



Date: April 20, 2001

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation
FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: CAR FREE DAY IN STANLEY PARK

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board not pursue the periodic closure of some areas in Stanley Park to automobiles at this time.

FOR CONSIDERATION

THAT the Board investigate a proposal to proceed with a special event - car free day in Stanley Park for the summer of 2002.

POLICY

To accommodate major special events, the Board will allow Stanley Park to be closed to vehicle traffic one day per month prior to 10:00 a.m., with no closures during July and August.

BACKGROUND

At its July 25, 2000 meeting, City Council's Transportation and Traffic Committee requested that the Park Board consider the costs and feasibility of closing Georgia Street west of Denman Street on Sunday mornings when the Lions Gate Bridge is closed for construction in order to create a car free Stanley Park. The subsequent staff report prepared for the Board outlined the problems associated with vehicle closures in the Park:

- access to the park is difficult: public transit does not deliver the service to accommodate the regular patronage to the park; there is inadequate public parking in the West End to accommodate those wishing to park their vehicles near the entrances to the Park.
- access within the Park is difficult: families with children and individuals not able to walk long distances would be most affected - especially those wishing to access facilities and destinations located in the Park's northern sections.

- the redevelopment of the eastside seawall and a full cycle/blade route around the Park has lessened the attraction of using Park Drive for these purposes.
- vehicle restrictions have significant impacts including loss of income on various Park stakeholders - e.g., Aquarium, restaurants, tour buses, clubs and sporting associations.
- due to the unpredictability of bridge closures, it is not possible to develop a schedule for vehicle restrictions.

Given the poor attendance of previous car free days in the Park, the staff report did not recommend organizing a car free day at this time. However, the Board directed staff to review the possibility of future vehicle closures in the Park at their September 11, 2000 meeting.

DISCUSSION

Determining a Viable Program for Vehicle Closures in the Park

To determine a viable program for vehicle closures in the Park, one must first define the objectives for the program.

Objective: to provide the public with the opportunity to experience the Park without the noise and congestion of automobile traffic

This is the obvious objective for periodic vehicle closures in the Park. While most would agree that one's enjoyment of a park is enhanced without the noise and congestion of automobile traffic, previous car free days in Stanley Park have not been well attended. Most of these events involved partial road closures on the eastern side of the Park. Reasons for the poor turn out include those highlighted above plus the fact that large portions of the Park are not impacted by automobile traffic (western seawall, interior park trails, etc.).

Experiencing Stanley Park with a partial vehicle closure under the Board's existing closure policy has not generated significant interest by the public. In fact, the partial closures to automobiles have a history of keeping large number of visitors out of the park. In addition, these events have had a negative impact on the movement of traffic in and around Stanley Park (e.g., grid-lock conditions on other roads within the Park, long line-ups at the Park entrances, etc.).

Objective: to encourage and promote the public's use of alternate forms of transportation to and from Stanley Park - walking, biking, blading as well as public transportation.

While it is recognized that for many, the automobile will always be the primary mode of transportation to and from as well as within Stanley Park, it is also recognized that the Park's

roadways and parking areas are at capacity during busy summer weekends. If the use of the park continues to increase, the corresponding traffic conditions will eventually limit the access to the Park. It is in the interest of the Board, the Park and its visitors to encourage and promote alternative transportation to and from as well as within the Park.

Unfortunately, partial vehicle closures have not proven to be effective in encouraging and promoting the public's use of alternate forms of transportation. During past partial vehicle closures in the Park, many visitors either: continued to access the Park using an automobile - contributed to the Park's traffic congestion; or chose not to visit the Park during closure - accounting for the Park's low patronage.

Given the past history of periodic closures of some areas in Stanley Park to automobiles in terms of generating public interest, providing benefits to the Park and its users as well as the negative impact on traffic in and around the Park, staff do not recommend that the Board organize any additional "partial" vehicle closures at this time.

Another Option for Consideration

If the Board wishes to further pursue car free options in the Park, staff recommend that the Board investigate combining a large scale special event with a full Park closure to automobile and tour bus traffic. The special event could be an existing event such as Canada Day, Fireworks, a walk or run, etc. or a new event such as picnic, festival, concert or run/walk/cycle event. In either case, the event must have significant drawing power so as to attract the public's interest. Organizing the event would involve soliciting request for proposals from event organizers.

The ultimate success for a viable car free program would be to maintain Park patronage during the vehicle closure period. Staff estimate that on a busy summer weekend day, approximately 56,000 people enter the Park and approximately 65% or 36,600 of those arrive by either car or tour bus. Thus, the objective for the program would not only be to attract the same number of daily visitors but also to create a pleasurable visit to the Park so as to encourage visitors to continue to access the Park using alternate forms of transportation in the future.

It should be noted that such an event would require some form of transit within the Park; especially to the Park's western sections. This would limit the use of these roads for transit only and they could not be programmed for other activities. Thus, the majority of roads in the Park would remain open to accommodate transit within the Park, service and emergency vehicles.

It is difficult to estimate the cost associated with such an event as the budget is dependent on the activities organized. The costs could be reduced by "piggy backing" with an existing event or by soliciting a sponsor for the event. The most successful event with traffic restrictions in Stanley Park was the Park's 100th Birthday Celebration held on Sunday, June 18, 1988. Approximately 70,000

people attended this event. During the event, the Park was closed to automobile traffic, the Board provided public transportation along Park Drive and a series of special events were organized throughout the Park. The Board spent \$ 90,000 plus staff time to host this event.

Consultation - Meeting with the Stakeholders

To date, staff have only met with the Park's stakeholders - Aquarium, restaurant and concession operators, various clubs and sporting associations, Ecology Society, etc. The general public and other interest groups have not yet been consulted with regards to a car free event in the Park.

At a meeting with the Park's stakeholders in April, staff outlined the history of car free events in the Park and proposed the option of organizing a car free day in conjunction with a major special event in the Park. The stakeholders were also informed that they would be given the option of participating in the event. The vast majority of the stakeholders were not in favour of **any** vehicle restrictions in the Park. Comments and concerns raised by the stakeholders during the meeting included:

- restricting vehicle access significantly impacts business as most patrons of the Park's businesses depend on the automobile to access these facilities and services;
- attendance at previous car free days does not warrant the disruption the closures cause to Park stakeholders;
- recently operators of businesses have endured road construction, bridge closures, and pay parking increases, they do not believe the Park Board should promote events which will further disrupt their operations;
- worried that a one day closure is only the "tip of the iceberg" and that the Board may wish to expand the program;
- tour bus operators require at least a year's lead time to accommodate a vehicle closure in the Park, some operators have already sold 2002 tours which include visits to the Park;
- questioned the right to compensation under their lease agreement with the Board;
- questioned why the Board would consider approving an event which will have a negative financial impact to the Board at a time when the Board is short of funds.

The Next Step

The Park Board must decide whether the benefits of a car free day (transit only) in the Park warrant the associated costs to the Board and inconvenience and costs to Park stakeholders. A car free day is consistent with the Board's efforts to encourage alternate forms of transportation to and from and within the Park - i.e., moving the transit loop to Pipeline Road, operation of the Park Shuttle during the summer, etc. If the event is successful in attracting regular Park patronage, it provides the Board with an opportunity to encourage patrons to use alternate transportation to the park, as well as monitor participation and traffic patterns when traffic is restricted in the Park.

A car free day does come with a cost to the Board. Hosting such an event would require a commitment of funds and staff resources by the Board. At minimum, the Board would have to hire an event organizer to both solicit sponsorship and organize the day's activities. The Board would also have to cover the costs associated with increasing transit to and from as well as within the Park. Staff estimate that these costs could be in the range of \$25,000 to \$30,000. In addition, the event would have an impact on the Board's revenue sources within the Park - concessions, restaurants, pay parking - pay parking revenue alone is estimated at \$20,000 per summer weekend day. As noted by the stakeholders, the event would result in an inconvenience and revenue loss for their operations as well.

CONCLUSION

While partial vehicle closures have not proved successful in attracting the public's interest, a special event with a full vehicle closure could create a viable program which allows the Board to: provide an opportunity to experience Stanley Park without the noise and congestion of traffic; as well as encourage and promote the public's use of alternate forms of transportation to, from and within Stanley Park. In the longer term, this event could become an annual Park event used to showcase the alternate forms of transportation to and from as well as within the Park. However, orchestrating such an event requires a commitment of funds and resources by the Board. Should it be in the interest of the Board to proceed with a car free special event in the Park, consideration should be given to:

- broadening the consultation process to include the general public and other interest groups;
- establishing a budget for the event with funding from the Corporate Sponsorship Fund;
- soliciting a call for proposals from event organizers;
- continuing to consult with stakeholders with regard to their involvement in the event.

In order to give event organizers sufficient time to solicit sponsorship and Park stakeholders (especially tour bus operators) sufficient notice, the event should not be scheduled until the summer of 2002. Once the proposals are received, the proposals and their associated costs will be forwarded to the Board for consideration.

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