



Burnaby Heights residents want better transit, despite opposition from HMA

For Immediate Release

February 28, 2024

BURNABY – Movement is [mobilizing transit supporters](#) to speak up in support of a proposed new RapidBus that would link Burnaby Heights to the North Shore and to Metrotown. This effort is in response to a campaign from the Heights Merchants Association (HMA) who are campaigning to have the route [swerve around](#) their vibrant, walkable community. After engaging with Burnaby Heights residents, it became clear to Movement that the HMA does not speak for the people who live in the community.

“Whether you drive, take transit, or both, you’ll see two crucial problems with the HMA’s position: It ignores the fact that Burnabarians want better transit, and it will worsen the issues that have led to the loss of 40% of the neighbourhood’s businesses since 2014” said Denis Agar, Executive Director of Movement: Metro Vancouver Transit Riders. “The Heights’ strategy has focused on competing with Costco, which is akin to an haute-cuisine French restaurant pouring all their resources into competing with McDonald’s.”

Movement is announcing a [petition](#) to support better transit in Burnaby Heights. The petition calls for the proposed RapidBus to run along Hastings, instead of the detour proposed by the HMA, which would reduce transit on Hastings. Last Sunday, Movement volunteers spoke with pedestrians on Hastings. Almost everyone was supportive of better transit. As of 4pm on February 28th, Movement has already gathered 260 names, most of whom are Burnabarians.

Quotes about better transit on Hastings:

“Thousands of BCIT students rely on public transit to get to school and work each day. It’s essential that expanded rapid transit options prioritize critical corridors such as Hastings so that trips can be seamless, speedy, and provide access to restaurants, shopping, and housing.”

- Jimmy Wang, VP External of the BCIT Student Association

“Diverting BRT to Boundary would be a tragic loss of opportunity for the region and The Heights. It’s the neighbourhood I grew up in, live in, and it’s one that is built from the ground up on the strength of its foot traffic. It’s a neighbourhood of people, for people, and to deny it the chance to really shine with premiere transit and a connection to 2 cities would be a crying shame. I love The Heights, it’s always been accessible to me as a walker and transit user, and I’d like for others to have that same opportunity to enjoy a real gem of Burnaby.”

-Spencer Powell, Movement volunteer, small business owner and Burnaby Heights resident

“A rapid bus along Boundary and up 1st Avenue then to Halifax would be a waste. There is little residential and virtually no commercial (in fact it is quite industrial) along this route. The bus route should serve the residents near Hastings and it would go right past all the businesses in the Heights.”

- Petition respondent

Why businesses in Burnaby Heights are closing

The main trends impacting businesses in Burnaby Heights are cost inflation and a stagnant population. Between 2001 and 2021, the population of Burnaby Heights increased by 0.26% per year (1/6th of the region's growth rate) while retail property values skyrocketed. The Heights was designed for locals before the age of the automobile, with walking, cycling, and transit in mind. This makes sense, considering how pedestrian-friendly the Heights truly is. Merchants that rely primarily on locals need an increase in population to match increasing rents.

The HMA's proposal will take a transit lifeline away from Burnaby Heights residents

Movement has received an earful from residents who are struggling to rely on the existing transit service. Tens of thousands currently use routes like the R5 and 222 to commute, but they're too slow and too crowded. Last Sunday, Movement volunteers spoke with multiple Burnaby Heights residents who use the 222 to commute. They told us that on many occasions the bus was already full by the time it got to the Heights, forcing them to take a \$20 cab ride. The 222 will be replaced by the new RapidBus, and under the HMA's proposal, it will be removed from Burnaby Heights.

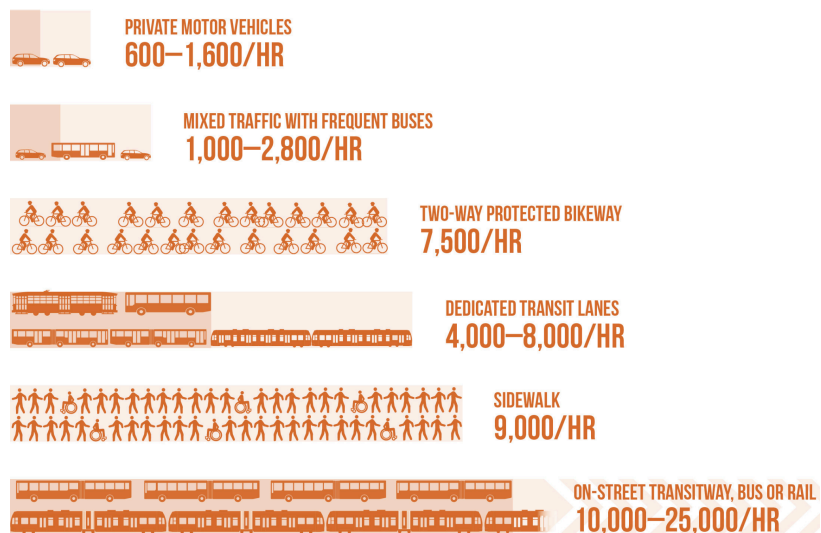
The vision for better transit in the Heights

Currently, there are HOV lanes on Hastings that are in effect for about 3 hours per weekday. During those times, buses, as well as cars with 2 or more passenger and emergency vehicles are allowed to use these lanes. Outside of those times, the lanes are used for free parking.

It is essentially impossible to eliminate congestion for cars, but buses are much more space-efficient. An all-day bus lane would allow thousands of people per hour to access Burnaby Heights, far more than the 1 parking space per business that would have to be removed. Bus lanes are also quite an affordable measure, as they can be installed with simply a change of signage. The one on Hastings would be similar to the ones on 41st Avenue

in Vancouver, Willingdon St in Burnaby, or Marine Drive in North Vancouver. To be effective, these lanes would need to be in effect from 7am to 7pm, 7 days per week.

Bus lanes have been shown in this region to make transit more competitive, more reliable, and they actually reduce the number of buses needed to run the service. These savings can be re-invested to provide more capacity, alleviating the overcrowding that is common in the Heights.



A dedicated bus lane can move far more people than a mixed traffic lane. Credit: NACTO

How Burnaby Heights businesses can survive in the 21st Century

Neighbourhoods that we now covet with street cafes, restaurants, and patios were almost universally built around transit. Burnaby Heights is no exception, originally built around a streetcar service that started in 1908. This is why it never had parking lots in front of the businesses, like 200 St in Langley, for example. Parking lots only became common decades later, in the era of the automobile. In the streetcar era, residents would walk to shops on Hastings St. on their way to the streetcar stop.

Today, those with cars have a wide array of shopping options within a short drive. But there are still many people who prefer to live in a neighbourhood where they can walk to the things they need, as we did 100 years ago. As evidence for this, [note that the most walkable neighbourhoods are often the most desirable](#). The people who move to Burnaby Heights to live a walkable lifestyle will be loyal customers to local businesses.

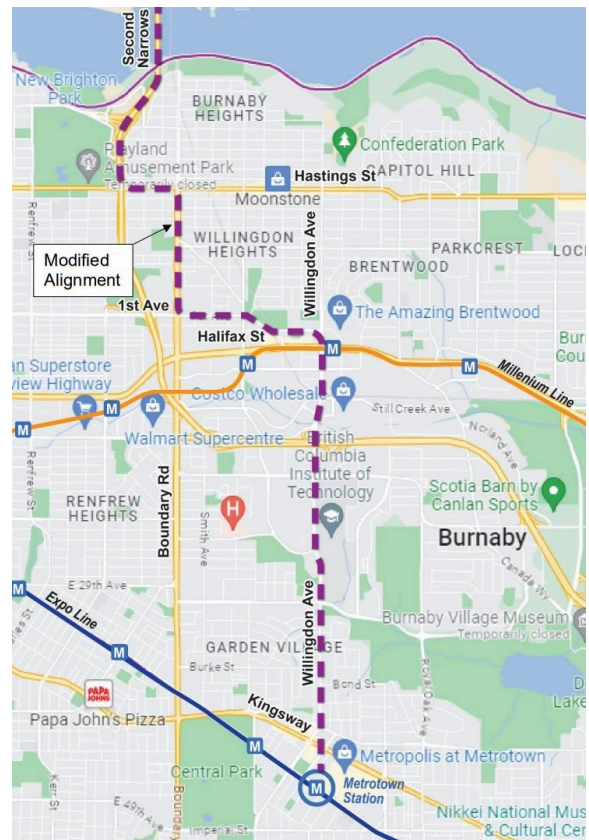
Burnaby Heights businesses can make up for higher costs by attracting new residents that prefer to shop locally. How? By becoming the most walkable, family-friendly neighbourhood in Metro Vancouver. With the new North Van-Metrotown RapidBus and all-day bus lanes, The Heights could have fast, frequent transit in all four directions. This is a dream for many, especially as the cost of even a used car hits \$40,000. Young families feel stuck - they can't get ahead because costs keep rising. One way to cope is to ditch the second car, but this is only possible if they have lots of useful destinations within walking distance, and good transit to everywhere else. With this new RapidBus, the Heights could be that dream neighbourhood for many potential residents.

For this to work, many thousands more housing units will be needed. But the good news is that the HMA is already very supportive of new housing, and new provincial legislation has made it easier to build. Fast, reliable transit is the missing link.

The HMA's alternate routing doesn't pass the smell test

The HMA is making the argument that the alternative routing is better for riders. But when you take a walk along that corridor, it's hard to take that argument seriously. Indeed, much of that corridor doesn't have sidewalks at all, so walking isn't an option. Between high-voltage power lines, cemeteries, and motorcycle dealerships, it just doesn't seem like the right place for a major investment like this, especially when passengers on Hastings are getting passed up by full buses already.

Also, community members on Halifax Street are starting to mobilize against the alternate proposal, with concerns that a bus lane would eliminate parking in an area with no alternatives for blocks in any direction.



The HMA's proposed alternative routing
Credit: City of Burnaby

Conclusion

Movement urges the HMA, TransLink and the City of Burnaby to make Burnaby Heights a place where buses are fast, frequent and reliable in all directions. Run the proposed RapidBus down Hastings from Willingdon to Boundary, and provide all-day bus lanes so everyone can rely on it. Do it not only for the residents who deserve better services, but do it for the merchants who will benefit from population growth.

Movement's next steps

- Movement members will be presenting to the TransLink Mayors' Council and Burnaby city council, imploring them to improve transit in the Heights.
- Movement will continue canvassing in Burnaby Heights, spreading awareness and gathering names.
- Movement is seeking institutions, unions, and other organizations to support our petition. Please contact us below if you'd be interested in providing a quote of support, or if you'd like to suggest an organization to sign on.

Contact:

Denis Agar
Executive Director
Movement: Metro Vancouver Transit Riders
denis@transitmovement.ca
778-776-8806

Appendix: More Quotes from petition respondents

"I've lived in the area for many years and The Heights is a walking neighbourhood. Instead of forcing seniors and other bus riders to hike up the hill from Boundary we should make every businesses accessible to folks."

"I use the bus daily! Frequent and reliable transit is NECESSARY for someone who lives near Hastings street and needs to get to work on time. I frequently have to wait for a late bus only to get on an extremely crowded bus. Good transit is what makes a city livable, not more parking spots!"

"As someone who has lived more than 20 years in the Heights and absolutely loves the community, better and faster transit would make a huge positive impact on the quality of life of myself, my family, and my neighbours."

"This neighborhood has so much character and charm and deserve better access by locals, many of whom do not drive. We need to prioritize improved public transit to this area!"

"I ride and walk around the heights frequently. It's a mess. Way too many cars on Hastings from Boundary to Kensington. This new bus route is so great. Some short term discomfort while we all Adapt and then it will be great. We must work towards climate action and this is a great way to start. Thanks!"

"A rapid bus along Boundary and up 1st Avenue then to Halifax would be a waste. There is little residential and virtually no commercial (in fact it is quite industrial) along this route. The bus route should serve the residents near Hastings and it would go right past all the businesses in the Heights."

“I used to take this route a lot as part of my former commute from Burnaby (Metrotown area) to CapU. It took way too long! But while I was staring out the window on the bus, I discovered several favourite local businesses along Hastings, and would occasionally stop for a sandwich, snacks or dinner on my way to and from campus. I would not have discovered or patronized these businesses if the bus was routed through an industrial area.”