

Streetcars, pedestrians best for Government



My wife and I enjoy our regular visits to Victoria, playing tourists in our own town.

On a recent visit, we decided to enjoy a latté on Government Street.

To our dismay, we were engulfed by fumes from tour buses and cars driving slowly up Government Street. Idling tour buses pumped out clouds of diesel fumes while waiting for passengers.

Perhaps it is time to consider closing Government Street to motor-vehicle traffic (except streetcars) and making it a pedestrian-friendly precinct from Humboldt Street to Yates Street.

Many other cities have successfully done this.

At the same time, perhaps Victoria should consider running a streetcar up Government from the Empress Hotel, connecting with Douglas Street and continuing on to the new Uptown Centre, returning to the Empress Hotel via Blanshard Street, with a possible future connection to the cruise-ship terminal. Deliveries to businesses could still be made via adjoining parallel streets or at certain regulated delivery times.

The argument that this would have a negative effect on local business is not valid and such closures have proven to be beneficial.

Christchurch, New Zealand, has successfully operated its Victorian streetcars for many years and they are a hit with tourists and residents alike, as was the Bombardier streetcar during the Winter Olympics in Vancouver. Portland's streetcars, modelled on European ideas, have also been successful.

Installation of the streetcar tracks in Portland was achieved one block at a time with minimum disruption of approximately one week to local businesses.

What a wonderful addition this would be to a city like Victoria.

Robin Chown, Sidney