



For the Committee of the Whole Meeting July 18 2019

Date: July 14 2019 **From:** Mayor Helps

Subject: Government Street People-Priority Place

NB The recommendations in this report in some places are a complement to the staff recommendations and in some places are proposed to replace the staff recommendations. The differences are outlined in the recommendations section at the end of the report.

Background

For more than three decades, Council, business owners and other members of the community have – in my opinion – been having the wrong conversation about Government Street: do we close it to cars or not? Based on my trip to Heidelberg, Germany earlier this year – and from pictures citizens have sent me in response to my blog posts on this topic – it’s clear that another path is possible. It is this path I hope Council, the business owners and the public will embrace.

By the end of this term I would like this Council to leave a legacy and to turn Government Street into a people-priority place with very limited vehicle traffic. This transformation will require commitment, budgetary resources, and holding fast to a vision. This vision is already laid out in part in the 2017 Public Realm Plan. (See Appendix A in Kerri Moore’s report.)

What is the vision? The pictures below help to illustrate the direction I think we should go. Note that in all the pictures from European cities, vehicles and people easily share the street space.

Let's start first with where we are. It's a Friday evening in July on Government Street and the sidewalks are so crowded that it's difficult to get past people. The middle of the street is completely empty.



Then there's the pilot from last summer where we closed the street to car traffic and opened it to people only. This worked well, but only when it was heavily programmed. When I looked for the pictures of the non-programmed days that I took, I realized I had deleted them from my phone because they were too depressing!



And then there are pictures from Heidelberg and other European cities. Cars aren't banned from the areas. It's just that they aren't the priority – people are. It was remarkable to see people in cars, people riding bikes, people walking, people drinking beer, all sharing the same space so gracefully.

A young child walking her bicycle.



A catering truck delivering food to City Hall (building on the left).



A bike and a car sharing the road.



A woman carrying a tray of beer across the street.



Other sample people-priority streets from Europe. Again, note in all instances, vehicles are still able to access the streets and share easily with pedestrians.



Here's one humble example – a work in progress – closer to home.



Conclusion

Our residents deserve this kind of high-quality, people-centred public space, especially as the city continues to grow and the downtown population continues to increase. Government Street should feel like a people priority greenway, lush with street trees, ample places to sit and linger and as if the whole public space between the storefronts on the west side of the street to the storefronts on the east side of the street is made for people.

Recommendations

1. Amend the strategic plan Action 2019 Action #2 from “consider pedestrian only Government Street in 2020-2021 budget process” to “create a ‘people-priority’ Government Street with the complete transformation of the street between Humboldt and Yates to be completed by the end of 2022.”
2. Direct to staff to incorporate in the 2020 budget an analysis of options to transform Government Street into a people-priority place from Humboldt to Yates by 2022.
3. Direct staff to incorporate into the 2021 and 2022 budget improvements to the street based on the 2020 analysis to make it a people-priority place and significantly limit vehicle traffic.

Respectfully Submitted,



Mayor Helps
Respectfully Submitted,



Mayor Helps

Appendix A from Corporate Nights Magazine

Car-free cities are picking up speed

By [CK Staff](#)

June 21, 2019

[2019 Best 50 Issue](#)

Oslo, London, Berlin and even Toronto are among a growing list of cities paving the way for cleaner commutes



Oslo has just phased out the last on-street parking spaces in its city centre, giving a leg up to pedestrians, cyclists and transit.

When a Labour-Green coalition replaced the Conservative party at Oslo's city hall in 2015, change was on the table. But one of the council's promises – to become the first European city to ban motor traffic in the heart of the city – collided head-on with angry motorists and a business group that claimed such a ban would create a "poorer city" and a "dead town."

So the Norwegian capital tried a new tack. It has just phased out the last on-street parking spaces in the city centre, giving an edge to transit, pedestrians and cyclists without banning cars.

The initiative included incentives for cyclists such as new bike lanes, including better lighting and snow removal, along with subsidies for electric bikes and cargo cycles. Council also expanded transit services and lowered fares.

But Oslo is just one of many cities taking aim at traffic. Here are a few steps some cities are taking to reduce pollution and boost quality of life.

- **London, England**, just announced that it will close 20 kilometres of roads for its biggest [car-free day](#) yet on September 22 and promises to launch weekly and/or monthly car-free days in different locations across London. This year it will unveil a new transportation strategy for its “Square Mile” centre that’s expected to designate half of the streets as either car-free or “pedestrian priority.” London also pioneered congestion charges to discourage downtown traffic in 2003.

- **Germany** is creating a “Green Net” of car-free corridors that will connect cyclists and pedestrians in 10 German cities (including **Hamburg**) as well as four universities. The “autobahn for bikes” is expected to get 50,000 cars off the road each day by 2022.

- In **Berlin**, construction crews are building 100 km of bike super-highways, four metres wide. A related initiative will ban cars from some roads. “It will alter the streetscape forever,” says one local cycling activist.

- In **Paris**, cars built before 1997 are not permitted in the city centre on weekdays. Since October, cars have been banned downtown on the first Sunday of each month. Paris now plans to double its bike lanes and limit certain streets to electric cars by 2020.

- The broad boulevards of **Buenos Aires** now include dedicated bus lanes – reducing bus traffic on side streets. This is helping the city create more and more pedestrian zones, where cars are either banned or restricted to a speed of 10 km an hour.

- In **Toronto**, city council voted in April to make permanent a pilot project that discourages cars from driving on a 2.5-km section of King Street through the city’s financial core. The King Street corridor prioritizes streetcar traffic.

Clearly, this is a time of daring change (in some places). Though that progress shouldn’t be taken for granted in volatile political climates. Last November, **Madrid** rebranded 500 acres in its urban core as an “ultra-low emissions zone,” banning older diesel and gas-powered vehicles (unless the owner has previously registered a parking spot). One local newspaper estimated downtown traffic was immediately reduced by a third. Though as [Citylab just reported](#), “Following knife-edge elections at the end of May, however, that progressive policy looks to be “condemned to death,” as [one newspaper headline](#) on Tuesday put it dramatically.

“I think it is important that we all think about what kind of cities we want to live in,” Oslo’s vice-mayor recently told Fast Company magazine. “I am certain that when people imagine their ideal city, it would not be a dream of polluted air, cars jammed in endless traffic, or streets filled up with parked cars.”

A version of this article appeared in the Summer Issue of Corporate Knights magazine.