

Date: May 25, 1999

SUBJECT: STANLEY PARK; RE-INSTATING ONE-WAY TRAFFIC TO THIRD BEACH

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Board approve re-instating one-way traffic from Third Beach to Second Beach; and

THAT the modifications be funded and implemented immediately as part of the ongoing re-pavement of Park Drive.
- B. THAT the weekend afternoon closures of the Causeway exit at Prospect Point be discontinued.

INTRODUCTION

Third Beach is a popular destination in Stanley Park, only a short distance from the West End. Until December 1998, motorists headed for Third Beach had to first loop through the entire park on the one-way Park Drive. Since two-way access to Third Beach was implemented on a trial basis by converting one of two existing southbound lanes into a northbound lane, Third Beach has been much easier to reach from the West End. However, the reduction from two southbound lanes to one has led to frequent traffic delays, and attendant public discomfort.

This report recommends to terminate the two-way trial, and to re-instate one-way traffic southbound on two lanes. Given the advancing summer season with much higher park traffic volumes, it seems prudent to implement the recommendation immediately in order to avoid continued inconvenience to park visitors.

BACKGROUND

On September 14, 1998, the Park Board approved permitting two-way access to Third Beach on a trial basis for one summer season. The operator of the Ferguson Point Teahouse Restaurant funded the required modification to the park road system at \$44,000 as a capital improvement included in an extended lease option. The two-way access was implemented in December, 1998.

DISCUSSION

Changing any well-established traffic pattern is a difficult undertaking. At least two aspects must come together: on a technical level the change has to deliver the expected benefits, and on a practical level the public has to accept the inherent trade-offs. The experiment of allowing two-way access to Third Beach has to be evaluated on both accounts.

Traffic Analysis

The Park Board retained a traffic consultant in 1997 to investigate the feasibility of two-way access in terms of traffic management. After analyzing traffic volumes, queuing, crosswalk usage and traffic impacts, the consultant concluded that eliminating one southbound lane was feasible in that the remaining road capacity was sufficient for the expected traffic volumes. Residual concerns amongst Park Board staff led to recommending the proposed change only on a trial basis.

Since implementing two-way access in December 1998, every sunny weekend has seemingly generated traffic volumes that overload the one remaining southbound lane, starting with the first weekend of the year. Traffic delays of half an hour on weekend afternoons have become commonplace.

The Park Board conducted traffic counts on the first weekend (Easter) in April, when on average 7,100 cars daily traveled southbound on Park Drive, 28% of those (2,029) entered the park via the causeway exit. In comparison, 744 traveled northbound to Third Beach.

Staff expected that the capacity of the remaining southbound lane for freely flowing traffic would be 800 to 900 vehicles per hour, based on the traffic consultant's report. Staff counts and traffic observations during this spring, however, indicate that the actual capacity of the remaining southbound lane is around 600 vehicles per hour. On the Easter weekend, counted traffic volumes reached more than this critical threshold of 600 vehicles every afternoon for several hours. Peak counts were 1,000 vehicles per hour on Saturday afternoon, and according to several testimonials people got stuck in traffic for an hour.

The two-way traffic experiment has proven unworkable for the following reasons:

1. Direct observation has shown over four sunny spring weekends that the road capacity at the Ferguson Point merge is 600 vehicles per hour. This is two-thirds of summer peak volumes.
2. Restricting north shore bypass access to Park Drive has generally kept volumes at or below this threshold by reducing traffic 30% prior to beach/pool weather. However, internal park traffic alone has exceeded the 600 level on the past long weekend.
3. With the advent of beach weather and the opening of Second Beach Pool, even the 600 per hour capacity no longer stays valid as parking behaviour substantially reduces traffic flows.
 - a. Traffic moves slower due to increased sightseeing; tour buses frequently slow down when passing by a tourist attraction, backing up traffic behind them.
 - b. Delays are caused by much higher numbers of pedestrians crossing roads; particular concerns are the pedestrian paths from Ceperley Meadow and Bridle Trail to Second Beach, crossing Park Drive.

- c. The search for parking destroys smooth traffic flow as cars circle Ferguson Point, Second Beach and Third Beach parking lots in search of a parking stall. The result is far more merging activity than was contemplated by the traffic study.
- d. Add to this the indifference of parking hunters who stop dead on Park Drive in hope that any group of approaching pedestrians may occupy a parked vehicle and hence depart.

It is important to note that, other than adding road dust to aggravation, the current repaving project north of Second Beach has not been a significant contributor to the delays. Traverse times from the traffic backup points - between the Hollow Tree and the 20 km warning signs - were three to five times longer to reach the merge point at Ferguson Point than to traverse the remainder of the distance to Second Beach.

Apart from inconveniencing Park Drive users with 15 to 20 minute traffic jams - this was occurring May 24th even with the north shore closure - Third Beach patrons, who were thought to benefit from easier access, were subject to fifteen minute delays in attempting to exit the parking lot and merge into Park Drive traffic. Hence, the people whom this trial was assumed to benefit, find themselves worse off than they were last year, prior to the changes.

Staff's traffic analysis concludes that the existing one southbound lane cannot accommodate the existing traffic volumes, and therefore recommends to go back to the way it was before, that is to re-instate one-way traffic from Third Beach to Second Beach on two southbound lanes. Staff recommend to act as quickly as possible, because the imminent summer traffic has higher traffic volumes and creates congestion more easily, thereby threatening to cause traffic delays far worse than those experienced in the past months.

Public Input

The Park Board has received at least one hundred phone calls complaining about the implementation of the two-way access to Third Beach, in addition to a dozen succinct letters and more than twenty e-mails. Of these, a total of three voices expressed support for the change, the remainder were opposed to it.

Most complainants expressed deep frustration over being stuck in slow-moving traffic jams. Frequently, eye witnesses reported that it took nearly an hour to drive from Prospect Point to Second Beach. People also expressed concern over the pollution caused by a great number of idling engines in traffic jams. At least six tour bus companies expressed their concerns of meeting their schedules for sightseeing trips in the City. Given the small number of northbound vehicles compared to the southbound traffic jams, many questioned the fairness of making it easier for a few people to get to Third Beach while making it impossible for so many others to drive southbound. Clearly, the public failed to endorse the trade-off of easier access to Third Beach when balanced against the negative side effect of severe disruptions for southbound traffic. Also, leaving Third Beach has become a problem in itself.

The experimental closures of the Causeway exit at Prospect Point on weekend afternoons generated additional public concern voiced in 35 phone calls and six letters. Of these, four thought the exit closure a positive measure of reducing traffic in the park, the remaining 37 were rather upset over having been denied convenient access to Stanley Park.

In conclusion, public response to the experimental introduction of two-way access to Third Beach has been overwhelmingly negative, arguing that the benefits of the experiment are few and pale in comparison to the frustration and inconvenience suffered by many.

SUMMARY

The traffic analysis by Park Board staff concludes that the introduction of two-way traffic to Third Beach has resulted in significant traffic delays to southbound traffic due to the actual road capacity being much lower than projected. Given the imminent arrival of higher summer traffic volumes and attendant further reduced road capacity related to parking behaviour, staff conclude that the experiment has failed and one-way traffic from Third Beach to Second Beach should be re-instated immediately to avoid even more severe traffic complications.

Public response to the experiment has been characterized by frustration over the traffic delays, and by a clear lack of endorsement for the inherent trade-offs. They have asked over and over to see the experiment ended. Staff recommend to act accordingly and promptly.

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