

Terminal Square

The area between the CPR station and the downtown waterfront looms large in the founding of the modern city of Vancouver, being the terminus of the transcontinental railway that connected this country to the Pacific Ocean, and with proximity to the original settlement of Gastown. It is currently the terminus of the Seabus ferry to the North Shore, the West Coast Express commuter train, as well as adjacent to the original Expo Line Skytrain terminus and the soon to be completed terminus for the new Canada Line.

Vancouver is at the point where we need to develop a serious infrastructure to support cycling as a significant means of transportation. Some success has been had outside the downtown with the network of bicycle friendly residential streets. There has been mixed results when it comes to cycling routes in the downtown core and cycling access to the core. The "two lines and bike icon" cycling path has been a failure in providing safe and comfortable cycling conditions to attract a larger number of cyclists, especially when the streets chosen are also bus routes. As well, cycle connections into downtown particularly from the south and southeast are poor and do not take advantage of the best cycle paths we have, the seawall route around False Creek.

Planning for any new public squares, or any other urban design initiatives for that matter, should go hand in hand with the planning and development of a cycling infrastructure.

The city has excellent public access to a long waterfront that extends from Point Grey to the Second Narrows Bridge, but that access, with the exception of Granville Island, is generally in the form of parks and beaches. Missing is a dynamic urban connection to the water.

The concept for Terminal Square is based on the idea of an urban space that ties the terminuses of the public transportation network into a heroic and dynamic pedestrian realm, while incorporating the emerging cycling network.

Proposed is a series of buildings that define a large 200,000 square foot square that can accommodate over 130,000 people. The scale of the buildings is commensurate with the scale of the square, mediating between the office hi-rises, hotels and convention centres to the east and the lower scale of Gastown and proposed development to the west. The relatively low scale of the CPR station to the south allows good sun penetration into the square. As the cornice lines of the flanking buildings remain at the same height, and the square terraces down to the new Seabus terminal and becomes narrower, the framing of the view of the north shore mountains, becomes more dynamic reflecting the dynamic landscape of the south coast. This is picked up in the treatment of the square stepping down to the water as a topographic Zen rock garden. The terracing and the stage projecting into the pond become a venue for both everyday and large events including buskers entertaining the noon hour lunch crowd, the jazz festival, special symphony performances, Canada Day celebrations and political rallies.

The periphery of the square is where most of the day-to-day activity will take place as people connect to different transit modes or find restaurants and cafes from which to view the human parade. The northwest side of the square will attract morning activities such as a coffee and croissant for breakfast, as the tall, wide arcade lets in the morning sun. The east side of the square starts to get sunlight after noon and would see a lunch crowd enjoying the shade of the trees and the ambiance of the cascading water descending to Burrard Inlet, or the shelter of the glass covered arcade. This pleasant allé of trees becomes a setting for café culture.

As the sun sets, venues on both sides of the square let their hair down as the square takes on a new ambiance with the magical lighting of the rocks terracing down to the water. The signal that this is a place to be is broadcast throughout the city in the LED display on the Granville Square tower.

Seasons could be marked with spring cherry blossoms shading lunch hour picnickers on the grass terraces, the summer promenade down to the water to buy ice cream, or with the pond becoming a frozen showcase for skaters to exhibit their skills.

A weekend farmer's market under the glass canopy north of the old train station establishes a weekly rhythm. The station itself, now a public market draws people on their way home thinking about what they will prepare for dinner.

Though the square is large, it is not overbearing in a monumental way, but has a variety of peculiar corners and different places to slip in and out of, just as it has attractions for downtown office worker and oddball eccentric alike.

The architecture is united in a large amount of masonry, generous amounts of glass, repeated motifs and regular rhythms, but playful variations are encouraged in the input from different architects.