

Transforming Broadway:

What would it take to turn Broadway into a Great Street?



photo: Roham - Creative Commons

Broadway is Vancouver’s major east-west corridor. The street bisects the city, and in so doing acts as a major transportation route, a site of innumerable jobs, services and retail outlets, and a place for people to gather. Broadway fills many roles. Yet, despite being one of the most travelled routes in the city, Broadway also presents a number of challenges to residents and city planners alike: there are significant difficulties with the circulation of both people and goods on the street and sidewalks; the existing built form exhibits inconsistencies in terms of its design and development; potential densities are under-utilized; current development patterns tend to favour the creation of residential space rather than commercial space (affecting the area’s long-term economic role); the public realm often lacks a sense of dynamism appropriate to such a major street.

At present, both the City of Vancouver and Translink are undertaking work that will impact the future of Broadway. The Vancouver Public Space Network is

using this opportunity to explore the potential for enhancing Broadway as a place, and investigating what it would take to make Broadway a Great Street. There is an assumption here: that Broadway hasn’t yet found its stride, that it could be improved, and that there are opportunities to enhance the street. This, in itself, may be contentious. In some capacities (e.g. movement of people and goods) Broadway is already in a league of its own for Vancouver. That being said, we feel that Great Streets have a ‘completeness’ to them that Broadway hasn’t yet achieved.

The idea of treating Broadway as a candidate for “Great Street” necessitates a discussion on the relationship between land-use, transportation and the social use of space – including the types of buildings, the way people move through the street, the type of retail, services and amenities that are present, the quality of the public realm and more. What would it take to make Broadway Great? We need your help to answer that question.

I. BROADWAY PRIMER

Broadway Geographies

Broadway runs from Rupert Street in the east (where it turns into the Lougheed Highway) to Highbury in the west, where it merges with West 8th Street. Along the way it provides definition to a number of Vancouver's neighbourhoods and acts as a major arterial route for moving through the city. Currently, there are a number of projects that are assessing the role of Broadway, each of them have a slightly different geography.

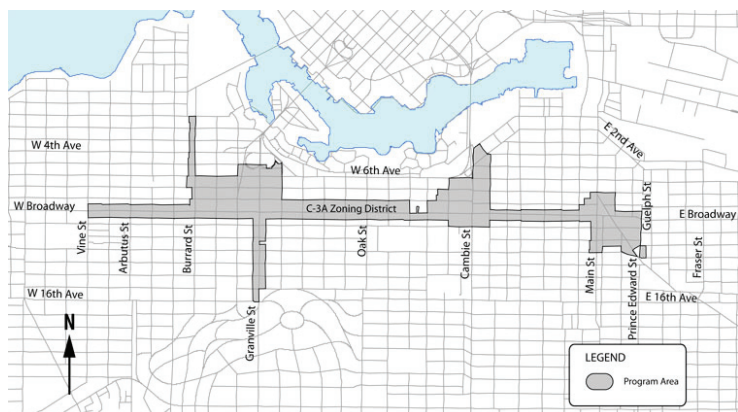
City of Vancouver – Central Broadway Corridor:

The Central Broadway Corridor is situated mid-point along Broadway and stretches from Prince Edward Street in the east (roughly Kingsgate Mall) to Vine Street in the west. The corridor is partly defined by a specific zoning designation – C-3A – stretching beyond the formal confines of Broadway Street (see Map below).

City of Vancouver – Mt. Pleasant Planning Program:

The City is currently completing a community visioning study of the Mt. Pleasant Neighbourhood – including the portion of Broadway between Clark Drive and Yukon. This study intends to provide a long-range neighbourhood plan that references a variety of needs: residential, social & business.

Translink UBC Line Rapid Transit Study: This investigation into transit opportunities on Broadway covers the territory between Commercial Drive and UBC, and looks at a series of alternatives for extending rapid transit service to the university.



**Pedestrian Volume 10am-6pm:
Increases in the Broadway Corridor, 2002-2008**

Location	2002	2008 %	Change
East of Pine	3,745 6	,560	75%
East of Fir	2,198	3,676	67%
Granville, S of B'way	6,671 1	0,631	59%
East of Hemlock	3,087	4,695	52%
East of Spruce	1,809	2,482	37%

The Many Faces of Broadway - Why is Broadway So Important?

Broadway fulfils a number of key roles. Several of these are listed here:

Destination Broadway - Outside of Downtown Vancouver, Broadway is the second most travelled-to destination in the city. It is the site of key intersections (such as Granville, Commercial, Main and Cambie. A combination of services, retail outlets and cultural facilities act as a draw for residents and visitors alike.

Transportation – Broadway is a major transportation route in Vancouver. Roughly 16,000 automobiles (19,000 people) move along Broadway each day between 9:00 and 6:00pm. Public transit also plays a substantial role with approximately 90,000 transit trips taken every weekday. Buses account for 3% of morning traffic but carry 60% of the people moving along the street.

During summer about 500 cyclists a day utilize Broadway – roughly 1/6 of the bike traffic in the Central Broadway Corridor (including 7th and 10th Avenue bike routes). At the same time, the busiest pedestrian locations outside of the Downtown tend to be clustered around the Broadway Corridor. Of the top-ten pedestrian blocks, half of them are located in this area, while still others are located in the immediate vicinity. The importance of Broadway for pedestrians has also increased dramatically (see table on bottom left).

That being said, Broadway's mode-share (the split between people travelling by car, bike or on foot) is different from the city as a whole – and reflects the type of mode-share patterns that are found elsewhere in the region. If the City wishes to achieve its many sustainability goals, this is a key area that will need to be looked at.

Jobs – Broadway has the second largest concentration of jobs in the region (the largest concentration is in the DT peninsula). The largest number of jobs are located in the accommodation, food services and retail sectors (20%). While healthcare services account for 18% of jobs and technical services another 12%. It is anticipated that Broadway will be the site of further employment growth throughout the next decades – a direction that has been encouraged by City Council.

Goods Movement – Broadway plays an important role as a key function as a site of goods movement. The Broadway corridor is one of the busiest east west truck routes in the region. Approximately 500 trucks use Central Broadway to service the city between 9 am and 4 pm each day.

Broadway Timeline

Broadway, like the city as a whole, is always in a state of transition. Buildings change, businesses flourish or are replaced, the use of space is constantly evolving. Once one type of use replaces another, it's hard to remember what used to stand in a given location. But reflecting on these changes also helps to put into perspective the unfolding experience of the street. By reflecting on what was, we can also help to open up ideas about what could be.



Broadway & Heather, 1909



Broadway, West Point Grey, circa 1930s



Broadway, circa late 1980s

mid-1880s: 9th Avenue laid down as a dirt road
1890s: Street cars running, integrating 9th Avenue into existing city fabric. 9th Avenue widened to accommodate street car usage
1900: Bears sighted at 9th Avenue and Westminster (today's Broadway and Main)
1902: City of Vancouver purchases 5.5 acres from CPR for the creation of Vancouver City Hospital (later VGH)
1909: May - 9th Avenue renamed Broadway. There were a number of Americans involved in the city's real estate boom and it was felt that Broadway (after Broadway in New York City) would, in archivist Major J.S. Matthews' words, "help promote some mysterious advantage."
1920s: Present Central Broadway Corridor utilized by seven different streetcar routes
1912: The Sun reports on June 24 that the city's "roads are getting crowded: the total number of automobiles . . . in Vancouver is 1,769."
1923: First buses appear on East Broadway - when BC Electric Railway inaugurates a motorbus line on Grandview Highway in March
1926: Public concern expressed about the fact that only one side of Broadway is paved. Political pressure to attend to this.
1929: The Dick Building is built, an ornately decorated structure at the southeast corner of Granville and Broadway
1929: June 6 news report: Kingsway between Knight and Broadway is to be widened from 66 feet to 99
1937: Centre Park, a 1,200-seat softball diamond, opens at Broadway and Fir (demolished in 1950)
1930s-50s: Growth of automobile related retail and services in Broadway area
1951: China Creek (and the China Creek Ravine) buried. Former salmon spawning grounds, swimming hole and refuse dump
1970s: C-3A Zoning District created by City to define development patterns on Broadway Corridor. C-3A Urban Design Guidelines adopted by Council in 1976
1984: Construction began on the Broadway SkyTrain station at Broadway and Commercial Drive
1996: 99 B-Line created by BC Transit (now Translink). Within a short period it becomes the most popular route in the system, carrying an estimated 12,000 passengers per day (30% higher than original estimates)
2002-3: Phases 1 and 2 of the Millennium Line open
2009: Canada Line completed, with a station at Cambie and Broadway

Sources: Chuck Davis. History of Greater Vancouver; BC Electric Railway History Blog; Translink; City of Vancouver Archives.

II. GREAT STREETS

What are Great Streets?

Many authors have taken the time to look at street life – the social, geographic and political functions of roadways and avenues, highways and turnpikes. One of the most celebrated of these is Allan B. Jacobs – a professor at Berkeley who also happens to live in Vancouver. The work of Jacobs and others provide a useful lens through which to look at Broadway.

Qualities of Great Streets

According to Allan Jacobs, Great Streets should fulfil five functions. In sum, a Great Street...

1. should help make community; 2. is physically comfortable and safe; 3. encourages participation; 4. can be remembered; 5. is representative – the epitome of a type; the best.

Jacobs also identifies a number of ‘requirements’ for Great Streets – but notes that not all Great Streets will necessarily have all of these factors.

Places for people to walk with some leisure: “It’s on foot that you see people’s faces and statures and that you meet and experience them.”

Physical comfort – particularly climate-related: “The best streets are comfortable, at least as comfortable as they can be in their settings.”

Definition: “they have boundaries, usually walls of some sort or another, that communicate clearly where the edges of the street are, that set the street apart, that keep eyes on and in the street, that make it a place.”

Qualities that engage the eyes: “Great Streets require physical characteristics that help the eyes do what they want to do, must do: move.”

Transparency: “The best streets have about them a quality of transparency at their edges, where the public realm of the street and the less public, often private realm of property and buildings meet.”

Complementarity: “the buildings on the best streets get along with each other... they are not the same but they express respect for one another, most particularly in height and in the way they look.”

Maintenance: “Given a choice, people would rather be on a well-maintained street than a poorly maintained one.”

Quality of Construction and Design: “it is appropriate materials and care that are at issue in the making of the best streets, and certainly within the public realm those should be the standard.”

Other Qualities that Contribute:

Trees

Beginnings and endings

Many buildings rather than few; Diversity

Appropriate length or segmentation

Enough parking - but not too much

Time (to grow into a Great Street)

Slope / Changes in elevation

Design features & details

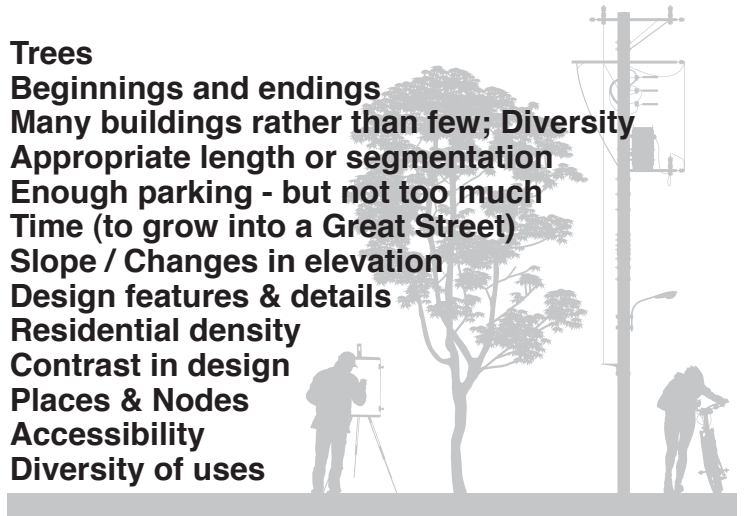
Residential density

Contrast in design

Places & Nodes

Accessibility

Diversity of uses



III. TRANSFORMING BROADWAY?

As we look at the roles that Broadway currently plays we have an opportunity to imagine its future direction. Broadway has always been in a state of transformation – so what should come next?

- How would you define a “Great Street”? – are their aspects that you would add/take away from the ideas mentioned in this backgrounder?
- What sorts of values and/or objectives should drive future changes to Broadway?
- Are there examples of other streets that could serve as a model?
- What’s working well about Broadway? What’s not working well or could use improvement?
- Are there specific features of Broadway’s public realm that are in need of attention?



ADDITIONAL COPIES / MORE INFORMATION:
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