

# **REPORT**

## ***Engineering Services***

**To:** Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council  
**Date:** January 13, 2025

**From:** Lisa Leblanc  
Director of Engineering Services  
**File:** 05.1035.10  
(Doc# 2618382)

**Item #:** 2025-7

**Subject:** **Response to Council Motion: “Cycling Sundays on Front Street” 2025 Pilot**

---

---

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** the “Cycling Sundays on Front Street” 2025 Pilot project not be pursued due to significant unbudgeted costs and impacts on high-priority work plans, as outlined in the report titled “Response to Council Motion: “Cycling Sundays on Front Street” 2025 Pilot” dated January 13, 2025.

---

### **PURPOSE**

To report back to Council on the logistical, transportation, legal, and financial requirements to close Front Street to vehicular traffic on Sundays through summer 2025 to provide a safe, convenient, and enjoyable route for people to travel on foot, bicycles, and other self-propelled modes between Sapperton Landing Park and Westminster Pier Park.

### **BACKGROUND**

As part of the Riverfront Vision, the City has had a long-standing desire to connect Sapperton Landing Park and Westminster Pier Park with a safe, accessible off-street pathway along the Fraser River for active and sustainable modes of transportation. Achievement of this connection is highly challenging owing to the presence of railway tracks, Front Street (a regional truck route), and steep topography immediately adjacent to the sensitive Fraser River habitat.

In the summer of 2020, the City of New Westminster closed Front Street to vehicular traffic for a trial period during Sunday daytime hours from July to Labour Day weekend to enable people on foot, bicycles, and other self-propelled devices to travel along the riverfront. This was undertaken for two reasons:

- The world was in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic where people desired outdoor places to safely recreate in accordance with physical distancing guidelines. Closure of Front Street to vehicles enabled a spacious route to walk and cycle along a desired riverfront connection between Sapperton Landing Park and downtown New Westminster.
- At the outset of the pandemic, vehicular traffic volumes were generally low, and the impact of additional vehicles on nearby roads was minimal. Given that Front Street is a critical truck route, commercial vehicles were successfully directed to alternate routes during the Front Street vehicle closures.

The 2020 Front Street closures were generally successful and met objectives; the closures provided a riverfront walking/cycling connection with low impact for vehicular traffic, including commercial vehicles. However, several issues arose during implementation:

- Given the importance of Front Street as a truck route from a regional perspective, TransLink expressed concern on the implementation. There were questions about whether the 2020 program could be considered a long-term reduction in truck route capacity and whether the City required permission from TransLink to close the road to vehicles. Eventually, TransLink allowed the closures but expressed the need for a more robust review process should the City consider a similar road closure in the future.
- People using Front Street during vehicular closures were required to cross the Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) railway track to access the south end of Sapperton Landing Park at the Valley Marine Tug Boat Towing driveway. This crossing was considered unsafe and contrary to federal regulations, as there is no direct communication with CPKC and any approaching trains. After this initial pilot, Transport Canada and CPKC personnel informed the City that a similar Front Street closure would require either CPKC-appointed flaggers during the closure or a formal rail crossing agreement between CPKC and the City.

On October 7, 2024, Council passed the following motion:

*BE IT RESOLVED THAT staff report back on the feasibility and operational issues pertaining to the development of a pilot project that would:*

*a. during daylight hours, close Front Street on Sundays from May to September 2025 to vehicular traffic; and*

- b. during the period noted above, open up Front Street to cyclists, pedestrians and other forms active transportation while it is temporarily closed to vehicular traffic;*
- c. seek interest from food trucks and other micro businesses who may want to set up on Front Street during the ‘Cycling Sunday’ closures.*

The proposed Front Street closure Pilot (the Pilot) must consider how to address the major issues noted in 2020, in addition to the following topics that were not present during the last pilot:

- Traffic volumes have largely rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, so a closure of Front Street to vehicular traffic in 2025 is expected to have a more significant impact on traffic delays and livability of the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- The Pattullo Bridge replacement project is expected to continue throughout the spring and summer of 2025. Given its proximity to Front Street, there are possible project-related impacts to the road network (such as road closures on nearby parallel streets) that can add to potential traffic impacts. It is possible that road closures may be required for all users of Front Street while construction activity occurs below the new Pattullo Bridge structure.
- With the pending opening of riverfront access at the Bosa Pier West site, there is a desire to provide access to Front Street via Westminster Pier Park. This requires an additional rail crossing east of the park that currently is only accessible for emergency and maintenance vehicles to the park. This crossing is not configured to be used by non-motorized traffic, and thus further review is needed on what requirements are required during the Pilot.
- There is also a desire to utilize Front Street during the Pilot for activities such as public events or food trucks.

**DISCUSSION**

There are two key items to consider for a potential 2025 Pilot, as outlined below.

*TransLink Permission for Truck Route Closure*

TransLink has regulatory authority over changes to the capacity of the regional truck route network. After the 2020 Front Street closures, TransLink requested that City staff liaise with them at an earlier date to ensure that the proper permissions are requested and that proper process is followed.

This Pilot would require a review by TransLink following the policies of the “Review Process for Temporary or Permanent Truck Prohibitions and Truck Route Network Changes”. Initial discussions with TransLink staff indicate that the Pilot – as proposed in the October 7, 2024 motion – may require the TransLink Board to grant permission, due

to the Pilot likely being classified as a temporary long-term closure of greater than three months and the potential of the Pilot to be a high-impact event. This involves the following process:

- Submittal of a formal letter to TransLink, with detailed analysis that the City has identified all options to accommodate trucks for the duration of the closure, quantitative analysis of truck impacts to New Westminster and other municipalities, and stakeholder summary; and
- Review by TransLink, including a legal and executive review, preparation of a Technical Report summarizing their findings, and presentation to the TransLink Board for a final decision.

Although the above is achievable, it would require staff time to conduct the review, liaise with appropriate stakeholders, and prepare the findings for submission to TransLink, and require six to twelve months for TransLink to review.

To simplify the process and avoid TransLink's undetermined review time, staff would recommend reducing the time that the Pilot is in place to three months or less. With this adjustment, TransLink Board approval would not likely be required. Instead, a more simple review by TransLink staff requiring only a few months would be necessary. This is also because TransLink is more likely to consider a shorter Pilot to be a low-impact event, due to the intermittent nature of the closure on Sundays during the daytime and the Pattullo Bridge replacement group indicating no expected road closures or changes to the transportation network during the proposed Pilot period.

Based on the timelines, required effort, and a high risk of TransLink Board approval not being achieved by May, staff recommends a shorter 12-week Pilot period if the 2025 Pilot were to proceed.

#### *Allowance of Public to Cross CPKC Track*

The proposed Pilot would require the public to cross the CPKC railway track at two locations. As noted, these crossings would be considered illegal without proper support from CPKC, and potentially unsafe for the public without appropriate measures.

Discussion with Transport Canada indicates that providing CPKC-appointed flaggers in addition to other temporary transportation control measures during the Pilot when the public is actively crossing the tracks is possible. This would require a CPKC-appointed flagger at each track crossing during the times when Front Street is closed to vehicular traffic. The flaggers are in communication with other CPKC staff, and have the ability to know in advance when a train is approaching the area, slow or stop a train from entering the area if there is a safety concern at a crossing (for example, a person being unable to clear a track crossing), or assist in protecting the public when a train is actively using a crossing. Providing such flaggers would also address potential liability on the City's part where there may be an incident with the public crossing the track improperly.

The City would also need to provide additional traffic control personnel to assist the public in actively crossing, as well as provide traffic control measures such as guidance signs, delineators, or barricades to ensure the public can safely move at and around the track crossings. Outside of the Pilot times, the crossing locations would revert to their usual state, and public crossings would be prohibited. In the case of the crossing near Westminster Pier Park, the fences and gates that effectively limit its usage to emergency and maintenance personnel would be reinstated. Because these locations are not active crossing locations outside of the Pilot times, it is expected that whistle cessation at these locations can be preserved through the Pilot.

### *Other Considerations*

The proposed program would require some additional cleaning effort by Public Works staff after each event. This additional work would be incorporated into existing operations and may lead to slight reductions in service levels elsewhere across the city for the duration of the Pilot.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The temporary closure of Front Street to vehicular traffic on summer Sundays appears to be technically feasible, although the financial and resource implications are significant, as outlined in the Financial Implications section below. Based on the information provided by TransLink and Transport Canada, a shorter Pilot period of 12 weeks would be recommended if the program proceeds. A Pilot duration of longer than three months introduces a potential delay in getting the required TransLink approval to close a truck route that is considered an important regional connection.

If Council chooses to proceed with a Pilot, staff will continue communication and arrangements with CPKC for assigned flaggers, along with staff arranging for other traffic control personnel and enhancements to make the rail crossings safer for non-motorized traffic.

### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

If the Pilot were to proceed, a desired connection for sustainable transportation along the riverfront would be temporarily and intermittently achieved. A safe and convenient link between Downtown and Sapperton Landing Park would be provided while connecting the BC Parkway, Central Valley Greenway, and Brunette-Fraser Regional Greenway along a level, traffic-free route. Although this recurring closure could generate interest in the longer-term desire to complete a riverfront connection, it would not contribute materially to the active transportation network and would not likely induce long-term mode shift.

The closure of Front Street to vehicular traffic may have potential impacts on goods movement through the city: delays, queuing, noise and exhaust along nearby parallel routes, and cut-through traffic in neighbourhoods. Staff would need to anticipate these issues and consider what mitigating measures are needed.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The direct financial implications consist of providing CPKC-assigned flaggers as well as other traffic control personnel, crossing control signage, crossing enhancements, and maintenance that would be approximately \$10,000 per day for the Pilot. An abbreviated version of three months, or 12 weeks, would cost approximately \$120,000. This is a high-level estimate and does not account for any soft costs, such as detailed traffic management plans, marketing, or special event-related expenses.

In terms of staffing implications, the proposed Pilot is expected to require *significant* effort, particularly through the winter and spring, and have impacts on 2025 work plans. Transportation staff would be required to liaise with external agencies and interest holders to prepare for the Pilot, to develop traffic management strategies, and to coordinate contractors for provision of traffic control services. This project would be led by the City's Transportation Engineer who also oversees road safety programs, traffic signal management and installation, rail crossing engineering, and major construction-related traffic management, including Pattullo Bridge replacement. The most notable work plan implication is that progress on high-priority road safety project implementation – particularly measures recommended in the 2023 Intersection Safety Study and completion of safety projects at E Columbia Street and Brunette Avenue and at Sixth Avenue at Second Street – would be slowed, and responses to inquiries and requests for service would be further delayed.

To reduce the impacts of this program on work plans would require the retention of an external project manager, at a probable cost of \$50,000-\$60,000, bringing the total cost of the 2025 program to approximately \$180,000. There will still be staff involvement in the management of the external project manager and review of traffic management plans, and therefore still be implications for Transportation work plans.

As the 2025 Operating and Capital Budgets are at an advanced stage of Council deliberation, funding for this Pilot would be managed within the pending 2025 Engineering Operating budget, potentially through a delay in filling several new Council-supported positions planned for 2025 and potentially offset from higher-than-anticipated revenue from various sources, should that materialize.

The Pilot could attract events that can provide modest revenue for the City. These could include small-scale festivals like block parties, food trucks, or filming opportunities. The demand for such events and thus the potential revenue cannot be determined at this time.

Due to high unbudgeted costs associated with this program, and significant impacts on 2025 work plans particularly related to road safety, staff are recommending that the City not pursue this program in 2025.

**INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

Public Works, Community Services, and Finance staff contributed to the preparation of this report.

**OPTIONS**

The following options are presented for Council’s consideration:

- 1. That the “Cycling Sundays on Front Street” 2025 Pilot project not be pursued due to significant unbudgeted costs and impacts on high-priority work plans, as outlined in the report titled “Response to Council Motion: “Cycling Sundays on Front Street” 2025 Pilot” dated January 13, 2025;
- 2. That a Pilot program to close Front Street to vehicular traffic for up to 12 Sundays during summer 2025 at a cost of up to \$180,000 be endorsed, subject to resolution of external approval requirements as outlined in the report titled “Response to Council Motion: “Cycling Sundays on Front Street” 2025 Pilot” dated January 13, 2025;
- 3. That a Pilot program to close Front Street to vehicular traffic for up to 12 Sundays during summer 2026 be endorsed, with the identified budget and resource enhancements to be added to the 2026 budget as outlined in the report titled “Response to Council Motion: “Cycling Sundays on Front Street” 2025 Pilot” dated January 13, 2025; or
- 4. That staff be provided with other direction.

Staff recommends Option 1.

**CONCLUSION**

A 2025 summer Pilot to provide temporary Sunday daytime openings of Front Street for pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-vehicular road users is an opportunity for the City to provide a safe, healthy, and comfortable means of travel and recreation between the Downtown area and Sapperton Landing Park on a limited basis. As outlined in this report, a Pilot program would have significant unbudgeted costs of up to \$180,000 and affect Engineering work plans by diverting resources away from high-priority road safety projects, signal management, rail crossing engineering, and construction traffic management work.

Should Council choose to proceed with the Pilot, Engineering staff will continue to review the potential impacts, discuss with appropriate agencies the required approvals and personnel, and arrange the necessary traffic control measures and personnel for the duration of the program.

## **APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:  
Kanny Chow, Transportation Engineer

This report was reviewed by:  
Mike Anderson, Manager of Transportation  
Kwaku Agyare-Manu, Deputy Director, Engineering  
Alex Tam, Manager, Financial Services  
Carolyn Armanini, A/Manager, Economic Development

This report was approved by:  
Kwaku Agyare-Manu, A/Director of Engineering Services  
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer