



ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: February 10, 2009
Contact: Peter Judd
Contact No.: 604.873.7303
RTS No.: 07836
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: March 3, 2009

TO: Standing Committee on Transportation and Traffic
FROM: General Manager of Engineering Services, and the Director of Planning
SUBJECT: Report back on 3-month Sunday Trial Car-Free Street Initiative

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT staff undertake a consultation process with interested BIAs or business associations, community groups and other stakeholders, regarding the nature and selection of Car-Free initiatives to begin in June 2009.
- B. THAT staff report back to Council before June 2009 on the results of the consultation, recommended initiatives, and the specifics of each initiative including possible cost implications.
- C. THAT staff consider proposals that may be less than three months in duration and on any day of the week.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

Implementation of more extensive and sustained car-free initiatives in Vancouver as part of the City's work toward the Greenest City initiative requires further consultation with communities and stakeholders. Staff will undertake this and report back to Council as soon as possible.

COUNCIL POLICY

City policy prioritizes transportation modes as follows: walking, cycling, transit, goods movement, and private automobiles.

Council annually approves special events that use City streets or other City owned properties, as well as events on private property that might have an impact on the adjacent public. Recommendations for specific event approvals are presented to Council only for new events, or for on-going events with plans that have been changed significantly in time, routing or impacts.

SUMMARY

A range of car-free initiatives are held around the world, from single block community-oriented events to major City-wide events that involve closing many kilometres of roads to vehicles. Many factors must be considered when planning and implementing such an initiative. These factors include the initiative's planning and operational costs, the staffing requirements, financial and organizational capacity of the host, the characteristics of the street and neighbourhood, business mix and local business support, and potential impacts on the community, transit, businesses, and traffic.

Community and business organizations are better positioned than the City to produce the proposed car-free initiatives due to their ability to attract higher numbers of volunteers and participants, their awareness of local interests and their ability to plan and program activities on a neighbourhood scale. Preliminary feedback from community groups and BIAs suggests that most organizations feel organizationally and financially unprepared to sustain a three-month car-free initiative, and therefore have limited their initial expressions of interest to a single day option. To successfully plan and deliver the more ambitious initiative as proposed by Council, many expressed the need to partner with other organizations and the need for additional resources. Therefore, the scope and type of possible initiatives depends in part on Council's willingness or ability to financially support them.

In light of these findings, staff recommend:

- Considering initiatives that are most likely to succeed - even if this means fewer than three locations, less than three months in duration and not necessarily on a Sunday.
- Continued consultation with interested BIAs, business associations, neighbourhood groups and community stakeholders to develop viable models and recommendations for car-free initiatives to begin in 2009 (partly based on the level of City funding available).
- Staff report back to Council before June 2009 on the results of the consultation, recommended initiatives, and the specifics of each initiative including possible cost implications.

PURPOSE

The report is intended to advise Council of options for a three-month Sunday trial car-free street initiative. Included in this report are examples of car-free events in Vancouver and elsewhere; feedback from community organizations, BIAs and other neighbourhood based business associations; and a discussion of the impacts and considerations for such an initiative. The report will also include a possible course of action for successful implementation of the trial in the summer of 2009.

BACKGROUND

On December 16, 2008 Council discussed and carried a motion outlining three "green initiatives". One of these was a three-month Sunday car-free street initiative to take place in three Vancouver neighbourhoods. At that time, Council requested a report back on options for such an initiative.

DISCUSSION

“Car-Free” Events in Vancouver

Vancouver has a history of hosting successful events involving road closures. These events include: Davie Days, Hippie Daze, Kerrisdale Days, Car-Free Festivals (Commercial Drive, West End, Kitsilano, and Main St.), Gastown Car-Free Day, the Celebration of Light, the Chinatown Night Market and various parades. Furthermore, construction has often closed roads (e.g. East 1st Ave. in 2003), which impacts the capacity for movement and enhances community social interaction. Additionally, much will be learned when three pedestrian corridors are implemented next year during the 2010 Olympics. While all of these events are in effect “car-free”, most do not state being “car-free” as a major objective.

Key Research Findings

“Car-Free” Initiatives and Events

There are a variety of explicitly “car-free” initiatives that have taken place in Vancouver and around the world. These initiatives differ dramatically in their scale, regularity, level of programming, amount of resources required, staffing, and impacts on transit, traffic and businesses. Most of these take place on commercial streets, but may be suitable on residential or non-commercial arterial streets as well.

1. **Active Living** initiatives (e.g. Portland’s Summer Parkways) close long stretches of road (over 3 km), typically one day a week for a period of 2-3 weeks. These examples may or may not include business areas. The cost to the host City per event can be quite high (up to \$200,000 per day) as are staffing requirements. The main attraction is the provision of a movement corridor for recreational use.
2. **Community Festivals** (e.g. Vancouver’s Car-Free Festivals) typically occur once per year and close between 1 and 10 blocks. The costs for this event depend on whether it is hosted by the City (Gastown Car-Free Day cost the City \$75,000 - this was a one-off event and costs may be brought down when repeated) or community organizations (Each Car-Free Festival costs community organizers up to \$15,000 per day). Staffing and volunteer requirements are high for these initiatives. The level of programming is typically high and people are attracted to the lively festival atmosphere.
3. **Coordinated Block Parties** (e.g. Kitsilano Car-Free Day Block Parties) differentiate themselves from regular block parties by coordinating the hosting of multiple parties (up to 20) in the same neighbourhood on the same day. These community initiatives take place only on residential streets and typically involve very low levels of programming, staffing and costs. These events tend to attract residents from within a few blocks of each party.
4. **Public Space** initiatives (e.g. New York’s Williamsburg Walks) occur once a week for a period of 3-4 weeks and close from 1 to 6 blocks. The costs for the City for these events are kept low (\$5-6,000 per event). Costs to the host neighbourhood depend on the level of staffing and programming (although the cost to provide a “blank canvas” for the community tends to be minimal). Public Space initiatives aim to draw residents from the local neighbourhood to make use of increased public space.

5. **Seasonal Pedestrianization** streets (e.g. Montreal's Rue Ste. Catherine) are closed to traffic all day for a period of up to three months. The costs to the City for this trial are high (\$200,000) over the entire trial but low when considered per day (\$2,500). The level of programming varies. Staffing is minimal. People are drawn from across the City to the car-free commercial street.

Appendix A contains a summary of these five categories of car-free initiatives.

Important Considerations for Success

Previous "Car-Free" events in Vancouver indicate that community organizations and BIAs are better positioned than the City to organize such events. The community-hosted Car-Free Festivals tend to attract more volunteers and higher attendances in addition to costing much less than the City-hosted Gastown Car-Free Day. Giving 'ownership' of the car-free initiatives to partnerships of community groups and BIAs helps provide a number of benefits, including the tailoring of initiatives to balance the needs and interests of the local residents and businesses.

The following considerations should be taken into account when selecting the type of initiative, the location, the dates and times of the events and the potential organizers.

1. The cost to plan and implement the initiative (to the City as well as the organizers).
2. The level of staffing and number of volunteers required.
3. The organizational capacity of interested groups to hold *and sustain* such an initiative.
4. The potential of a street and its neighbourhood to attract on-site attendance (based on residential density, distance to transit, mix of commercial activities and the community's demographic characteristics).
5. The level of support from individual businesses and their willingness to participate proactively.
6. Impact on the neighbourhood.
7. Impact on transit (considering rerouting of buses, replacement of trolley buses with diesel and inconvenience to transit users).
8. Impact on businesses (consider streets whose commercial activities may be negatively impacted by a car-free initiative).
9. Impact on traffic (determining streets with high existing pedestrian and bike mode shares and low traffic blocks, dates and times).

Preliminary Feedback from the Community

Business Improvement Areas and Business Associations

In December 2008, staff contacted the BIAs and several other neighbourhood based business associations asking those interested in the Car-Free initiative to provide some preliminary ideas and comments regarding Council's motion. The organizations were also asked to submit, by February 2nd, written expressions of interest for their area as well as the terms and conditions for possible participation. Seven BIAs submitted letters of interest in the initiative. Of the seven, only one expressed a desire to hold car-free days for twelve consecutive weeks. The other six stated their preference to each hold one car-free day over the summer.

Initial issues and considerations raised by BIAs include:

- Not having the resources to plan, program, advertise and staff or recruit volunteers for twelve events.
- Fear that twelve weeks of street closures would have a negative impact on area merchants.
- The need for some flexibility in choosing the day of the week that works best for local businesses.
- The desire to combine a car-free day with an existing BIA event in order to make best use of limited resources.
- The need to partner with other organizations to ensure the initiative's success.

East Vancouver Celebration Society (EVCS)

We have also received initial feedback from a member of the East Vancouver Celebration Society (EVCS) and organizers for two of the Car-Free Festivals held in 2008. The EVCS felt unable to plan or implement a car-free initiative on the scale proposed by Council due to their limited financial and organizational capacity. Issues raised by the EVCS included:

- The Car-Free Festival model could not be sustained over a three month period without funding (due to need for over 130 barricade volunteers per event per day).
- Consider holding less than three months of events for a given location if it helps to ensure the success of the initiatives.
- EVCS recommends organizing groups consist of a demonstrated partnership of business and community interests to ensure a variety of objectives are met.

Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST)

BEST has taken part in previous car-free events in Vancouver through the provision of bike valet services (Car-Free Festivals, Celebration of Light - at a cost to the City of \$500 per location per night), conducting surveys on the bike valet program (at a cost to the City of \$1000 per day) and have coordinated the information expo at the City-hosted Gastown Car-Free Day (at a cost of \$15,000 to the City). They have expressed interest in taking part in any car-free initiatives held this summer.

Vancouver Public Space Network (VPSN)

The VPSN submitted a letter to the Mayor offering general support of the car-free initiatives in addition to more specific suggestions to help ensure the success of these trials.

- Consider having different approaches for car-free initiatives for different locations (e.g. pedestrian only, pedestrian priority (pedestrians and bikes and possibly transit), daytime or night-time closures).
- Create an influential business case for car-free streets to win support from businesses.
- Effectively monitor economic and social impacts of car-free events in Vancouver.

Proposed Stakeholder Consultation Process

Through expressions of interest and informal conversations, staff have some preliminary input from BIAs and some community stakeholders; however an inclusive, collaborative process has yet to occur. Recognizing the need to move quickly, staff envision an intensive session or

sessions that would engage a range of interested parties in mutual learning, sharing of objectives and issues, and general agreement on ways to move forward.

Over a six-week period, staff will consult with key stakeholders, including business representatives, neighbourhood groups, and other interested organizations. Consultation objectives include:

- information-sharing about existing car-free models and experience,
- discussion of potential impacts and issues,
- identification of appropriate typologies or possible remedial actions, and
- agreement on criteria or key considerations for selection of car-free trial areas.

Results of the consultation will provide staff with a basis for recommending areas within which to pilot the initiative.

The Role of the City

The trial car-free initiatives will likely involve costs to the City. Furthermore, the type of car-free initiatives that take place this summer will depend in part on the City's level of financial support. The City contribution could take the form of grants, foregone policing or permit fees, advertising or the provision of resources. Further consultation is needed to determine the specific initiatives and consequently the funding requests for Council.

Anticipated Timeline

To plan and implement car-free initiatives in the summer of 2009, staff propose the following approximate timeline:

- Ongoing through March - Consultation process
- Mid-April - FEST meeting
- By June - Submit report back to Council in time for implementation in June: Criteria for selection, Recommendation of initiative locations, Implementation Plan, Recommendations for evaluation and monitoring on plans; City funding options for initiatives
- June - Initiatives ready to proceed

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Depending on the type of car-free initiative, the daily expenses vary between \$2,500 (Seasonal Pedestrianization) up to \$200,000 (Active Living). Whether the initiatives are hosted by the City or external organizing groups, costs to the City in one form or another will be required.

- Taking the example of the 2008 West End Car-Free Festival, City fees, services and requirements cost \$5000 per day (policing costs, street signage and traffic plan, sanitation, paramedics, permits and insurance). Fees within City control could be waived to assist interested groups in hosting car-free initiatives subject to Council approval.
- Monitoring costs. Surveys would be useful to develop business cases for future events. Survey costs would be roughly \$1000 per day (Based on bike valet surveys conducted by 4 BEST staff during the 2008 Celebration of Light). Pedestrian or vehicle counts would cost roughly \$270 per day (Based on the 2008 Pedestrian Study).

- Staff time during consultation, planning, implementation and follow up on initiatives.
- Potential expenses may be passed on to the City by Coast Mountain Bus Company for costs incurred through the replacement and rerouting of trolley buses with diesel buses.
- Lost parking revenue on host streets with parking meters.

There are also traditional sources of funding for organizing groups who may decide to host a car-free initiative.

- Neighbourhood Small Grants Program - The Vancouver Foundation provides grants of up to \$500 to resident-led grassroots actions that benefit the local neighbourhoods.
- Individual donations (including day of donations).
- Special Event Market Permit (SEMP) holders (e.g. existing Car-Free Festival organizers) normally generate revenue by charging vendors for vending privileges within the event boundaries.
- FEST (Festival Expediting Staff Team) offset of up to \$1000 is available to organizers of not-for-profit community based events to help cover the cost of Engineering and Police services for the event.

Any requests from community groups for city funding will be advanced to council for consideration.

PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

Stakeholder Consultation Process

The consultation process can be delivered by existing staff resources in Engineering and Planning (BIA Program).

Potential Staffing Issues For Car-Free Initiatives

Staffing requirements vary greatly depending on the type of initiative held, the number of blocks that are closed and the level of programming. In previous "Car-Free Festivals", large numbers of volunteers (130-200 per day) were required to staff the barricades. The bare minimum of barricade volunteers would be two per block for a two hour shift. A three block closure for 8 hours (including set up and take down) would require 24 volunteers. Experience of the EVCS demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining a pool of motivated volunteers for more than one event.

Due to Olympic planning and preparation and normal City operations, additional staff may be required to plan and put on these car-free initiatives in the summer of 2009. The number and scale of car-free initiatives will determine whether a temporary part-time or full-time coordinator is required for the successful implementation of these initiatives.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Car-free initiatives can encourage more sustainable forms of transportation, particularly when held on a regular and long term basis. A negative environmental impact occurs when car-free initiatives held on streets with trolley bus routes require rerouting and replacement with diesel buses. Furthermore, destination car-free events that result in people driving to the event can also have a negative environmental impact.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Calming traffic and allowing for the free movement of pedestrians across streets, car-free streets can improve community interaction and cohesion. This was an unanticipated benefit from the six week closure of East 1st Ave. in the summer of 2003 for necessary sewer reconstruction. Furthermore, an increased level of community participation and sense of stewardship may be fostered by facilitating the cooperation of local organizations.

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Vancouver's history of successful Car-Free Festival events has created a public expectation of the nature and scale of a 'successful' car-free initiative. If a different type of car-free initiative is envisioned for this summer, staff recommend a campaign to change public expectations for these initiatives.

While publicity will be important, it will also be important to ensure that each initiative has a local appeal and is not necessarily publicized as a city-wide event. This will help to minimize induced traffic caused by City-wide attendance.

CONCLUSION

While community groups and BIAs are in the best position to host car-free initiatives, preliminary feedback from these groups suggests that most feel unprepared to sustain a three-month car-free initiative. To successfully plan and put on the initiative as proposed by Council, many expressed the need to work with another organization and the need for additional resources to be made available to them.

In light of these findings, staff recommend:

- Considering initiatives that are most likely to succeed - even if this means fewer than three locations, less than three months in duration and not necessarily on a Sunday.
- Continued consultation with interested BIAs, business associations, neighbourhood groups and community stakeholders to develop viable models and recommendations for car-free initiatives to begin in 2009 (partly based on the level of City funding available).
- Staff report back to Council before June 2009 on the results of the consultation, recommended initiatives, and the specifics of each initiative including possible cost implications.

* * * * *

Appendix A

Categories and Examples of Five Car-Free Initiatives

	Active Living	Community Festival	Coordinated Block Parties	Public Space	Seasonal Pedestrianization
Description	Long routes intended to provide a temporary space for movement and recreation.	Festivals with relatively intensive programming and lots of events.	A number of residential block parties coordinated to take place at the same time and provide community public space.	Road closures on commercial streets with minimal programming. These provide a “blank canvas” of public space for community use.	Full closure of street for a proscribed period of time. May be used to test the future permanent pedestrianization of the street.
Examples	- Ciclovia (Bogota) - Paris Plage * - Summer Parkways (Portland) - Summer Streets (NYC) - Sunday Streets (San Fran.)	- Car-Free Gastown - Vancouver Car-Free Festivals (Commercial Drive, West End, Main St)	- Kitsilano Car-Free Block Parties Day	- Williamsburg Walks (NYC) - Summer Space (NYC)	- Rue Ste. Catherine (Montreal) - Paris Plage *
Scale of Road Closures	4 - 120 km of road closures	1 or more blocks	19 blocks parties were held during the 2008 event	1 or more blocks	1 or more blocks
Types of Street	Varies. Some avoid arterial and commercial streets, others use these streets.	Usually commercial streets.	Residential streets only.	Usually commercial streets.	Usually commercial streets.
Regularity	Usually 1 to 3 weekly events per summer. Ciclovia occurs weekly year round. Paris Plage runs all day for one month.	Once or twice per year.	Once per year.	Once per week. Usually for a period of 3 or more weeks.	One to three months.
Daily Duration	6-8 hours *	6-8 hours	4-8 hours	6-8 hours	All day
Level of Programming	Varies. Number of programmed venues varies for different events.	High. Multiple stages in street. Patio seating, vending and information tables on sidewalks.	Low for the organizing group. Programming for each block left to organizers of each individual block party.	Low. However, some events provide an option of programming on each block (groups can choose to “adopt a block”).	Low-High. Depends on organizing committee.
Financial Resources Required	High. Due to large scale of event and high level of coordination required.	Medium. Higher for city run event (more paid staff), lower for community led (mostly volunteers).	Very low.	Low/Medium. The City facilitates street closure, while business associations cover the day-of expenses.	Low (after initial set up is completed)
Staffing Required	High. Events require large numbers of traffic control volunteers. A higher level of programming adds to the number of staff required for coordination and planning.	High. 100-300 per event (mostly volunteers). High numbers of volunteer entertainers, barricade attendants, and coordinators involved.	Very low. Each block is run voluntarily by local residents.	Medium. Staffing required for traffic control and to attend barricades. If programming is minimal, fewer staff are required for coordination of event.	Low. Once barricades are in place, staffing is minimal.

* Paris Plage is considered both Active Living and Seasonal Pedestrianization due to its recreational focus and 24 hour a day, month-long closure

	Active Living	Community Festival	Block Parties	Public Space	Seasonal Pedestrianization
Impacts on Motor Vehicle Traffic	Medium to High depending on the street. Portland minimized disruptions by choosing residential streets. Other cities choose less busy traffic times but impacts are greater due to their placement on high volume roads. Weekly events have few long term impacts.	Medium. Weekly events may disrupt traffic significantly for the event days. No long term impacts.	Low. Since the parties occur on low volume residential streets. Since they are community events, they are less likely to refuse entry/exit of neighbourhood vehicles.	Medium. Weekly events may disrupt traffic significantly for the event days. No long term impacts.	High. Traffic is forced to reroute. If time frame is long enough (over two months) new travel patterns and choices are formed.
Impacts on Transit	Low to High depending on the route. Portland's route avoids bus routes. SF had light rail vehicles (with temporary barricades) sharing part of the route. Ciclovía often maintains some vehicle lanes. NYC buses rerouted.	Medium/High. Vancouver's trolley lines make rerouting some buses challenging. Diesel buses may be required to replace trolley buses for the event.	Very low. These initiatives do not take place on bus routes.	Low to High depending on the route. In Vancouver, trolley lines make rerouting some bus routes challenging. Diesel buses may be required to replace trolley buses for the event.	Low to High depending on route. Rue Ste Catherine rerouted one diesel bus line (Metro line running one block parallel to street was unaffected). Paris buses don't use expressway. Vancouver trolley lines may pose challenges to accommodate buses.
Impacts on Business	Depends on route. Paris and Portland routes are located away from commercial streets so impacts are minimal. NYC event benefits some businesses (e.g. food/drink) while others lose business (e.g. furniture).	High. Presence on commercial streets can have a positive or negative impact on businesses. Some types of businesses benefit (e.g. food/drink) while others do not (e.g. hardware, video rentals).	Low. Unless they are close to a business area, businesses will see little impact positively or negatively.	High. Businesses with ready to eat food (e.g. take out, sandwiches, etc...) or patio service did well. Businesses that actively prepared for the closure benefited (incl. a furniture store). Those that did nothing tended to be negatively impacted.	Depends on route. On Rue Ste. Catherine, businesses with patios saw benefits while those without were mixed (only 15-20% reported a drop in sales). Paris Plage is located on a highway and therefore has little impact on businesses.
Intended Outcomes (in order of importance)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased physical activity 2. Improved bicycle safety 3. Improved walkability 4. Increased public space 5. Community interaction 6. Reducing GHGs 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community interaction 2. Increased public space 3. Reducing GHGs 4. Improved walkability 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community interaction 2. Increased public space 3. Improved walkability 4. Reducing GHGs 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased public space 2. Community interaction 3. Improved walkability 4. Improved bicycle safety 5. Increased physical activity 6. Reducing GHGs 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved walkability 2. Increased public space 3. Community interaction 4. Reducing GHGs 5. Improved bicycle safety <p>*Note that long-term closures are better at fostering behavioural change than short term closures (i.e. weekly).</p>