

NEW REQUESTS Capital & Operating

Requestor: Council

Prepared by: Darren Enns, Director, Planning and Development

Cost Center for Service Review: TBD

Title of Initiative: 2023 Pedestrian Zone Update



Summary:

At the September 26, 2022 Council meeting the following motion was passed:

COU22-341 Moved by Councillor Pettigrew That with respect to Item 8.1, Notice of Motion: Consideration of the Continuation of the Banff Avenue Closure During the 2023 Service Review Process, the following be adopted, as amended: NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Council direct Administration to return as part of the second day of the 2023 Service Review (2022 December 05), with a report outlining improvements, including traffic mitigations and the associated costs, to implement for the 2023 Banff Avenue Pedestrian Zone.

For: (7): Mayor DiManno, Councillor Canning, Councillor Christensen, Councillor Olver, Councillor Pelham, Councillor Pettigrew, and Councillor Ram MOTION CARRIED

Administration is presenting this report to review potential improvements and traffic mitigations along with associated costs.

2022 – Pedestrian zone year in review

- Visitation estimates
- Business participation
- Transit performance
- Bike valet
- Traffic management
- Visual improvements
- Dates
- Budget

Visitation Estimates

In previous years, spot visitation counts have been conducted to assess visitation numbers to the downtown pedestrian zone, with peak pedestrian counts surpassing 39,000 per day. Video-based counts were used for these previous estimates, since the existing downtown pedestrian counter array is designed around sidewalks and not around the entire roadway. Staff did assess the relative volume of pedestrians recorded by the pedestrian counters and estimate pedestrian volumes in the range of 20,000 – 30,000 on most days with a strong correlation between vehicle volumes in the town entrance and pedestrian volumes of around 0.92 (eg for every 100 vehicles entering or exiting town, there were 92 pedestrian movements estimated downtown).

Business Participation

Participation by sidewalk cafes and outdoor merchandise displays was lower in 2022 than in 2021. In 2022 there were 39 cafes operating in the pedestrian zone, in an area equivalent to 7% of the total area, and 12 outdoor merchandise displays equivalent to 1% of the pedestrian zone. Revenues from cafes within the pedestrian zone equated to approximately \$82,000 in fees. In conversations with operators and those who chose not to operate, a common constraint in sidewalk café operations was access to labour, which was an issue felt across the community in 2022.

Transit Performance

Roam transit was accommodated in the pedestrian zone again in 2022, with ridership rebounding significantly. As with previous years, accessibility ramps were installed at all stop locations. The Operations team modified transit access gates in response to challenges experienced in 2021 and as a result gate “up-time” was above 99%. Roam reports that on time performance was positively impacted by travel through the pedestrian zone in times of congestion on Beaver/Wolf/Buffalo Streets. Roam’s schedule adherence was negatively impacted by having only single lane travel, as buses regularly had to wait for up to 4 minutes while other buses to pass through the zone.

Bike Valet

Banff Lake Louise Tourism once again supported the pedestrian zone through providing the service of a bike valet on the 200 block. Over the term of the pedestrian zone 4,402 bicycles were accommodated, an increase of 27% on the previous year. Additionally, the number of visitors served at the location (all inquiries) increased 73% from the previous year, with a total number of 12,161 engagements.

Traffic Management

As reported in the October 11, 2022 report to Council (see attached Appendix A - Summer Transportation Overview 2022), traffic congestion was down this summer compared to pre-pandemic 2019 numbers, and fewer delays were recorded primarily due to the increased use of intercept parking and a mode shift to public transit. At the same time, vehicles were diverted to Beaver and Lynx streets, which saw more traffic than when Banff Avenue is open, however congestion associated with vehicles travelling on detours around the pedestrian zone did not meet or exceed anticipated levels. The solutions to managing vehicle congestion in the community are mass transit from Calgary, intercept parking, local transit, active transportation, and disincentives to driving to areas of congestion.

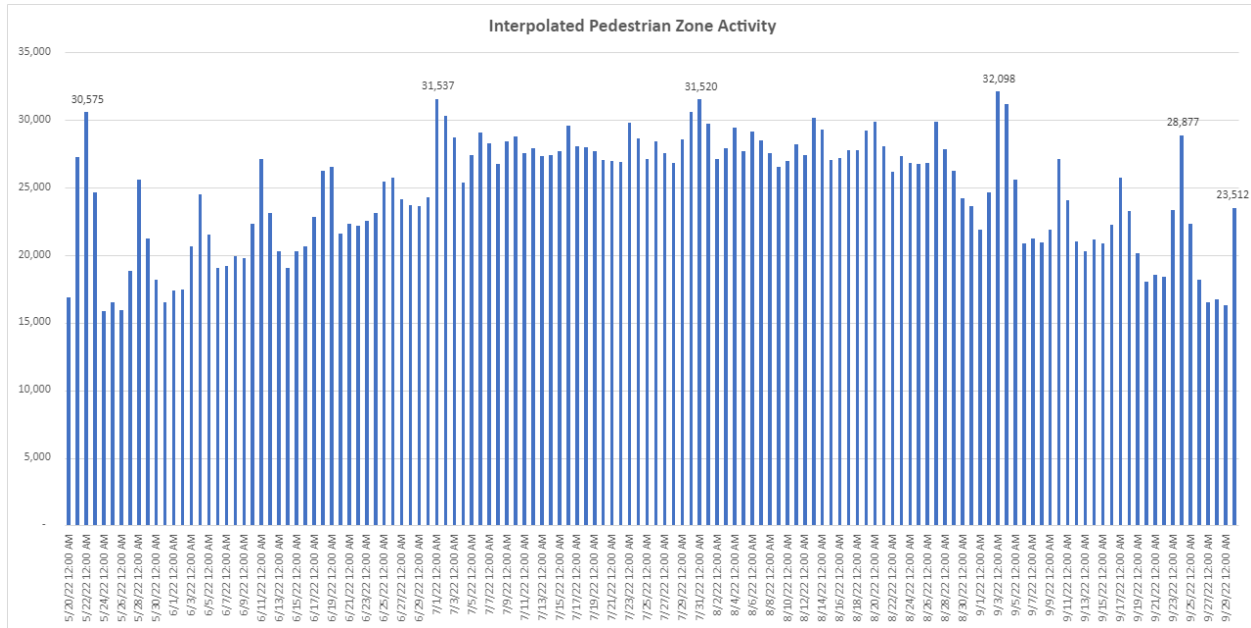
Visual Improvements

Minor changes were made in 2022 to the overall ‘look’ of the pedestrian zone, with some notable successes including required landscaping for café participants, standardized menu signage, reduced mass and scale of sidewalk cafe barriers, and greater species variety in the Town’s seasonal landscaping deployments. These improvements were borne out of Council amendments to *Sidewalk Seating Policy C7005-1* and *Outdoor Merchandising Policy C5006* in March 2022.

Dates

The dates of the pedestrian zone for 2022 were from the May long weekend to Thanksgiving (142 days) via Council direction. Administration had recommended a 2022 start date of the third week of June through to the third week of September (91 days). The rationale presented for a more condensed timeframe was largely built around the unpredictability of weather, however other factors include availability of labour (both for the Town and café operators) and the availability and survivability of seasonal planting.

Pedestrian activity may be a useful dataset for this discussion, and while the pedestrian counter network on Banff Avenue does not cover the entire street, using the 200-block sidewalk counter administration have produced an estimate below of this data.



Budget

Council approved a budget with expenses of \$220,000 for the pedestrian zone in 2022. Actual costs as of November 7 were \$149,982 with no additional expenses anticipated. Primary areas of savings were in signage and flagging. Revenues from cafes and outdoor merchandise within the pedestrian zone were \$82,000 in 2022. In 2023 anticipated revenues from cafes and outdoor merchandise within the pedestrian zone are \$140,000 which are currently included in Planning and Development’s budget.

2023 – Pedestrian zone improvements

As successive pedestrian zones have been implemented, the number of improvements that can, or need to be made have been reduced. With respect to improvements for 2023, administration recommends the following steps:

1. **Increasing transit service levels to Sulphur Mountain;** An increase in transit service levels from the Tunnel Mountain area could reduce the amount of private vehicle traffic (especially large recreational vehicles) originating in the Tunnel Mountain campgrounds. *Already approved for implementation in 2022 but not yet implemented*
2. **Increasing transit service to Sulphur Mountain from the Tunnel Mountain area.** An increase in transit service levels from the Tunnel Mountain area could reduce the amount of private vehicle traffic (especially large recreational vehicles) originating in the Tunnel Mountain campgrounds. *Already approved for implementation in 2022 but not yet implemented*
3. **Signalization upgrades and optimization.** Changes such as better detection for buses in the ped zone and other amendments may provide some improvements with detection reliability and traffic flow. **\$20,000**

4. **Bike valet improvements.** BLLT has identified some improvements that could be made to this service area, primarily involving signage, access, fencing, and electric charging opportunities for e-bikes. **\$7,000**
5. **Additional landscape planters for traffic management.** Having additional small landscape planters on hand would provide opportunities to use as traffic control devices, particularly on the Beaver Street detour as tools to ensure vehicles don't park illegally and impede turning movements. **\$25,000**
6. **Public outreach and education.** Another option Council may wish to consider would be an event or campaign to inform the community around the rationale for the pedestrian zone and / or establishing a feedback mechanism for the community to provide feedback on impacts of the pedestrian zone (e.g. a dedicated Action Request category). These steps might create a forum to explain / illustrate the benefits of pedestrian areas such as
 - Walking is the most basic form of transportation and is an integral part of our transportation system.
 - Good pedestrian presence indicates a community's health and vitality. Walking and cycling are popular recreational activities. Improving walking and cycling conditions provides enjoyment, social inclusion, and health benefits to users.
 - Research consistently indicates that small-scale improvements to the pedestrian environment offers evidence of increased spending, economic vitality and business performance.
 - Designing a safe, convenient, and comfortable walking environment requires planning, careful engineering, attention to detail, and ongoing maintenance and care.
 - Physical improvements must go hand-in-hand with education, land use controls, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation. **\$15,000**

It may be worth noting that a rich array of public input on the pedestrian zone has already been received, primarily through Council and Governance and Finance meetings on the subject.

Resources Required to Implement & Maintain:

The pedestrian zone pulls together staff from multiple teams including Operations, Communications, Planning and Development, Engineering, Municipal Enforcement, and Emergency Services.

Estimated Delivery Date:

The approved delivery dates for the 2023 pedestrian zone are May long weekend to Thanksgiving.

Supporting Materials:

- Appendix A - Summer Transportation Overview 2022

2023 Budget Criteria:

Please indicate which of the below criteria your request meets:

- a) 3rd Party Funded, ie grants, donations, etc
- b) COVID related / safety / legislated
- c) Lifecycle maintenance / asset management
- d) Supports Economic Recovery
- e) Significantly move towards targets in Strategic Plan with outstanding projects
 - i. Improving Active Routes and Transportation

- ii. Addressing Cost of Living
- iii. Nurturing a Model Environmental Community
- iv. Preserving Cultural Vibrancy
- v. Strengthening Emergency Management and Wildfire Preparedness