

REPORT

Engineering Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: April 3, 2023

From: Lisa Leblanc
Director of Engineering Services
File: 05.1035.10
(DOC #2240436)

Item #: 2023-227

Subject: **New Westminster Secondary School (NWSS) Cycling Connector – Mitigation of Business Concerns**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to implement the proposed mitigation measures outlined in this report to address business and public concerns.

PURPOSE

To provide Council with recommended mitigation measures for implementation along Sixth Street between the Rotary Crosstown Greenway on Seventh Avenue and the east entrance of New Westminster Secondary School (NWSS) north of Eighth Avenue, and to summarize findings from other municipalities regarding engagement processes and mitigation measures for cycling infrastructure projects, as requested by Council on December 12, 2022.

BACKGROUND

As part of the Uptown Active Transportation Improvements, the NWSS Cycling Connector is intended to make it easier for people of all ages and abilities to cycle or use other small-wheeled devices comfortably and safely in Uptown. Providing a link between the Rotary Crosstown Greenway on Seventh Avenue and the civic precinct that includes NWSS, Mercer Stadium, Massey Theatre, and Moody Park Arena improves connectivity and provides a safer space for small-wheeled modes of transportation.

Construction started in the fall of 2022, and is currently ongoing with the final details, such as signs and pavement markings, to be completed in the spring of 2023 (weather permitting).

Based on concerns raised in fall 2022 by some Sixth Street business owners about the impacts of the new cycling infrastructure, Council requested staff to research other municipalities regarding mitigation measures for similar cycling infrastructure projects, and to identify potential mitigation measures for consideration.

EXISTING POLICY AND PRACTICE

The project aligns with the City’s Master Transportation Plan goals, policies and actions, 2019-2022 Council Strategic Plan, Uptown Streetscape Vision objectives, and Seven Bold Steps for Climate Action – specifically Bold Steps 2 and 7, Car-Light Community and Quality People-Centered Public Realm.

Together with the C3 segment (along Sixth Street between Tenth Avenue and the NWSS east entrance) identified in the City’s recently adopted Active Transportation Network Plan’s Core Network, this project forms part of a planned direct north-south connection between the Uptown neighbourhood and the City of Burnaby.

DISCUSSION

Mitigation Measures

Staff have identified potential mitigation measures for consideration based on the concerns raised by residents and business owners through the engagement process and during construction.

Visibility of concrete medians. In response to the concerns regarding the visibility of the new concrete buffers adjacent to the bike lanes (e.g. raised medians and pavement markings), staff are recommending the installation of flexible posts along the buffers. The time and cost (approximately \$5,000) to implement this adaptable measure will be fairly minimal as there are sufficient flexible posts available in storage, noting these were previously used along the Agnes Greenway.

Traffic congestion. Congestion at the Sixth Street and Eighth Avenue intersection was noted in the public feedback. Although a minor increase in traffic delay was anticipated, given the intersection changes to improve service to pedestrians and cyclists, staff are expecting gradual improvements as road users become acclimated to the geometric and operational changes to the project area. Noting that signal changes were completed in January to activate new northbound and southbound left turn signal phases, staff will continue monitoring the operations and adjust the signal timings where suitable.

Pedestrian accessibility. To help improve pedestrian accessibility in the project area, the design includes upgraded curb ramps at the Sixth Street intersections with Eighth

Avenue and Seventh Avenue. The design also includes a new pedestrian crossing at the Sixth Street and Hamilton Street intersection, providing improved pedestrian access between businesses and parking along Sixth Street. For further accessibility improvements, staff recommend the implementation of a new midblock curb ramp on the west side of Sixth Street between Hamilton Street and Seventh Avenue to provide an accessible connection between the on-street parking and loading spaces and the sidewalk. The cost to implement this measure is estimated to be approximately \$5,000.

Lighting. The approved electrical design includes upgrading existing street lighting with new LED fixtures along Sixth Street, which will improve lighting levels. Implementation is scheduled for this spring. Further changes (e.g. additional lighting poles) are not currently recommended given the need to relocate existing lighting poles or other street fixtures as well as the significant costs associated with those changes. Lighting would be upgraded at the time of redevelopment of properties along the corridor.

Off-street parking. Although off-street parking is under the management of the individual private property owners, staff are available to contact the property owners to share experience and help facilitate discussions with tenants on how best to proceed with adjusting parking allocations or signage to improve shared use of the existing off-street parking supply and wayfinding, respectively. Staff recommend installing on-street wayfinding signage to highlight accesses to off-street parking for properties where it is not clearly visible.

Parking meter rates. Staff recommend continuing to monitor occupancy of on-street parking along Sixth Street, to inform future analysis to determine whether parking fees should be adjusted to optimize parking turnover. No changes are recommended at this time.

Emergency access. Staff have reached out to the Fire Department to confirm that there have not currently been any access issues as a result of the new bike facilities, but the project team will continue liaising with emergency services to determine if adjustments are required to the existing bike infrastructure. No changes are recommended at this time.

Education and promotion. Promotion of the project through launch events with businesses along Sixth Street, cycling organizations (e.g. HUB Cycling), and New Westminster Secondary School, as well as updating project information through online resources, is recommended once construction is complete in the spring. This will increase awareness of the new cycling facilities along Sixth Street as well as the broader cycling network initiatives the City is undertaking. Staff are coordinating with Economic Development staff to identify potential campaigns and activities to involve businesses in the project completion. Staff are also currently planning for an event to celebrate the completion of the project, likely to be held in June.

Engagement with other Municipalities

To get an understanding of what other municipalities have done to engage with businesses and to mitigate business concerns from cycling infrastructure projects, staff contacted transportation professionals across North America. Key elements of engagement that staff from other municipalities identified are summarized below:

- Documentation of engagement activities for improved transparency and to allow for confident decision-making
- Opportunities for business-only engagement sessions to build relationships and allow for addressing concerns directly
- Use of public intercept surveys were highlighted as a way to provide an opportunity to reach citizens who may not typically engage in these processes
- Collect and present data (e.g., parking occupancy) to support the planning process, as well as the monitoring phase to report on the progress
- Communicate the level of engagement so it is clear what is being expected from the public and how their feedback will be used
- Provide precise wording (e.g., difference between ‘temporary’ and ‘interim’, use of ‘adaptable’) to reduce confusion
- Host promotional events to raise awareness of the new facilities and network, as well as promote cycling as a viable mode of transportation

Staff learned that other municipalities have implemented very few physical mitigation measures to address expressed business concerns (only one project team provided parking maps and implemented metered parking to address parking concerns). Staff recognize that these projects align with municipal goals and plans and that reaction to these projects is to be expected, particularly in the early stages. They observed that residents and business owners typically adapt to and accept changes with time as they realize the broader long-term benefits to the community. The interviewees also noted that the City of New Westminster conducted a comprehensive engagement process for the NWSS Cycling Connector project, relative to what other municipalities have done in similar situations.

A memo with a more detailed account of the research is provided in Attachment #1.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

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

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Implementation of the proposed mitigation measures is currently estimated to cost approximately \$10,000 and can be accommodated within the existing capital budget.

OPTIONS

The following options have been presented for the Council's consideration:

1. **THAT** Council direct staff to implement the proposed mitigation measures to address business and public concerns.
2. **THAT** Council provide alternate direction to staff.

Staff recommend option 1.

CONCLUSION

The NWSS Cycling Connector provides New Westminster residents and visitors with an all-ages-and-abilities cycling facility connecting the Rotary Crosstown Greenway to the civic precinct north of Eighth Avenue, which will help the City achieve its transportation and climate action goals. Implementation of several mitigation measures outlined in this report is expected to address some of the concerns that have been raised by residents and business owners since construction on the NWSS Cycling Connector began in 2022.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment #1 – Feedback on Strategies for Public Engagement on Cycling Infrastructure Memo

APPROVALS

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