



Association of Douglas Street Businesses

November 23, 2007

Denise Blackwell, Chair, Capital Region District

P.O. Box 1000, 625 Fisgard Street, Victoria, BC V8W 2S6

Mayor Alan Lowe, Mayor, City of Victoria

Municipal Hall, City of Victoria, #1 Centennial Square Victoria BC V8W 1P6

Mayor Frank Leonard, Mayor, District of Saanich

770 Vernon Ave, Victoria BC V8Y 2W7

Mayor Don Amos, Chair Victoria Regional Transit Commission

c/o The Town of Sidney, 2440 Sidney Ave, Sidney BC V8L 1Y7

The Honourable Kevin Falcon, Minister of Transportation

PO Box 9055, Stn Prov Govt, Victoria BC, V8W 9E2

Dear Recipient:

Re: Proposed Douglas Street Busway

The Douglas Street Businesses appreciate the need to establish broad objectives and policies with respect to the growth of Victoria and, in the broader context, the growth and development of the Central Region District. However, we are very concerned about the proposed busway project on Douglas Street.

The busway's impact is comparable to placing a 7 foot chain link fence down the centre of Douglas Street as the busway would result in no left turns on or off Douglas, no through traffic across Douglas, and no pedestrian, or cyclist crossings except at signalized or selected intersections.

So far, our group has determined that the busway has serious and permanent negative impacts on Victoria and that there is little evidence that the busway will be effective in contributing to the transportation goals identified in the Regional Growth Strategy.

Victoria and Saanich Issues

The busway project raises a number of issues about the future of the Victoria's community and economy.

- The busway effectively divides Victoria into two sections - "east of Douglas" and "west of Douglas". The busway would prevent vehicle, pedestrian and cyclist access to, from, and across Douglas Street for over 95% of the busway's 2 mile (3.1 km) length.
- The busway degrades the value of the Douglas Street asset by taking away access and functionality, and inserting an exclusive right-of-way primarily for use by Westshore, Highland and Sooke commuters.

- Unlike the anecdotal reports of support, our surveys indicate that a majority of the over 900 businesses affected by the busway is “very concerned” about the busway.
- Indications are that most businesses can expect a 50% or more reduction in business as a result of the implementation of the busway.
- Apart from the seriousness of business losses, this would also be expected to have negative property value and assessment implications for the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich.

Transportation Issues

There are a number of transportation issues that are relevant to the proposed busway project

- The busway provides no benefits for Victoria commuters on any local bus routes as these routes would continue use the curb lanes.
- The busway might only change a 50 to 70 minute transit trip from outside Victoria by less than two minutes.
- The busway appears to be viewed as a solution to transportation issues in the CRD that are much more complex. The busway will have virtually no impact on Highway 1 / Westshore traffic congestion.
- The busway may not be the “greenest” or the most environmentally-positive alternative for the Douglas Street corridor. Other alternatives were not evaluated.
- The busway provides next to no benefits for local Victoria transit riders and is unlikely to make any contribution to local transit mode-change goals.

Busway Project Issues

The Busway Project as outlined in the Douglas Street / Highway 1 Transit Priority Study and the subsequent open houses, has raised a host of issues and includes insurmountable design flaws.

- The Project continues to suffer from a lack of transparency. No information has been disclosed about the number of current or forecast future riders that would use the busway nor are any current bus load factors (% seats occupied) disclosed.
- No information has been disclosed about the comprehensive ridership survey that would have been done for the commuter runs to and from Westshore and Sooke.
- No information has been disclosed about the travel time reductions expected for the busway nor the basis of the calculations that claim unusually high benefits to transit riders and large reductions in transit operational costs allegedly attributed to the busway or other transit priority improvements.
- The results of the risk analysis for the busway (should it fail to increase ridership) have apparently not been publicly disclosed.
- The Project predicts an increase in business property values, when in fact the opposite is the case. We know of no appraisers, developers, or businesses that would agree that a higher value is placed on a property when it loses prime vehicle access points.
- There are indications that relatively few businesses that would be affected by this Project are aware of the property-access implications to their businesses.
- The Project made no attempt to objectively determine the business losses that would result from its construction.
- It is apparent that the busway does not have a credible business case.
- The busway has insurmountable design flaws including problems locating viable bus stops, bus platform safety, increased pedestrian accident exposure and severity, increases in the severity of vehicle accidents, and transition problems between buses and general traffic at both ends of the busway.
- The busway would further restrict what little left turn capacity that would remain on Douglas Street after its implementation.

These issues are of serious concern to us as it is our expectation that public funding for transportation infrastructure must meet a high standard of transparency, justification, and feasibility while doing no material harm to the Community.

Before proceeding any further with this Project, we request that an independent audit of the Project be undertaken:

1. to provide full public transparency and disclosure of all information that is relevant to this Project
2. to address why other viable alternatives were not objectively evaluated
3. to review the basis of the claimed increase in ridership and the ridership surveys or other information on which it was based
4. to review the validity of the transit passenger and transit operational benefit claims that have been made to justify the Project
5. to determine if the property valuation impacts on local businesses due to loss of property access were properly assessed.
6. to determine if an evaluation of the community division implications that the busway will have on the Victoria and Saanich communities was diligently performed.
7. to determine if the pedestrian, and vehicle accident implications, and other impacts that this Project would have on Victoria and Saanich were diligently performed and accounted for in the evaluation.
8. to review the Project Risk Analysis for completeness and accuracy
9. to review the extent to which the Douglas Street Traffic Signal Improvements that have already been implemented, have met the benefit claims in the Douglas Street / Highway 1 Transit Priority Study
10. to invite public and business input to the independent audit review.

We would appreciate the favour of a response to our request by January 15th, 2008

Respectfully yours

Randy H. Northey, Chairman, Steering Committee
Association of Douglas Street Businesses
c/o The Pantry Restaurant, Unit 202, 3214 Douglas Street, Victoria BC V8Z 3K6

cc.

Mayor Chris Clement, Chair, CRD Planning and Protective Services Committee, c/o 1229 Esquimalt Road Esquimalt, B.C., V9A 3P1

Linda Lee Brougham, Chair, Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce, 100 – 852 Fort St. Victoria, BC V8W 1H8

Bruce Carter, Roberta Tower, Richard Neville, GVCC, 100 – 852 Fort St. Victoria, BC V8W 1H8

Trace Acres, British Columbia Automobile Association, 1262 Quadra Street, Victoria BC V8W 2K7

Pat Danforth, Director. BC Coalition of People with Disabilities, #204, 456 West Broadway, Vancouver BC

Kate Forster, Burnside Gorge Community Association, 471 Cecelia Rd, Victoria BC V8T 4T4

Paul Gerrard, President, Gorge Tillicum Community Association, Victoria BC

Kenneth Kelly, General Manager, Downtown Victoria Business Association, 20 Centennial Sq. Victoria BC V8W 1P7

Erik Kaye, City of Victoria Transportation Advisory Committee, Municipal Hall, City of Victoria, #1 Centennial Square Victoria BC V8W 1P6

Robert Randall, Downtown Residents Association, c/o Unit 2 532 ½ Fisgard St. Victoria, BC V8W 1R4

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