

NEW REQUESTS

Capital & Operating



Requestor: Council

Prepared by: Darren Enns, Director Planning and Development

Cost Center for Service Review: TBD

Title of Initiative: Concept Exploration - Permanent Downtown Pedestrian Zone

Summary:

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

COU22-345 Moved by Mayor DiManno

That with respect to Item 8.3, Request for Decision: 2023 Council Service Review Additions, the following be adopted: That Council direct Administration to bring forward the following item, with options for execution, during the upcoming 2023 Service Review Process:

- *Explore the cost of a conceptual design of a permanent pedestrian zone on Banff Avenue*
- *Host a community consultation on the future of the Banff Avenue pedestrian zone to be funded through Visitor Pay Parking Reserve*

For: (4): Mayor DiManno, Councillor Canning, Councillor Olver, and Councillor Pelham

Against: (3): Councillor Christensen, Councillor Pettigrew, and Councillor Ram

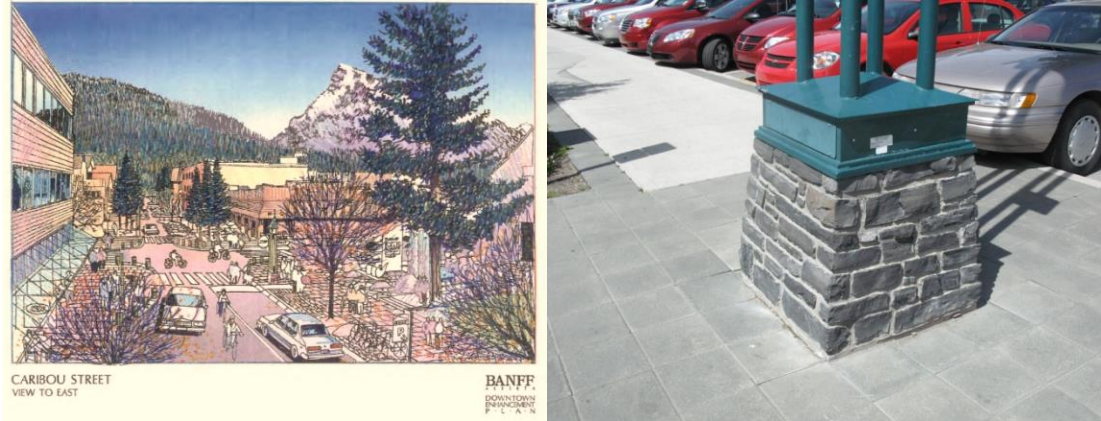
MOTION CARRIED

Administration is presenting this report to review options on the following:

- Developing a conceptual design for physical improvements to the downtown associated with a permanent, seasonal pedestrian zone;
- Developing additional traffic mitigations to reduce vehicular impacts associated with a permanent, seasonal pedestrian zone; and,
- Conducting community consultation on a permanent, seasonal pedestrian zone.

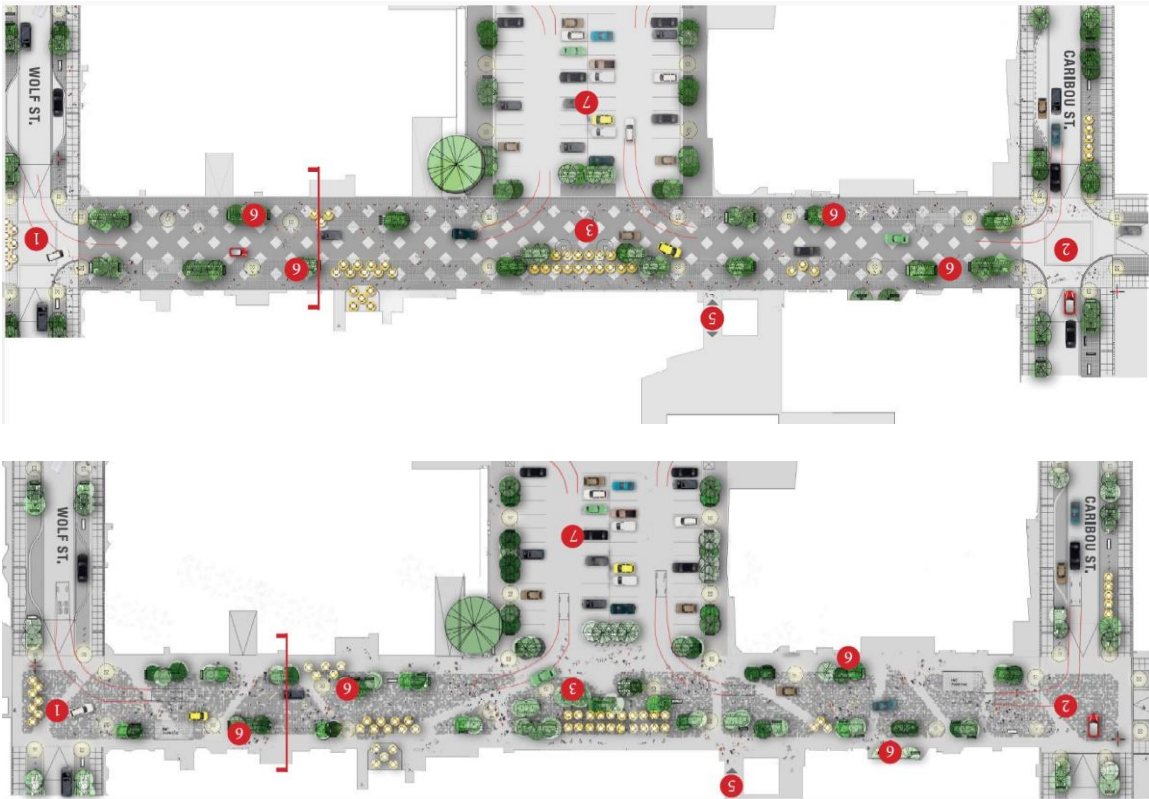
Conceptual Design

Concept development has been used as a tool to introduce and evaluate changes to the public realm numerous times before in Banff. In the case of Banff Refreshing, conceptual designs were developed through the Downtown Enhancement Concept (DEC) plan, and then prototyped through small-scale installations prior to proceeding with full reconstruction.



(Left: Example of a concept drawing to discuss public realm improvements Right: Example of a built prototype to evaluate improvements prior to full reconstruction)

More recently for the Bear Street project, different concept designs were developed to use in public consultation and evaluation, with analysis provided on benefits and challenges of each option.



With respect to design changes needed to transform Banff Avenue into a permanent, seasonal pedestrian zone, administration is of the opinion that these could range from amendments to the existing Banff Refreshing design all the way to a complete redesign of the existing street. Developing a range of concept drawings to explore these options would help flesh out the

benefits, challenges, and potential costs associated with different approaches. It may be helpful to note that underground infrastructure is assumed to be out of scope for this exercise given its relatively young age (15 years).

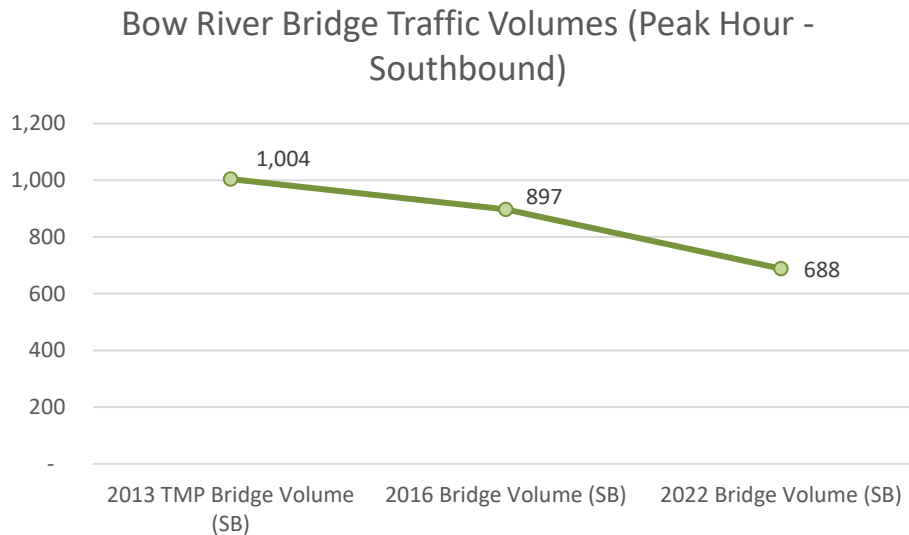
Concept development for the Bear Street project took several months (and followed multiple years of trials and public discussion) and had an associated budget of \$80,000. Administration would recommend a budget for Banff Avenue in the order of magnitude of \$70,000 given the multi-year experience in-hand with the pedestrian zones.

Additional Traffic Mitigations

With the introduction of the pedestrian zone, traffic volumes on adjacent streets (e.g. Lynx Street / Beaver Street) have increased to accommodate diverted traffic. The relative split for traffic displaced from Banff Avenue towards adjacent streets is not known due to a lack of monitoring facilities, and no data was collected on any streets to the east of Banff Avenue (Beaver St, Muskrat St, Otter St) in the 2013 Transportation Mater Plan or at any other time pre-pedestrian zone. As such no baseline data exists and trends are challenging to establish with any accuracy.

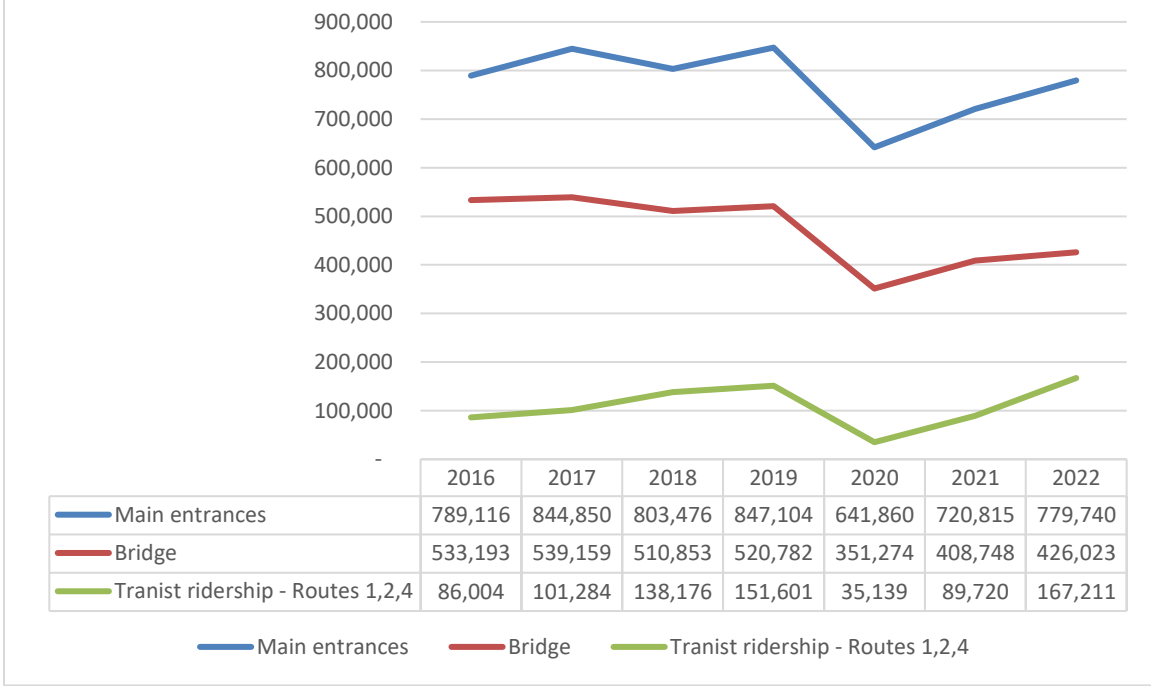
Regarding vehicle impacts on adjacent streets the following data could be considered:

1. The volume of traffic heading across the Bow River bridge has been steadily shrinking over the past 10 years, which would result in a lessened impact on adjacent streets than if a pedestrian zone had been implemented a decade ago.



2. Mode shift to transit has been significant since 2016 and, as a result, the proportion of vehicles travelling over the bridge has reduced over time. For August 2016 vs August 2022:
 - Main entrances vehicle volume - down 1% from 790k to 780k
 - Bow River bridge vehicle volume – down 20% from 530k to 430k
 - Transit ridership – up 94% from 86k to 167k

Bow River Bridge mode shift trend - August, 2016 -2022



3. The effect of induced demand on the pedestrian zone reopening could also be considered. In the first week after the pedestrian zone opened to traffic in October, the Banff Ave bridge volume, as a percentage of vehicles entering Town, increased 8% from 60% to 68% - i.e. more vehicles chose to drive when more vehicle lanes were made available. In the Banff context then, while there is an alternative sustainable mode available, then removing lanes for driving and allowing transit priority on them to incentivize mode shift is consistent with Council’s strategic objectives relating to transportation and environment.

4. The relative split of incoming traffic to the east and west entrances has changed over time – likely in response to highway messaging, advance communications and the construction of the train station intercept parking lot:
 - in 2016 the split was 51% west, 49% east entrance
 - in 2022 the split was 58% west, 42% east entrance

So between 2016 and 2022 entrance counts are similar (down 1% for August in 2022) but the split between east and west entrances has shifted by 7% to the west. It is not known what portion of vehicles travelling on streets to the east of Banff Avenue come from which entrance, but a reasonable assumption is that a majority travel on Beaver / Muskrat / Buffalo is via the Banff Avenue entrance – and therefore that impacts on streets east of Banff Avenue, in the absence of the pedestrian zone would have reduced over time.

The pedestrian zone undoubtedly caused a displacement of vehicles to adjacent streets but the context of mode shift, induced demand and entrance counter split should also be considered. One way to quantify this would be an ongoing counting program on these streets.

The primary methods for mitigating traffic impacts (pedestrian zone or otherwise) are those that have been recommended for decades, specifically intercept parking and transit. Administration would recommend that these initiatives remain the continued and renewed focus for a sustainable transportation system within the community as they would have the shared benefit of removing visitor vehicles from roadways and increasing mobility options for residents.

Additional tactics within the current infrastructure system would still be of assistance in mitigating future pedestrian zone related traffic impacts, specifically:

- **Constructing the Mountain Avenue transit lane.** A dedicated downhill travel lane on Mountain Avenue would create better on-time performance for transit and help in positioning transit as a faster mode of transportation than the private vehicle.
- **Increasing transit service to Sulphur Mountain from downtown.** Currently the transit budget envisions an increase in Route 1 service to 17-minute headways in 2023. Increasing these headways to 17 minutes during the summer would create a further incentive to choose transit over the personal vehicle.
- **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. In 2022 – this service will be increased to 22 minutes.
- **Increasing flexibility for transit routing within the pedestrian zone.** Having a more flexible roadway design would allow for transit within the pedestrian zone to bypass each other more efficiently thereby improving schedule adherence.
- **Signalization upgrades and optimization.** Changes such as improved detection for buses in the pedestrian zone and advance turn arrows at Elk Street may provide marginal improvements with traffic flow. These changes should be further explored if the pedestrian zone is made permanent.
- **Physical reconfiguration of congestion points.** There are a few intersections along the Lynx Street and Beaver Street corridors which are noted as being prone to poor turning movements and / or illegal parking. Redesigning curb lines at these points may improve intersection performance and reduce reliance on flaggers.
- **Additional intercept parking.** In 2022, Liricon Capital was able to provide an additional 100 stalls of intercept parking at the west side of the train station in addition to the 450 stalls already provided in the main intercept lot. With an anticipated turnover of 3 times per day, these lots combined to remove over 1,600 vehicles (or 10% of peak daily volume) which contributed greatly to reducing traffic in the townsite in the summer of 2022. Administration recommends exploring partnering with Liricon to explore an expansion of the north side (Fenlands) parking area to add an additional 390 stalls beyond existing capacity. This would also help to accommodate the ongoing and unforeseen parking demands associated with the seasonal Bow Valley Parkway traffic closure.



- **Recommended for External Partners: Visitor pay parking at Sulphur Mountain attractions (Gondola; Upper Hot Springs).** Consistent with experience in the town site, creating a disincentive for visitor driving personal vehicles up to Sulphur Mountain without pre-booked attraction tickets would be a critical step to reducing unnecessary traffic volumes on the south side of Banff and as a result, along the roads that lead to the bridge. At peak in 2022, the volume of traffic heading up Mountain Avenue only to be turned around due to insufficient parking capacity was 58%; and an average of 37% on the 7 days studied at times between 11am and 2pm.

Additionally, administration recommends awaiting recommendations from the *Expert Advisory Panel: Moving people sustainably in the Banff Bow Valley* on visitor management strategies at key attractions such as Sulphur Mountain.

Community Input Process

One of Council’s requested services would be a community input process which would involve presenting concept plans for review and discussion, and listening to the community on any new ideas which were not part of the concept plan or traffic mitigations. The tactics that could be used to conduct consultation include in-person meetings, online engagement and a selection of other tactics that have not yet been fully explored.

With respect to cost, administration is recommending a budget of \$25,000 which is consistent with the consultation budgets for Visitor Pay Parking (\$25,400) and St. Julien Road reconstruction (\$19,200). Regarding timing, this process would likely occur in Q3, after the development of concept plans in Q1 and Q2.

Operating Costs/Revenue(s):

	2023	2024	2025
Concept Development	\$70,000		
Community Input	\$25,000		
TOTAL	\$95,000		

Funding for this initiative is recommended to come from the Economic Recovery Reserve which currently has an estimated balance of \$371,893.

Resources Required to Implement & Maintain:

Internal resources from Planning and Development, Engineering, Operations, and Communications would be assembled to help developing concepts, evaluating transportation tactics, and communicating with the community.

Estimated Delivery Date:

If approved, concept development and transportation tactic exploration would occur in the first 2 quarters of 2023. Community engagement would likely target September / October in order to engage outside of the summer period, but close enough to the summer season for relevance.

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