

Guidelines for Addressing Concerns on Proposed Bike Routes and Trails



City Council staff and active transportation advocates have seen an increase in concerns surrounding new or upgraded proposed active transportation projects across the Lower Mainland. It is important to emphasize and listen to the concerns of community members and to acknowledge their reservations when it comes to infrastructure projects that impact their daily lives and perceived enjoyment of their neighborhoods.

Below you will find responses to some common fallacies that City staff and HUB staff have come across:

1. Bike lanes decrease home values

We understand that changes in neighborhood infrastructure can raise questions about property values and quality of life.

It's worth noting that multiple studies on this topic suggest a positive trend: properties near well-designed bike lanes, multi-use paths or trails have consistently been shown to increase property values.

This is because many buyers appreciate the convenience, safety, and community benefits these amenities provide. For example:

1. **Improved Accessibility:** Bike lanes and trails make it easier for residents to enjoy outdoor activities, reducing reliance on cars and fostering a healthier lifestyle.
2. **Increased Safety:** Dedicated lanes help separate cyclists from cars, improving safety for everyone on the road.
3. **Community Appeal:** Neighborhoods with bike-friendly infrastructure are often seen as more desirable, especially by families, young professionals, and environmentally-conscious buyers. The convenience of having a nearby recreational facility adds to the overall appeal of the neighborhood. As the desirability of the area increases, so does the demand for homes, which, in turn, drives up property values.

Examples of this around the North Shore are the Green Necklace route, a 7.5km greenway/multipath route established in 2018 that spans the City and District of North Vancouver. After its completion property prices did not see a decline in value nor a rise in crime rates. Similar trends can be found along the Arbutus Greenway and Seaside Greenway (Point Grey Road) in Vancouver and along the Central Valley Greenway which spans Burnaby and Vancouver.

Tip: Try to use local examples that illustrate property values have not been affected by this new infrastructure.

2. Bike Lanes/Trails increase crime in area

We understand the importance of ensuring that any new developments contribute positively to the safety and well-being of community residents.

Research and case studies from communities that have invested in bike paths and trails predominantly show that these amenities do not lead to an increase in crime - especially if they have been well designed. In fact, many studies indicate the opposite. Well-designed trails can enhance community safety for several reasons:

1. **Increased Foot and Bike Traffic:** When trails are regularly used by people cycling, walking, and running, there is often a stronger sense of community presence, which can deter criminal activity.
2. **Improved Lighting and Surveillance:** Many modern bike paths are equipped with lighting and are strategically placed in visible areas, making them less attractive to potential criminals after dark.

3. Community Engagement: Trails often serve as gathering spaces that bring people together, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in the area. A connected and engaged community is less likely to experience higher crime rates.
4. Economic and Aesthetic Benefits: Trails often enhance property values and attract visitors, which can lead to revitalization efforts and a more vibrant community environment.

Tip: Try to use local examples that illustrate property values have not been affected by this new infrastructure.

3. Bike Lanes hurt businesses

Despite often vocal protests from local business owners, studies show that overall impacts of cycling infrastructure on retail streets are positive for businesses and that cyclists spend more per person in these areas than those who arrive by car. A recent analysis of the new separated bike lanes on Toronto's Bloor Street found similar results including greater foot traffic, increased spending in local businesses and a greater average spend by both those arriving by bike and by people living locally.¹

1. As costs continue to soar across Metro Vancouver, fewer people are driving and more are walking, taking transit, and biking. TransLink's trip diary found that between 2011 and 2017, the percentage of all trips taken by personal vehicle decreased in Metro Vancouver from 59% to 55%. According to census data, biking is the fastest mode of transportation in the region and province. Commuting to work by bike increased in most municipalities between 1996 and 2016, while staying stable in others.
2. Merchants often overestimate the number of people who arrive by car and underestimate the people who arrive by foot, bike, and transit. Studies in Berlin, Dublin, Toronto, and Bristol found that merchants vastly overestimate the number of people who arrive at their businesses by car, by up to 100%.
3. In fact, bike lanes have actually been found to have a positive or neutral impact on business revenue, especially for local businesses. [Twenty-three studies](#) across the US and Canada found bike lanes to have positive or neutral impacts on revenue. Research from London, UK actually found that people who walk or cycle spend 40% more than those who drive. Another 2013 study found that people cycling may spend less per trip, but make more trips, and visit local shops rather than big box stores or malls.
4. "The weather is too poor to bike so no one is biking to my business!" Cities with similar climates to Vancouver actually have high levels of year-round biking. These include mega-bike cities like Amsterdam and Copenhagen!

¹ [Microsoft Word - Cycling infrastructure and its relationship to residential property prices REPORT.docx](#), p11

5. This is a reason Mayor Ford needs to hear but Canadians believe bike lanes make a community a better place to live. A 2018 Angus Reid survey found that 73% of Canadians think bike lanes make a community a better place to live.

Many BC Business Improvement Associations (BIAs) support bike lanes/active travel. For additional information see HUB Cyclings, 2022 report, [Bikes Mean Business](#).

4. Bike Lanes Are Underused

Bike lanes may start out with lower usage, but as people see a safer, more connected network develop, ridership grows significantly. Cities that invest in protected active transportation networks—Vancouver included—see a steady increase in cycling trips, proving that "if you build it, they will ride." Removing these lanes too soon undermines long-term shifts toward sustainable, active transportation. Vancouver's Beach Avenue Bikeway and Vancouver's Burrard Street Bridge are two such projects that received significant push back when it was initially opened but today are some of the busiest bike routes in North America and sees more than 1-million riders annually. ([case study](#))

HUB Cycling also recently collaborated with local bike shop, West Point Cycles, to [create a video](#) debunking this fallacy.

5. Bike lanes slow down traffic

Studies by [Younes et al., 2024](#), show that bike lanes actually improve overall traffic flow by giving people safe, appealing alternatives to driving. As biking infrastructure expands, people are more likely to choose cycling, especially for shorter trips. This shift—called mode shifting—encourages more people to ride their bikes and frees up more space on the roads for vehicles, alleviating congestion for everyone and reducing commute times.

Reallocating space on roads for cycling will actually make roads more efficient at moving people – a typical motor vehicle lane can carry around 2,000 people per hour, but the same space allocated for cycling infrastructure could carry around 10,000 people per hour.

HUB Cycling recently collaborated with local bike shop, West Point Cycles, to [create a video](#) debunking this fallacy.

6. Bike lanes block emergency vehicles

Making a street safer does not further delay emergency response times, a [recent study](#) published in the peer-reviewed journal *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives* found.

Specifically, the study looked at the actual change in emergency response times on streets in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that went through a 4-to-3 lane conversion. The study looked at actual EMS response time data and conducted a survey of emergency responders to gather their perceptions. They found “no difference in emergency response rates from before to after” implementation.

If a bike lane/route is well designed, it can even speed up emergency responses as it has done on the Cambie Bridge in Vancouver where the bike lane is wide enough to accommodate an ambulance and by-pass traffic congestions. Check out [this video](#) where HUB Cycling’s president, Jeff Leigh, discusses how the southbound Cambie Bridge bike lane has assisted emergency vehicles in reaching a crash quicker. A similar benefit was achieved on 10th Ave near Vancouver General Hospital where special mountable curbs on the bike lanes allow emergency vehicles accessing the emergency room to bypass vehicle traffic.

[Study confirms that a safer street design doesn’t slow emergency vehicles – Seattle Bike Blog](#)

7. Adding bike lanes means less street parking

Losing parking spots due to the installation of bike lanes is a valid concern for many residents in both urban and suburban communities. However, it’s important to consider this issue within a broader context: limiting bike lanes can hinder efforts to make our roads safer and more accessible for all users, including children and people who are not old enough or unable to drive a vehicle, and can make communities more congested by vehicle traffic.

In the long-run, designated bike lanes encourage more people to cycle, which reduces traffic congestion, lowers noise pollution, and minimizes vehicle exhaust—benefits that contribute to healthier, more livable communities for residents and people visiting the area. Additionally, safer roads benefit everyone, including people driving, walking, and cycling.

In HUB Cycling’s semi-annual Rush Hour Challenge, it is proven time and time again that in a downtown urban setting, bikes are almost always faster, more efficient, and take up less space than driving a vehicle.

While the availability of convenient parking supports driving, it can inadvertently encourage car dependency, which exacerbates congestion, air pollution, and the cost of maintaining urban infrastructure.

The high-cost of building parking spaces is also adding further stress on the housing market, and driving up the cost of many new developments targeted towards new home owners or renters. This makes it increasingly challenging for first-time home owners to enter the market to begin with. A new [research report](#) found that developers can spend up to \$230,000 per stall to build parking for new developments around Metro Vancouver, which often isn't used by a building's residents. Metro Vancouver estimates that, on average, building parking is "oversupplied by 47 per cent in strata buildings and 35 per cent in market rental buildings." Developers told researchers that reducing the number of parking spaces "can significantly lower development costs."

Balancing these competing priorities is challenging, but the shift toward safer, more sustainable transportation options ultimately benefits the entire community.

8. Bike lanes are expensive to build/not value for money

Good cycling infrastructure does cost money, but it is incorrect to say it is a large amount in the scope of overall transport spending, or that it is a poor return on investment. In fact, building cycling infrastructure is a fraction of what it costs to build vehicle infrastructure. For example, the City of Portland calculated that the city's entire bicycle network, consisting of over 300 miles of bikeways would cost \$60 million to replace (2008 dollars), whereas the same investment would yield just one mile of a four-lane urban freeway ([source here](#)).

Cycling infrastructure has also been shown to pay back to society more than it costs – a 2014 UK government report cited returns of between 2:1 and 35:1. A 2022 [New Zealand study](#) found that the money spent on high-quality cycling infrastructure yields benefits between ten and 25 times the costs.

Other countries demonstrate returns of 10 times or higher, and London's transport authority reports ratios of 20:1 for cycling investment. Whilst many of the UK figures are for 'general' investment in cycling (i.e. including training, etc.) the higher cost of cycling infrastructure is still justified because of the additional numbers drawn to cycling by the provision of safe places to cycle.

The Netherlands spends €500m per year on cycling infrastructure, which generates €19bn in health benefits alone – a 38:1 return on investment.

Other local examples of infrastructure cost

- Building 3 miles of highway costs the same as building 1,250 miles (Seattle to Los Angeles) of bicycle lanes²
- The Hornby bike lane in Vancouver (2 km), including full separation, signage, signals and seasonal plantings, cost the same as one left turn bay at an intersection for cars
- Roadway facility costs average about \$700 annually per capita in the U.S., about half of which is funded through general taxes rather than user fees (FHWA 2008; Subsidy Scope 2009)³
- Most cities have about similar miles of roads and sidewalks/paths, but spend 5 to 10 times as much money on motorized than non-motorized facilities.⁴
- Parking⁵
 - A typical urban parking space has land and construction costs worth \$5,000 to \$50,000 resulting in annualized costs (including land, construction and operating expenses) ranging from about \$500 to more than \$3,000
 - Typically 10-20 bicycles can be stored in the space required for one automobile, and bicycles are often stored in otherwise unused areas

West Point Cycles/HUB Video: [Active Transportation Fallacies Part 4: "Bike Lanes Are Expensive and Not Worth The Money"](#)

Additional References and Resources:

- [Microsoft Word - Cycling infrastructure and its relationship to residential property prices REPORT.docx](#), University of Waterloo Ontario
- [Property Value/Desirability Effects of Bike Paths Adjacent to Residential Areas](#), University of Delaware
- [Trail Effects on Neighborhoods: Home Value, Safety, Quality of Life - American Trails](#)

Active Transportation Research Tracker:

² http://www.bikeleague.org/resources/reports/pdfs/economic_benefits_bicycle_infrastructure_report.pdf

³ <http://www.vtpi.org/nmt-tdm.pdf> (Page 28)

⁴ [Completing Sidewalk Networks Benefits and Costs](#)

⁵ <http://www.vtpi.org/nmt-tdm.pdf> (Page 5-6)

Velo Canada has released an Active Transportation Tracking tool, a database of research on the benefits of AT. [***Active Transportation Benefits Tracker***](#), This database summarizes published research on the benefits of active transportation in a Canadian context, and is intended as a resource for anyone looking to make the case for active transportation.