

# Victoria council backs rapid transit along Douglas Street

The plan:

Two light-rail lanes, two car lanes,  
and no on-street parking

by Bill Cleverley, TimesColonist Dec. 9, 2010

*Vision of Douglas Street: A northbound railcar passes City Hall, with cyclists in the centre and cars on the other side.*

*Photograph by: Artist's Rendering, BC Transit.*



Light rapid transit railcars or buses could run in exclusive lanes on the east side of Douglas Street into downtown under a plan endorsed by Victoria councillors Thursday.

Two car lanes and all on-street parking on Douglas Street south of Hillside would be eliminated to make room for rapid transit. Councillors indicated that their preference is for light rapid rail rather than buses.

The transit corridor would have two lanes, with one going into downtown, and the other out.

A downtown endpoint for the corridor hasn't been settled but B.C. Transit has suggested going as far south as Humboldt or Belleville streets, near the legislature.

B.C. Transit developed several proposals and asked city council for its preference.

Coun. Pam Madoff said the importance of the decision cannot be overstated.

"This is not going to be done without some degree of pain. It's a huge change. It's probably one of the biggest decisions and one of the biggest changes in terms of how our city works that this council or a subsequent council will be responsible for," Madoff said.

"I'm sure there's going to be short-term angst, mid-term angst, but I think we have to put ourselves in the position of really looking forward."

B.C. Transit said it will have cost estimates next year and those

estimates are expected to guide what happens next.

The Douglas Street proposal, part of a plan to link downtown with Langford, follows months of consultation with business owners, residents, neighbourhood and special-interest groups.

B.C. Transit has said changes are needed to deal with increasing ridership and road congestion.

In developing the plan, B.C. Transit appears to have considered not just its own interests but what will work best for businesses, pedestrians, cyclists and the city as a whole, Madoff said.

"Truly we are, in essence, defining our city and we're also connecting our region. I think we have one chance to do this and to do it properly," she said.

Mayor Dean Fortin agreed.

He said there are benefits in terms of costs, safety, ease of use and convenience to run rapid transit on one side of Douglas rather than curbside in each direction.

After the meeting, Fortin said the option presents many opportunities and challenges for the city.

"There's many things for the city to take a look at," he said.

Parking spots along Douglas will be lost.

"How do we increase parking on the side roads to deal with that?"

Artist renderings looking from the sidewalk on the east side of Douglas

show a road reconfigured to have two lanes of light rail, two bike lanes in the centre, and a northbound and a southbound lane for cars, and a sidewalk on the west side. Those drawings are conceptual and placement of bike lanes has not been finalized, said Erinn Pinkerton, transit director of corporate and strategic planning.

"It is a significant change and significant change brings with it a lot of work that has to be done around the detail," Pinkerton said.

While **B.C. Transit is still considering the option of running trains or buses in the curbside lane on either side of Douglas**, routing the rapid transit route in both directions on the east side of Douglas is seen as the better option.

Other options considered included lanes in each direction on Blanshard and Douglas, and on Blanshard and Government, plus in the median of Douglas.

All options assumed the removal of two car lanes, wider sidewalks, separate bike lanes, exclusive rapid transit lanes, dedicated left-turn lanes at key intersections, and stations designed for light rail.

Running rapid transit in the curb lanes would mean the loss of 154 parking spaces and crossing 86 driveways.

Using the east side means the loss of 154 parking stalls but crossing only 64 driveways.

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