. Please include this letter and this email in your report to Council.

We continue to believe that, while we support bicycle infrastructure, this simply is the wrong location for it. Our reasons for this are in the February 24 letter.

In our presentation of City Council around the same time, when we explained our position to Council, we were assured that these improvements are temporary (i.e. paint), not permanent, and could be reversed if necessary.

As the retailers have now proven our point, we believe that now is the time to acknowledge that this was not the right decision, reverse the changes, before the retail sector suffers further damage.

The Uptown Business Association hereby asks for the construction to be halted, promptly followed by the removal of the bike lane improvements, and the reinstatement of the on-street parking stalls.

Regards,

Bart Slotman | Vice President

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February 24, 2022

City of New Westminster
511 Royal Avenue
New Westminster, B.C.

Attention: Mayor and Council

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

Re: Bike Lanes to NWSS

The Uptown Business Association (UBA) supports in the overall vision for the Uptown Area as outlined in the City's Uptown Streetscape Vision document. This document envisions the Uptown as a pedestrian friendly retail district. The UBA has been equally supportive in making the Uptown area accessible by all modes of transportation, including improving bicycling connections to the Uptown area.

Recently, we were informed of the City's plan to connect the high school to the Crosstown Greenway by adding new, separated bike lanes in the 700 block of Sixth Street.

While we are very supportive of encouraging cycling by investing in new bicycle infrastructure, and of connecting the highschool to the bicycle network, we are deeply concerned with the impacts of locating this new connection on Sixth Street.

Sixth Street is a relatively narrow, and busy commercial street, with retail on both sides. Adding separated bike lanes would remove most of the street parking, and adds cyclists on a busy streets with cars and buses. There are much better routes that are much more comfortable for cyclists, and which do not result in a material adverse impact on the retailers in this block.

It would appear that the economic impact was not taken into consideration when selecting the cycling route. We also doubt that the construction costs will be much higher than necessary. It seems the only consideration was the most direct connection to the high school.

In our opinion, **the analysis was flawed**, and we urge the City to do a complete **cost-benefit analysis** that includes all route options available, and includes the impact on the retailers and the economic viability of retail sector in this part of the Uptown area.

Impact on Sixth Street Retailers

Most of the retail businesses in the 700 block of Sixth Street are convenience based, and a quick in-and-out is key to their success. Most businesses rely on customers driving to their stores. Losing the street parking for their customers will have a material adverse impact on their businesses at a time when many are marginally successful and still recovering from the impacts of the pandemic.

Removing customer parking to add bike lanes may be the nail in the coffin for many, and is likely to result in the failure of a number of businesses. Removing the street parking will also undermine the viability of retail as a land use in the 700 blocks of Sixth Street in the long term.

Bike Lanes are not consistent with Uptown Vision

The Uptown Vision developed by the City includes wider sidewalks and more spaces for gathering, and planting. It also envisions a curb lane that is allocated to various uses, including bus stops, loading zones, parking stalls, and patios. It does NOT show the entire parking lane eliminated to create (poorly used) separated bike lanes.

Thus, this new plan to add separated bike lanes in the 700 block of Sixth Street is **not** consistent with the City's own vision for Uptown.

Comparing the benefits and costs

The number of users of the proposed bike lanes is severely limited by the following factors:

1. The bike lane does not connect to the regional bike network or to any other bike lanes. It is only a 'stub' serving the high school. As such, it is serving only the high school population, and not regional or local bicycle commuters.
2. The use of the bike lanes to serve the Massey Theatre or Moody Park Arena is extremely limited. Theatre patrons don't want to arrive at a show sweaty or in bike clothes. And hockey players don't carry all their gear on a bike. To suggest that these facilities would drive demand for the bike route in any material way is not realistic.
3. After deducting for holidays, the school only operates roughly 200 days per year, which is just over one-half of the 365 days in a year. Then, the school only generates traffic going to the school for 30 minutes in the morning, and 30 minutes in the afternoon after school. In other words, this is not a facility that would see any significant traffic 365 days per year and during the entire day. It would see most of its traffic during only 200 hours out of the 8,760 hours in a year.
4. The school population is roughly 2000 students and staff. If, in the most optimistic scenario, you can get 10% of the students and staff to ride their bikes to school, that would be 200 cyclists. These students come from all directions, so approximately 1/4 would head south using the new bike lanes. That means you would build all this infrastructure for 50 cyclists using it only 200 days per year. This pales in comparison to the existing traffic numbers by any other mode of transportation, including buses and pedestrians, which would be adversely impacted.

The negative impact of the loss of parking is absolutely staggering considering the relatively low benefit to the community for this bike route.

Alternate Route

The negative impact can be eliminated by considering two possible alternatives that we understand have not been previously included.

1. We encourage the City to consider Eighth Street as the alternate route. In contrast to Sixth Street, Eighth Street is much wider (99 feet vs 66 feet), providing for much more room to add bike lanes with less impact. Also, the loss of any street parking on Eighth Street does not come with the adverse impact as compared to Sixth Street, as there is no retail fronting Eighth Street.
2. Another (low cost) alternate would be to paint bike lanes on the existing roadway on Sixth Street. At present, the parking lane is 12 feet wide. It only needs to be 8 feet wide. Striping the parking lane and re-allocating that excess 4 feet to a painted shared lane on the road would dedicate space for bicycles. We appreciate that this is not as safe as separated bike lanes, but combined with a lowering of the speed limit to 30kmh, it would significantly improve safety.

Option 2 could also be used as a pilot project to test the actual demand for bicycle infrastructure, and would delay the capital cost until the correct permanent route has been selected.

Priorities

We find it ironic that the City found \$2.5 million in its capital budget for this short 1 block bike lane, whereas we have been asking the City to improve the public realm in entire Uptown area (including replacing and widening sidewalks) for many years, only to be told there is no budget.

We also suggest that if \$2.5 million is available to street improvements Uptown, most voters would prioritize wider sidewalks that benefit thousands of pedestrians every day over a set of separated bike lanes that may be used by a select few people.

Summary

For clarity, the Uptown Business Association supports encouraging cycling as a viable alternate mode of transportation, and improving cycling connections to the Uptown district and the High School.

However, the proposed route comes at too great a cost to the retailers in the 700 block, and undermines the long term viability of retail as a land use in this area, which is not being considered in the City's analysis.

Also, the capital cost of the proposed bike lanes are excessive, and the same benefit can be derived by locating the bike route on Eighth Street at a much lower capital cost.

As such, we would ask that the city:

1. Proceed with upgrading the temporary bike lanes on Seventh Avenue, as proposed (for brevity, this part is not addressed in this letter, but was supported by UBA);
2. Revise road space allocation on the existing road by line striping to add shared bike lanes on Sixth Street as an interim step;
3. Complete a full cost benefit analysis for any permanent bike connection to the high school, including the impacts on the retail district;

4. Consider Eighth Street as a permanent bike route to connect to NWSS to the cross town greenway, as well as the Moody park Athletic facilities.

We look forward to continued dialogue with city staff on this matter, and are available to meet with you or staff if that would be beneficial.

Sincerely yours,

**Uptown Business Association
of New Westminster**



Bart Slotman
Chair