



Governance and Priorities Committee Report

For the Meeting of February 26, 2015

To: Governance and Priorities Committee **Date:** February 13, 2015
From: Julie MacDougall, Acting Director, Parks and Recreation
Subject: Rockland Avenue Greenway

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the findings from the pilot temporary closure of a portion of the 900 block of Rockland Avenue and to receive Council direction regarding the future of this closure.

The 900 block of Rockland Avenue is located between Quadra Street and Vancouver Street, and is bordered by Pioneer Square to the north and the Christ Church Cathedral to the south. The intent of this road closure is to enhance the pedestrian and cycling experience through the neighbourhood, encourage active transportation in the community, and create an expanded park connection between Pioneer Square and the Christ Church Cathedral.

Rockland Avenue between Quadra Street and Vancouver Street is identified as a 'People Priority' Greenway in the City of Victoria Greenways Plan (2003). The closure was included as a high priority in the Pioneer Square Management Plan, and is supported by the Official Community Plan.

From January 2014 to December 2014, the City piloted a temporary one-year closure of the roadway to gauge the impact on traffic, including pedestrian and cyclist safety, and to assess public support.

Three public information sessions were held and an online survey was available on the City of Victoria website from May to December. The results indicate general support of the closure. In total, 447 completed surveys were submitted. Of the surveys received, 66.4% of respondents were generally in support of the closure and 18.8% were generally opposed to the closure. 14.8% of respondents were neutral.

A traffic impact assessment was conducted prior to the closure and again during the closure. The results indicate that the pilot closure has resulted in minimal impacts to vehicular levels of service and intersection safety in the surrounding area.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Maintain the closure of this portion of the 900 block of Rockland Avenue to vehicular traffic, and,
2. Direct staff to implement short-term greenway beautification improvements in 2015 subject to the proposed 2015 financial plan, and,
3. Direct staff to develop plans and cost estimates for permanent improvements for consideration in the 2016 financial plan.

Respectfully submitted



Leigh Sifton
Manager, Parks Planning and Design



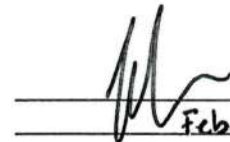
Julie MacDougall
Acting Director, Parks and Recreation



Katie Hamilton
Director, Citizen Engagement and Strategic Planning

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

Date:


Feb. 18/15

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the findings from the pilot closure of a portion of Rockland Avenue and to receive Council direction regarding the future of this closure.

BACKGROUND

The 900 Block of Rockland Avenue is located between Quadra Street and Vancouver Street, and is bordered by Pioneer Square to the north and the Christ Church Cathedral to the south (See Appendix A: Site Map).

The pilot closure of a portion of the 900 block of Rockland Avenue was implemented in response to the Pioneer Square Management Plan, the Greenways Plan, and is supported by the Official Community Plan. The intent of this road closure is to enhance the pedestrian and cycling experience through the neighbourhood, encourage active transportation in the community, and create an expanded park connection between Pioneer Square and the Christ Church Cathedral.

Official Community Plan

The Official Community Plan (2012) states the following goals and objectives related to Greenways and alternative transportation:

- Goal 7a: Transportation options reduce fossil fuel dependence, help conserve energy and produce low greenhouse gas emissions and other air contaminants.
- Goal 7b: Victorians move freely and efficiently via a safe, integrated and convenient network of public transit, bike routes and a supportive, inviting pedestrian realm in preference to driving alone.
- Objective 7.15: Maintain the City's Greenways Plan as a policy framework of an integrated, hierarchical greenway network composed of People Only Greenways, People Priority Greenways, and Shared Greenways.

Active Transportation

Rockland Avenue between Quadra Street and Vancouver Street is identified as a 'People Priority' Greenway in the City of Victoria Greenways Plan (2003). The vision of the Greenways Plan is to "provide a superb, human-scaled, people-friendly environment so that pedestrians, cyclists and other non-motorized users will be rewarded with a safe, enjoyable and engaging experience as they use Greenways." A 'People Priority Greenway' is described in the Plan as "designed for pedestrians, bicycles and other non-motorized rolling traffic, and motor vehicles". Rockland Avenue forms part of a larger east-west connection in the Greenways network linking Oak Bay Avenue to Quadra Street.

Pioneer Square Management Plan

The potential to close a portion of Rockland Avenue between Quadra Street and Vancouver Street was considered in the development of the Pioneer Square Management Plan:

Two rounds of public consultation were undertaken during the development of the Pioneer Square Management Plan. Both surveys included a question about the potential to close a portion of the 900 block of Rockland Avenue to vehicular traffic, with responses being generally in support of the closure.

- Survey 1 (June/July 2011): 63.4% supportive, 26.7% not supportive, 9.9% no response or neutral.

- Survey 2 (March/April 2012): 54.4% supportive, 28.0% not supportive, 17.7% no response or neutral.

A Traffic Impact Assessment was undertaken during the management planning process to evaluate the potential impact of the closure on nearby streets and intersections. Based on existing and projected levels of service for intersections surrounding the 900 block of Rockland Avenue during peak travel times, minimal impacts to intersection safety and capacity in the area were expected to result from the partial closure of this street. The assessment also found that this portion of Rockland Avenue had a relatively high mode share of existing pedestrian and bicycle traffic during peak periods (35%).

Council approved the Pioneer Square Management Plan in April 2013 with the recommendation to undertake a pilot closure of the roadway as a high priority, subject to public consultation and traffic impact assessment.

ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

The City closed the roadway for one year in January 2014 to provide the community the opportunity to experience the enhanced greenway and for the City to assess any changes in traffic volumes on nearby streets and intersections. The pilot project included the installation of signage and temporary bollards at each end of the closure (see Appendix B).

Public Feedback

Three public information sessions were conducted on-site during the one year closure where residents were able to view information panels and fill in a survey. The survey was also made available on the City of Victoria website from May to December 2014. The City used a number of communications tools to create awareness around the closure and engagement opportunities, including: website and social media updates, media releases, print ads, and street signage.

In total, 447 completed surveys were submitted. Of the surveys received, 66.4% of respondents were generally in support of the closure and 18.8% were generally opposed to the closure. 14.8% of respondents were neutral.

The survey collected information on neighbourhood of residence, age of respondent, and frequency of use of Rockland Avenue before and during the closure. The survey also provided space for respondents to comment on aspects that they liked about the closure, aspects that they didn't like about the closure, and future improvements.

When asked "What do you like about the greenway enhancement and road closure" response themes included:

- Creation of a safer space for cycling, walking, children.
- Enhanced opportunities for outdoor recreation (eg. Tai chi, training intervals, cycling with children).
- Quieter / more peaceful park space with better connections between the park and the Cathedral.
- Safer pedestrian crossings at Rockland and Vancouver / Rockland and Quadra.
- Traffic calming / reduction in vehicular traffic.
- Prioritizes pedestrians and cyclists.
- Adds public space / green space / community space to the downtown.

When asked "What do you dislike about the greenway enhancement and closure?" response themes included:

- Increased number of illegal left turns from Quadra to Burdett.
- Increased traffic on Fairfield.
- Road closure inconveniences drivers accessing Downtown and increases need for left hand turns.
- Closure is not long enough / not impactful enough.
- Bollards / Signage are ugly, unappealing.
- Lack of greenery / too much asphalt.
- Closure looks incomplete / temporary / boring.

The survey also asked what could be done to improve or enhance the closure. Response themes included:

- Landscape improvements, including: furnishings, lighting, landscaping, bike racks, community gardens, picnic tables, native planting, narrowed paving.
- Addition of a bicycle left turn lane from Quadra onto Rockland.
- Addition of a cyclist controlled crossing from Vancouver onto Rockland.
- Allow left turns from Quadra onto Burdett.
- Allow one-way vehicular traffic on Rockland.

A complete Public Engagement summary is attached as Appendix C: Engagement Summary Report.

Vehicle Traffic Impact Assessment

In April 2011, the City conducted a Traffic Impact Assessment to evaluate the potential impact on nearby streets resulting from a partial closure of Rockland Avenue. The assessment found that based on existing and projected levels of service for intersections surrounding the 900 block of Rockland Avenue, minimal impacts to intersection safety and capacity in the area were expected to result from the closure.

In December 2014, the same intersections as those counted in 2011 were recounted to evaluate the impact of the closure of Rockland Avenue on surrounding streets. At six of the seven intersections recounted in 2014 motor vehicle traffic volumes decreased. The one exception was at the intersection Quadra and Burdett which saw an increase of 4% in traffic volume. The differences in pre and post traffic volumes is likely attributable to the time of year and the limited amount of data that was collected for each location.

Traffic models created for both pre and post traffic count data indicate that there is no change in level of service at any of the intersections in the study area. Each of the intersections in the model continues to operate at an acceptable level of service.

Based on the data collected and the results from the traffic models created, the closure of the western portion of the 900 block of Rockland has resulted in minimal impacts to the levels of service and intersection safety in the surrounding area.

OPTIONS AND IMPACTS

Option 1 (Recommended)

Maintain the closure of this portion of Rockland Avenue to vehicular traffic and implement short-term greenway beautification improvements in 2015, subject to approval of the 2015 financial plan. Short-term improvements will focus on improving the aesthetic qualities of the new community space for pedestrians and cyclists, and will include elements such as planters, seating, improved closure signage and bollards.

Develop permanent improvements such as relocating curbs, increasing green space and narrowing pavement as part of the 2016 financial plan.

Impacts:

- A request for \$40,000 for short-term improvements to this section of Rockland Avenue is included for consideration in the 2015 financial plan.

Option 2

Re-open 900 Rockland Avenue to vehicular traffic. Add street markings and/or signage as per Greenways Plan to designate this street as a shared space for cars and cyclists.

Impacts:

- Decreases the quality of the cycling and pedestrian environment through this section of Rockland.
- Traffic volumes along Rockland may return to pre-pilot closure levels.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Maintain the closure of this portion of the 900 block of Rockland Avenue to vehicular traffic, and,
2. Direct staff to implement short-term greenway beautification improvements in 2015 subject to the proposed 2015 financial plan, and,
3. Direct staff to develop plans and cost estimates for permanent improvements for consideration in the 2016 financial plan.

Attachments

Appendix A: Site Map

Appendix B: Photo of Existing Closure

Appendix C: Engagement Summary Report

