

TAC Sustainable Urban Transportation Award Submission: Front Street Mews

Award Nominee: City of New Westminster (Project Lead)

Partners: Downtown Business Association, New Westminster Arts Council, New Westminster Public Art Advisory Committee, Railroad Company, Downtown Resident's Association, Accessibility Advisory Committee, ACTBiPed (Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee), Bosa Developments, local businesses and the larger community

Front Street Mews: Project Overview

In 2013, the City conducted a Downtown parking study which demonstrated that half of the parking (approx. 400 stalls) provided by the Front Street Parkade could be removed due to reduced parking demand. Subsequently, half of the Parkade was removed in 2015 and the Frontage Road, adjacent to Front Street, was redeveloped as a "Mews"- a narrow, intimate street that balances the access and service functions of a lane with active building frontages, accessory uses, and a street space shared by cars, bicycles and pedestrians. Unlike typical car-oriented streets, the Mews is a comfortable and safe place for everyone – pedestrians, cyclists and drivers- that was conceived through extensive consultation and a multi-disciplinary approach to its planning and design. The contemporary design for the mews transforms car-oriented infrastructure into a place for people with a continuous plaza-like paving pattern, social seating areas, lighting, street trees, traffic-calming, public art and 35 back-in angled parking stalls to access local businesses. The fully accessible, one-way street is designed for day-to-day social and retail activity as well as for temporary closures to host special events and community festivals.

1. Development and Enhancement of Sustainable Urban Transportation

The Front Street Mews is the centerpiece of the City's comprehensive Riverfront Vision, which will develop a continuous network of waterfront trails and parks along the Fraser River and connect these with walkable, transit-oriented high density mixed-use areas. Replacing the Front Street Parkade (a two-storey parking structure) with an attractive, pedestrian-friendly commercial street illustrates the City's commitment to the development and enhancement of sustainable urban transportation in Downtown New Westminster. With the goal of redeveloping the parkade-into a street for people, placemaking and prosperity- the Mews is designed to facilitate a wide range of activities including local access, pedestrian and bicycle movement, social interaction and commercial and restaurant activity. To achieve this balance, the City implemented an "all hands on deck approach" (i.e. Engineering, Planning, Urban Design, Parks & Recreation, Operations & Maintenance, Sustainability, Accessibility, Economic Development, Heritage and Public Art) to the design process and consulted with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, ACTBiPed (Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee), local residents, business owners and the larger community to contribute ideas about their vision for a successful street.

The Front Street Mews has been open to the public for approximately eight months and has significantly improved the experience of the historic Downtown by converting this underutilized, dark space into an inviting, attractive and accessible place for all modes of transportation. Given that the Mews has been in existence for under a year, both qualitative and quantitative data continue to be collected to demonstrate the many social, economic and environmental benefits realized as a result of this project.

As noted in the table below, the quantitative monitoring is in-progress. To date, the monitoring and discussions with the project partners have confirmed the following improvements:

	Improvement	Description	Measurement (Quantitative data in-progress)
1	Improves safety and accessibility	The area from Begbie to Sixth Street is now safer through improved sight lines and daylighting (CPTED- Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) and is accessible for people of all ages, genders and abilities, especially the most vulnerable- children, older adults and people with disabilities.	Continued conversations and observations with the community, business owners and project partners to review if the safety and accessibility improvements are meeting the needs of the community.
2	Improves choices and connected networks	The Mews design creates a connected network for a variety of travel modes and provides choices for how people move around the Downtown, whether on foot, bicycle, on transit, or in a motor vehicle.	The number of motor vehicles in the Downtown has been reduced post parkade demolition. To determine that there is adequate parking to support the local businesses, parking turnover on Columbia Street, the remaining parkade and along the Mews is being monitored. The Eng. Dept. will also continue to collect data on mode-split to/ from the Mews.
3	Promotes healthy and active living	The demolition of the parkade and implementation of the Mews promotes healthy and active lifestyles by comfortable and inviting for people to walk and bicycle and be physically active.	Capture # of people arriving by foot, bicycle or other active transportation modes.
4	Respects local context	The design of the Mews responds to the Downtown New Westminster industrial context, current and future land uses, as well as relationships with the adjacent railway, truck route, historic buildings and working riverfront. The final project is authentic, reflecting both local identity and the City's active transportation priorities.	Continued conversations and observations with the community, business owners and project partners on the overall success of Mews as a public space specific to New Westminster. Count # of posts on social media: #Frontstreetmews #FridaysonFront #uncoveringfrontstreet

	Improvement	Description	Measurement (Quantitative data in-progress)
5	Creates a vibrant and attractive public space	The transformation from parkade to Mews creates a vibrant, attractive and “sticky” public space where people want to engage in social, civic, and recreational activities. By removing an eyesore and building a beautiful streetscape, the City has attracted investment and promoted a sense of civic pride.	Continue to observe and count the number of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day-to-day parklet users • Outdoor café tables • Economic activity • Number of street closures to support large civic events/ festivals
6	Improves environmental sustainability	The Mews enhances the urban tree canopy and landscaping, reduces urban heat island effect, stormwater runoff reduction, reduces energy consumption, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.	Create a sustainability report card to monitor the following sustainability metrics over time : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased % tree canopy cover • Greenhouse gas reduction from reduced # of motor vehicles • Stormwater runoff reduction from soil cell installation at street trees • Reduced energy consumption from improved LED street lighting and solar access from parkade removal
7	Supports local businesses	The streetscape improvements support local Downtown businesses by helping move people and goods efficiently as well as increasing the economic activity by attracting new businesses to the area.	New businesses have opened on the Mews, including the Hive City, the Old Crow Coffee Shop and the Columbia Integrated Health Centre. Continue to monitor economic activity along the street including increased retail activity for existing businesses.
8	Flexible and innovative	The Mews is designed to be flexible and able to adapt to the city’s changing needs over time including its operations and maintenance.	Monitor annual maintenance and operations reports and costs over time to understand where there may be room for improvements in day-to-day operations, service access and staging for large-scale events.

Since the Front Street Mews opening celebration on July 7th, 2017, the “Fridays On Front” event ran every Friday evening in the summer for eight consecutive weeks. As intended, a portion of the Mews was closed to motor vehicles for staging of a family-friendly event with artisan food, beverages, craft vendors, live music and performances. As an indicator of success, each event gathered 2,500 people per week (total of 20,000 people) to experience the “Fridays On Front” event along the Mews.

2. Degree of Innovation

The Front Street Mews project demonstrates innovation in a number of areas: planning and engagement process, partnerships, placemaking, sustainability and flexibility.

A. Planning and Engagement Process- This project was implemented as a result of asking ‘big’ questions early in the planning process that led to assessing the parking demand and identifying the parkade as one of the biggest obstacles to creating a successful public space along the Riverfront. The success of the project is largely attributed to an extensive engagement process with stakeholders and the broader community including:

- Interactive stakeholder workshops were held create design options for the Mews. Attendees included representatives from the Downtown Business Association, Downtown Residents’ Association, Front Street businesses and property owners, River Market and Fraser River Discovery Centre;
- Public open houses were held to receive input on the design options for the Mews. Public feedback was collected through written surveys completed at the open house and through the City’s website; and
- Interdepartmental staff workshops to insure this complete street was designed with considerations from each department, particularly operations and maintenance.

B. Partnerships- Many partnerships were developed to optimize the diversity of ways the City, including residents and visitors, could benefit from the Front Street Mews Project. By bringing together the various partners, the City was able to leverage their skills, knowledge and support for the unique design of the Mews:

Downtown Business Association-

Encouraged the design of the Mews to host large events and festivals, leading to the planning and implementation of the Fridays on Front event.

New Westminster Arts Council-

Participated in the selection a public artist for the barrier wall (approx.740 feet long x 4 feet high) between the Mews and the adjacent truck route, and providing live entertainment for Fridays on Front.

New Westminster Public Art Advisory Committee-

Sponsored the integration of public art along the barrier wall to visually tie the wall to the urban design of the overall streetscape.
of the Mews.

Railroad Company-

Collaborated on the relocation of the Front Street truck route towards the rail corridor to maximize the pedestrian realm and provide a sufficient number of at-grade parking stalls along the Mews.

Downtown Resident's Association-

Participated in the interactive design workshops for the design of the Mews.

Accessibility Advisory Committee-

Provided valuable input to maximize the accessibility, including treatments of curbs, crossings and locations of accessible stalls along the Mews.

ACTBiped (Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee)-

Provided valuable design considerations for a shared, multi-modal street with strong connections to existing pedestrian, cyclist and transit networks.

Bosa Developments-

Partnered with the City to design and construct a playful parklet along the frontage of the Mews, between the street and the temporary Bosa sales centre.

Local Businesses-

Participated in interactive design workshops on operational/ servicing requirements, and provided local knowledge to support desired social behavior changes in the area.

C. Placemaking- Downtown New Westminster is a unique place, it has rich industrial history that prevails within the urban fabric that exists today. One of the most interesting features of the Mews is that it was designed to coexist with major historical goods movement corridors, including active rail lines and a truck route. Responding to its unique context in an authentic manner was an important design principle that was ultimately expressed in the standard of finish and materiality:

Paving Treatment-The bold paving treatment on the travel lane and sidewalk is a banding pattern, creating a distinct character for the Front Street Mews, creating a visual extension of the open public realm along the length of the Mews. The roll curb edge between the travel lane and the sidewalk promotes maximum accessibility to the businesses and promotes traffic calming by creating an urban plaza-like experience.

Public Art- Front Street Mews and the Front Street truck route are separated by a continuous 1.2m high custom precast concrete barrier wall painted with a public art mural. The mural, titled FLOW, has contributed to placemaking as a bold visual statement along the Mews.

Parklet- The owner of a vacant parcel fronting the Mews and the Bosa Development Corporation partnered with the City to design and construct a parklet, a fun and engaging family-friendly public space that functions on a day-to-day basis as well as for the Fridays on Front Event.

Recycled Materials- A number of unique, recycled materials were integrated into the streetscape that recall Downtown New Westminster's industrial past and celebrate the present. The historic streets of Downtown New Westminster were paved with granite pavers that were repurposed along the Mews. Salvaged cedar from fallen trees in the City was used to build the industrial-scale street furniture and custom bollards. In addition, portions of the street integrate recycled concrete from sidewalks replaced across the City.

D. Sustainability- Removing the two- storey parkade, including elimination of 400 parking stalls, resulting in a net gain of an animated streetscape and public realm the City. This dramatic transformation illustrates the City’s commitment to the development and enhancement of sustainable urban transportation in Downtown New Westminster.

E. Flexibility- Animated with street furniture, lighting, a parklet and public art, the Mews continues to evolve into a great place, inviting people to linger and socialize on a daily basis. The street was also designed to temporarily close to vehicular traffic to provide car-free space for large community events and festivals. The City partnered with the Downtown Business Association to plan a joint opening celebration of the Mews and the inaugural “Fridays on Front” event on July 7th 2017. The event attracted 20,000 people over the eight events hosted over the summer. The City will continue to monitor the number of people attending large events at the Mews.

3. Transferability to Other Canadian Communities and Organizations

This project was implemented as a result of asking ‘big’ questions early in the planning process that led to assessing the parking demand and identifying the parkade as one of the biggest obstacles to creating a successful public space along the Riverfront. The success of the Mews is largely attributed to the iterative phases of planning, extensive engagement and collaboration of multiple departments, a model that is transferable to other Canadian communities and various infrastructure projects.

4. Added Value

The transformation of half the parkade into a successful street, animated with public life, has inspired the City to review opportunities for public realm improvements below the remaining portion of the parkade. These opportunities include pavement treatments, improved lighting, pedestrian connectivity, flexible public space, recreational activities and event programming- adding value to the unique culture, character and economic vitality of Downtown New Westminster.



FRONT STREET MEWS APPENDIX

Project Partners

- Downtown Business Association
- New Westminster Arts Council
- New Westminster Public Art Advisory Committee
- Railroad Company
- Downtown Resident's Association
- Accessibility Advisory Committee
- ACTBiPed (Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee)
- Bosa Developments
- Local Businesses
- New Westminster Community

Consultants and Contractors

- Parkade Demolition Contractor:
Deramore Construction Services, Abbotsford BC

- Parkade Structural Engineer and Architectural Consultants:
Dialog, Vancouver BC

- Front Street Mews General Contractor:
Jack Cewe Ltd., Coquitlam BC

- Front Street Mews Urban Design Consultant:
Dialog, Vancouver BC

- Front Street Mews, Landscape Architectural Consultant:
PWL Partnership Inc.

- Front Street Mews, Civil Engineer:
McElhanney, Vancouver BC

- Front Street Mews, Public Artist:
Sandeep Johal, Vancouver BC

FRONT STREET MEWS TRANSFORMATION



parkade



front street mews



demolition

FRONT STREET MEWS PLACEMAKING



FRONT STREET MEWS FRIDAYS ON FRONT

