

## COMMENTS PAGE

### Transition from Campus to Community at UBC: Thinking about Schools and Transportation

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When I started working at UBC about 30 years ago, the site was a university campus, with little surrounding housing. Most students and employees arrived by car – the ultimate commuter campus. Now, UBC aspires to be a community. Housing for students, employees, and the broader Vancouver population has been built all across the UBC lands, and education is not just university level. It includes daycare, elementary and secondary schools.

But the legacy of our commuter campus survives. The university sits at the core – an internal hub protected from car traffic, allowing its students and faculty members to walk or bike in comfort and safety to classes, meetings, and recreation. This core is surrounded by arterial roads, designed and located to deliver commuters to the university. Yet the placement of UBC's residential neighbourhoods, schools and daycares requires most children to cross these arterials (such as 16th Avenue) at least twice every day.

This puts our youngest community members at risk in two possible ways:

- The saddest outcome is that many children are driven short distances to school or daycare, and miss the joys of walking and biking: being outdoors, feeling independent, and using their boundless energy.

- The alternative, for those whose parents recognize that the health benefits of active travel outweigh the risks, is that some children will be needlessly injured because they must walk or bike along routes that do not use research evidence to guide their design.

What does transportation research say?

- Safety concerns are the biggest deterrents to walking and biking.

- Facilities that motivate walking and biking are separated from motor vehicle traffic for the entire distance.

- Walking and biking routes physically separated from motor vehicle traffic are safer.

- Speed limits of  $\leq 30$  km/h greatly reduce both the risk of being in a crash and the severity of injuries if a crash occurs.

- Traffic circles (such as the one at 16th Avenue and Wesbrook Mall) reduce the risk of two motor vehicles crashing at an intersection, but increase the risk of pedestrians and cyclists being hit.

The good news is that routes designed to motivate walking and biking are also safer routes. In addition, people of all ages and abilities have similar preferences in route designs, so there is no need to design different styles for different people. So, what to do? Here are some ideas, based on the evidence:

- Reduce all campus speed limits to 30 km/h. This would signify that the UBC lands represent a residential and educa-



Cyclists ride under West Georgia Street at entrance to Stanley Park.

tional community, not a commuter pass through. The full university community would benefit from a feel similar to the campus core.

- Convert the painted bike lanes along UBC's arterials to separated bike lanes next to the sidewalks, and move car parking and bus stops next to moving motor vehicle traffic. This will make both cycling and walking along these routes more comfortable and safer.

- If roundabouts are installed at intersections to improve motor vehicle safety or traffic flow, either design separated outer rings for pedestrians and cyclists or provide underpasses so cyclists and pedestrians don't need to interact with motor vehicles at all. A great local example of this is the underpass at Stanley Park under Georgia Street. The university town of Boulder Colorado has installed more than 70 underpasses and it has the highest cycling rate in North America.

Northern European countries have been the leaders in implementing changes such as these (and more). In the last 10 years, changes have also been afoot throughout North America, in cities like Montreal, New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Vancouver. UBC was a leader in moving commuters from cars to buses via the UPass, but we lag far behind in designing for active travel throughout our campus communities. We are a research-intensive medical university. Wouldn't it be wonderful to put health research into practice at home? We could create a welcoming, healthy and safe environment for all our community members, including our youngest citizens travelling to and from their schools.



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