

# WHEELABILITY ASSESSMENT PROJECT

## Survey Results

### Introduction:

The purpose of this pilot project is to improve mobility and enhance active transportation options for people who are reliant on scooters, wheelchairs, walkers, walking sticks and other mobility aids. A key component of the project was to actively involve people who use mobility aids. To this end, a working group was established to inform the project; two assessment days were held; and a survey was conducted. The intent of the survey was to enable input by those people who may not want to take a more active role such as sitting on the working group or assessing the built environment.

In total, 121 people completed the ‘wheelability’ survey, with just over 60% of respondents, who identified their age, being 65 years or older. Regarding mobility aid used, walker was the most often cited response, followed by walking stick, scooter, manual and power wheelchair. About 30% of respondents reported that they use more than one mobility aid to get around – e.g., both a walker and walking stick or both a manual and power wheelchair. Regarding neighbourhood in which the mobility aid is used, far more respondents cited the Uptown as compared to the Downtown. Reasons cited for preferring the Uptown included availability of services; flatter or more level topography; newer and more accessible infrastructure; and a perception that it is safer.

The following summary is based on the survey results. Please note that the bracketed number after a response indicates the number of respondents with a like or similar response.

### Results:

#### 1. What is your age range?

• 19 and under .....	00	.....	00.0	%
• 20-34 .....	02	.....	01.6	%
• 35-49 .....	18	.....	14.9	%
• 50-64 .....	24	.....	19.8	%
• 65-79 .....	46	.....	38.0	%
• 80 and older .....	21	.....	17.4	%
• Not specified * .....	<u>10</u>	.....	08.3	%
	121			

\* Typically refers to a respondent with a mobility aid who has e-mailed information but has provided no or only limited profile information (e.g., age, type of mobility aid used, etc.).

**2. Which of the following mobility aids do you use to get around New Westminster? \*\***

• Scooter .....	27	.....	22.3	%
• Power wheelchair .....	18	.....	14.9	%
• Manual wheelchair .....	20	.....	16.5	%
• Walker .....	49	.....	40.5	%
• Walking stick (cane) ...	28	.....	23.1	%
• Not specified .....	10	.....	08.3	%
• Other .....	01	.....	00.8	%
- Disabled Tricycle				

\*\* About 30% of respondents who identified a mobility aid reported that they used more than one mobility aid to get around – e.g., both a walker and a walking stick. As such, the percentages do not add up to 100 percent.

• Singular .....	79	.....	65.3	%
• Multiple .....	32	.....	26.4	%
• Not specified .....	<u>10</u>	.....	08.3	%
	121			

**3. In which areas of New Westminster do you use your mobility aid? \*\*\***

• Uptown .....	94	.....	77.7	%
• Downtown .....	42	.....	34.7	%
• Not specified .....	10	.....	08.3	%
• Other .....	14	.....	11.6	%
- City .....	03			
- Metro Vancouver ...	01			
- Metrotown .....	01			
- Queensborough .....	01			
- Queens Park .....	02			
- Sapperton .....	04			
- West End .....	02			

\*\*\* About 35% of respondents who identified a neighbourhood reported that they used their mobility aid in more than one neighbourhood – e.g., both the Uptown and the Downtown. As such, the percentages do not add up to 100 percent.

**4. If you use your mobility aid to get between Uptown and Downtown New Westminster, what route(s) do you prefer to use and why?**

Multiple Responses:

- Do not or rarely go Downtown due to the steepness of the hills. (15)
- Use Sixth Street – e.g., direct, interesting, power sources, safe, etc. (10)
- Use HandyDart, public transit or taxi to get between Uptown and Downtown. (9)
- Do not travel between Uptown and Downtown. (7)
- Usually drive between Uptown and Downtown. (6)
- Use Eighth Street – e.g., most direct way to Century House, etc. (5)
- Use Tenth Street, Royal Avenue, and Eighth or Sixth Streets. (5)
- The Downtown is inaccessible unless you are going east to west or vice versa. (4)
- Not too familiar with the Downtown – i.e., I tend to avoid it. (2)

Individual Responses:

- Coburg Street to Second Street; Second Street to Eighth Avenue; Eighth Avenue to Sixth Street; and Sixth Street to Third Avenue.
- Despite the steep hill, I use Sixth Street. It is the most traveled and the best route from a safety point-of-view. I tend to avoid many Downtown streets after dark.
- Due to the hills, I use a taxi cab or my husband drives.
- I have not been Downtown in several years.
- I have recently moved to New Westminster. It would be helpful to know the most accessible, direct and safest routes between Uptown and Downtown.
- I live in the Uptown because it is relatively level and, for the most part, accessible.
- I often take the bus to get to the SkyTrain station.
- I prefer the Uptown as it has more conveniences and the sidewalks are in better shape.
- My only trip to the Downtown was scary. I got halfway down the hill and realized it was beyond my abilities. Coming back up the hill was worse.
- Primarily use Eighth Street.
- Take the C-4 bus between Downtown and Uptown.
- The Downtown is not too safe. I only visit when I absolutely have to do so.
- The furthest south that I travel is Third Avenue. After that, it is far too steep.
- The older age and poorer condition of sidewalks located in the Downtown as compared to those in the Uptown. As a result, the Downtown is far less accessible.
- There are few options in the Downtown given the steep slopes.
- Use Eighth Street as it is the most direct route to Century House.
- Use Eighth Street between the Quay and the Uptown.
- Use Eighth Street, Sixth Avenue and Seventh Street.
- Use Eighth Street to Third Avenue.
- Use Fourth and Sixth Streets. I know where the best ramps are located along that route and which obstacles to avoid.
- Use Sixth Street as it is more likely that I will find a power source to charge my scooter.

- Use Sixth Street at it is the most interesting and safest.
- Use the 106 and 123 buses.
- Usually travel by car with my parents.

**5. What barriers or obstacles do you experience when using your mobility aid in Uptown or Downtown New Westminster?**

Multiple Responses:

- Poor design of curb cuts – i.e., central location and slope force users out into the traffic, pronounced lips, small size, etc. (19)
- Presence of steep slopes, especially in the Downtown. (13)
- Too many different surface treatments – e.g., asphalt, brick, cement, cobble, etc. (12)
- Poor construction practices – e.g., inadequate signage, lack of alternative routes, etc. (11)
- Insufficient time for mobility aid users to safely cross at signalized pedestrian crossings – e.g., Eighth Avenue at Seventh Street. (10)
- Issues related to SkyTrain accessibility – e.g., crowded cars, inoperable elevators, etc. (9)
- Lack of snow removal on sidewalks – i.e., need to more strictly enforce bylaws. (7)
- Numerous cross slopes on sidewalks – i.e., driveways crossing sidewalks. This can cause mobility aid users to lose their balance, especially when it is icy or snowy. (7)
- Placement of sandwich boards which can block or limit freedom of movement. (6)
- Use of decorative inlaid bricks in sidewalks – i.e., they crack and lift overtime. (6)
- Inconsistency in design of curb cuts – i.e., each intersection is an adventure and presents its own set of challenges. (5)
- Many sidewalk sections are lifted as a result to tree roots – e.g., Sixth Street at 7-11. (5)
- Poor condition of Carnarvon Street between Tenth and Eighth Streets – i.e., cracked, lifted, missing and sunken sidewalk. (5)
- Poor design and maintenance of railway crossing at Begbie and Front Streets – e.g., ruts and trip hazards. (5)
- Poorly maintained sidewalks – i.e., the repairs often present their own trip hazards. (5)
- Presence of overgrown or overhanging vegetation bordering sidewalks. (5)
- Many businesses are not that accessible – e.g., narrow doors and aisles. (4)
- Placement of push buttons for cross-walks – e.g., difficult to reach, too high, etc. (4)
- Placement of utility poles which restricts access and acts to narrow the sidewalk. (4)
- Use the roads – e.g., fewer obstacles, smoother, etc. (4)
- Use of sidewalk merchandising which limits the useable size of the sidewalk. (4)
- The curb cuts at the intersection of Carnarvon and Eighth Streets direct mobility aid users out into the traffic. (4)
- Lack of accessible bus stops in the Downtown. (3)
- Lack of curb cuts in the Queens Park neighbourhood. (2)
- Many doorway transitions are poorly ramped. (2)
- Many public toilets are too small to provide adequate space in order to easily access toilets and use wash basins. Accessibility often seems an afterthought. (2)
- Poor design of ramp at City Hall – i.e., narrow, steep, etc. (2)

## Individual Responses:

- Although much of the sidewalks throughout Downtown New Westminster seem to have been updated fairly recently, there are areas (such as where I live in Sapperton) where the sidewalk is crumbling and in need of replacement. Additionally, some of the curb cuts in this area are angled in such a way that a person using them is forced to go into oncoming traffic before turning to cross the street with the light. Because of Royal Columbia Hospital, there is the potential for many people with mobility challenges to frequent this area but also the possibility of falls and other accidents due to some of the outdated sidewalks.
- Deal with the curb cut at First Street and Eighth Avenue.
- Despite the \$1.5 million spent on Hyack Square, this public space is now less wheelchair, stroller and disability accessible than it was before (due to the construction of more stairs that are ostensibly amphitheatre benches).
- Given the number of heritage buildings in the Downtown, this neighbourhood is far less accessible than the Uptown. Many older buildings incorporate stairs at entrance ways and do not have elevators.
- I am new to area and have noticed a lack of curb cuts and a number of uneven sidewalks. Many stores do not have automatic doors or ramps, which make them difficult to access. There are also a large number of obstacles on the sidewalk.
- I cannot take the community shuttle with a walker.
- I avoid buses as passengers tend to glare and scowl when the driver deploys the lift and waits until I am stationary.
- I find that the ramps vary in the 'curb' lip. Some of them are so high that it really jolts my scooter and my system when I go over them.
- I have worked for 20-plus years in construction management and project development, and I am sympathetic to the demands of ongoing construction projects. The problems related to construction and accessibility could be forestalled with proper planning and forethought. Getting anyone at City Hall to pay enough attention to actually look at any these problems is like pulling teeth.
- I refer to the writings of Jocelyn Tomkinson in her 'Tenth to the Fraser' blog on September 15, 2009: "Since the construction of the Westminster Quay Public Market and the redevelopment of the Quayside area in the mid-80s, level, safe access to this new public space on the other side of the railroad tracks has been difficult for pedestrians and tourists. If you can't do stairs because of a mobility impairment, age or the need to use a grocery basket or stroller, street access is not an option for you. The pedestrian overpass has several flights of stairs on either side of the railroad tracks making it inaccessible to all but the most able-bodied people and those without small children in tow. Given that ours is a city of elders and young families, this seems like a large proportion of the population to exclude when building an access route to the City's biggest attraction. This lack of attention to accessibility is even more curious given that the Quayside social housing co-operatives have some of the only adapted housing for people with disabilities in the area."
- Inconsistent pedestrian walk times allotted for intersections. What is the standard?
- It is difficult to cross at intersections given the number of pedestrians. You are often the last person to enter the crosswalk, which leaves you less time to cross.

- Lack of a pedestrian island or median on Royal Avenue at Sixth Street. Given the width of this route, there needs to be a refuge or safe place if one is unable to cross during the given time.
- Lack of accessibility on the east side of Fourth Street between Clarkson and Cunningham Streets – e.g., missing curb cut at back alley, narrow sidewalk, poor placement of signage and utility poles, etc.
- Lack of accessibility to upper Begbie Plaza at the Provincial Courthouse (accessed off of Agnes Street). The use of cobblestones, which are very uneven and are separated by large gaps, make it impossible for mobility aid users to enter and use the plaza.
- Lack of bus stops on Sixth Street between Columbia Street and Royal Avenue.
- Lack of consistency in curb cut design – i.e., some off the side; some to the right; some to the left; some smooth and wide; others narrow and difficult to negotiate.
- Lack of curb cuts on Second Street heading north towards Seventh Avenue.
- Lack of elevators to access upper floors of buildings – e.g., New West Arts Council.
- Lack of snow removal. Not so much with apartments but with single family homes. I can understand a 24-hour delay but not days on end. Newspaper notices are of no avail.
- Lack of snow removal from roads and sidewalks. The problem is not so much a lack of City work crews clearing snow where necessary, but, what I feel, is a lack of bylaw enforcement where it concerns businesses and private homes.
- Limited access to public toilets at Westminster Centre. Those using manual wheelchairs or walkers cannot open the door (unless someone assists). Once inside, it is impossible to leave until someone opens the door. There is a need to install a push-button automatic door opener. This public toilet also has a baby change table which folds down in front of the door, which blocks access to the toilet.
- Limited access to the Quay. It is difficult and potentially dangerous to cross the railway tracks at the Begbie crossing. Often, my walker wheels get stuck, which is scary. There are limited alternatives, given the stairs at Hyack Square and the distance to the McInnis overpass.
- Limited accessibility on Begbie Street between Columbia and Carnarvon Streets – e.g., curb cuts which direct users out into the traffic, no curb cuts on north side of Carnarvon Street (which makes it impossible to cross), etc.
- Location of bicycle racks on sidewalks – i.e., they are often in the way and I have to divert around them. This is more of a problem when bicycles are parked in them.
- Many businesses do not have automatic entry doors and when they do, they often do not work.
- Many curb cuts do not align with crosswalks, which forces one out into traffic in order to get back into the crosswalk.
- Many sidewalks are too narrow to allow a mobility aid user and a companion to travel side-by-side. As such, it makes it difficult to socialize.
- Many stores have heavy doors which are difficult to open and get through with a walker.
- Many years ago, I was on the City's Disability Advisory Committee.
- Most of the Uptown is walker-friendly. There are some missing curb cuts and uneven sidewalks but I know which intersections and areas to avoid.

- My major frustration is the lack of consistency with regard to curb ramp design. It seems that the design changes every few years or so. Regarding earlier designs, I don't know how they were ever approved, given that they restrict access to the intersection and direct the user out into traffic. This raises the issue of testing. Currently, and in the past, has the City ever involved mobility aid users in testing curb ramps?
- Narrow sidewalks on Sixth Avenue between Sixth and Eighth Streets. The usable portion of these sidewalks is even narrower given sidewalk merchandising at the 'Golden Coin' and the 'Happy Dollar.' This pushes people with mobility limitations out towards the curb. They must also contend with the crowds of people who use this sidewalk.
- Placement of elevators within buildings – i.e., they can be difficult to locate or are located in remote areas which raises concerns about safety.
- Poor condition of sidewalks in the City. Even some of the newer sections (e.g., along Sixth Street between Sixth and Eighth Avenues) are made so that traveling along them is much like driving on a piffled or rut-filled road. It is jarring and uncomfortable. Anybody with back problems or constant pain would feel the effects.
- Poor condition of the sidewalk along Princess Street (near Eighth Street) – i.e., cracked, lifted and very steep.
- Poor condition of the sidewalk along the south side of Seventh Avenue between Fifth and Sixth Streets.
- Poor condition of the sidewalk at Eight and Hamilton Streets. The broken sidewalk has caused me to fall five times in a three-month period.
- Poor condition of sidewalks in the Downtown.
- Poor design of elevator as the Police Services building. This elevator is difficult to use if you have a scooter or wheelchair. You have to exit the entryway to open the door to access the elevator.
- Poor visibility when using curb cuts located along north side of Sixth Avenue between Sixth and Eighth Streets. I have almost been struck by exiting cars on two occasions.
- Positioning of 'push-bar button' to open automatic door when exiting Royal City Centre at Sixth Avenue and Sixth Street. It is difficult to reach by a scooter user.
- Ramp from bus is too narrow to exit safely.
- Recognize that accessibility equates to independence for those who use a mobility aid.
- Regarding access to Columbia Square, the contractor has opened up a laneway suitable for wheelchair access from Tenth Street. It was rough and unpaved – one had to be careful with potholes, but, going slowly and carefully, it was eminently serviceable. The contractor has now widened that laneway and opened it up to vehicular traffic. There is no sidewalk; it is still rough and unpaved. Given that a wheelchair user has to weave a way around the rough patches, playing dodgem with vehicles makes this entrance unusable. The sidewalk to the south of Columbia Square has been finished, but it leads on to the middle of the parking lot. Again, no sidewalk and one is dodging traffic. The solution is to block vehicular traffic from the road entrance to Tenth Street and to restrict that to a laneway for pedestrians until the sidewalks are completed. This would entail a minor inconvenience for drivers, as they would have to go half a block to another entrance, but it would be a major step in terms of pedestrian safety.

- Regarding the sidewalk on Columbia Street, running west from Tenth Street (SkyTrain access), one of the pylons for the overpass creates a dangerous blind spot. Cyclists have no way of seeing what's coming the other way. I have been narrowly missed, and I am surprised that a parent with a stroller has not been smacked. It's a narrow space, perhaps the fence could be moved back. At the very least, there should be a warning sign to cyclists. With Carnarvon Street of no use to me to get to SkyTrain, this sidewalk is my only access. The temporary security fence also needs to be pushed back a foot or two in a couple of places. This will not interfere with construction.
- Some benches at bus stops are located very close to the curb which limits access by those with mobility aids – e.g., in front of bakery on south side of Sixth Street.
- Some curb cuts are not connected to crosswalks. Given that it takes longer for someone with a mobility aid to cross the street, this is a safety issue. For example, the intersection at Carnarvon and Lorne Streets.
- Some curb cuts are not even or level with the asphalt which creates a trip hazard. Often, I have to lift my walker to get over the lip.
- Some cyclists, who use the sidewalk, provide very little warning when approaching you.
- The Central Valley Greenway, while a really pleasant pathway system, incorporates steep sections that make it difficult, or impossible, for people using mobility aids to travel.
- The City seems to be undergoing something of an overhaul as far as construction and development goes, which can cause additional difficulties for people using wheelchairs and other mobility aids. Because New Westminster is essentially situated on and around a hill (and quite a steep one at that), accessible pedestrian routes to some locations are minimal, even in normal circumstances. When construction happens (such as is happening around Columbia and Tenth Streets), some locations (such as Columbia Square) are rendered completely inaccessible for people with mobility limitations. Proposed detours often require pedestrians to walk a number of blocks uphill, which can be difficult (or dangerous) for someone using a mobility aid such as a wheelchair or walker. I have actually had a couple of minor falls as a result of this situation.
- The crosswalk at Sixth Avenue and Ninth Street is unusable by scooters and wheelchairs and is very difficult to use by baby strollers, bicycles and shopping carriers. On the Moody Park side, there are steps but no ramp. Anyone using a scooter or wheelchair trying to cross to the park is trapped on the road surface.
- The major problem is that the City has given developers carte blanche with no direction or oversight as to sidewalks. On the south side of Carnarvon Street there are no sidewalks, with the only access to the SkyTrain via Columbia Street and that's not a sidewalk – it's a narrow unkempt laneway. The northwest corner of Carnarvon and Eighth Streets has a camber that is all wrong, which is nothing the City can fix. Insisting that developers maintain sidewalk access is something that the City can fix.
- The railway crossing at Begbie Street is in a seemingly permanent state of semi-disrepair. I got stuck, not in the tracks, but in the ruts between the tracks about a year ago. I understand that a permanent and safe crossing is in the works.
- There are too many inconsiderate and impatient drivers. They make you feel 'bad' for having to take longer to cross the road.
- The curb in the driveway at the lower exit of the Student Union building at Douglas College prevents me from using the entrance and exit.

- There are a number of obstacles along the north side of Princess Street between Sixth and Eighth Streets.
- There are some curbs that are not ramped between First and Fourth Streets and Sixth and Eighth Avenues.
- There are some rough patches near the mall at Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue – e.g., cracks, crumbling cement, missing bricks, etc.
- There is a need to improve Fourth Avenue at the Pine and Third Street intersections.
- There is nothing more frustrating than getting to the end of a block and finding that there is no curb cut. There is a need for better signage and more information in order to make informed decisions.
- Too much emphasis is being placed on bikes at the expense of other wheeled devices. While a cyclist can dismount to bypass an obstacle, I don't have this option.
- Until last week, access to Columbia Square was very dangerous – i.e., no sidewalks. Then the contractor not only dug up the sidewalk to the south of Columbia Street but also blocked off all access from Tenth Street. Instructing people use Royal Avenue is far too steep, even for a power scooter. Here, the City has abdicated responsibility and provided no planning or direction to the contractor. This was remedied after I raised a major fuss.
- While I understand the argument that the City must make all sidewalks accessible prior to correcting existing, poorly designed curb cuts, the latter still places many users at risk. As such, dollars must be allocated to both.
- While my walker is a godsend, I have come to appreciate its limitations. A half-inch rise in the sidewalk can result in quite a jolt and even a fall.
- While there are many challenges in Uptown New Westminster, there is a need to address accessibility-related issues throughout the City. I operate a scooter in Queensborough and there are many areas that are completely inaccessible.

### **Positive Responses:**

Several survey respondents made positive comments.

- I have traveled in other municipalities and, for the most part, we are one of the best off from an accessibility standpoint.
- I applaud the efforts of Engineering in consulting with mobility aid users.
- Recently, there has been a real improvement in curb cut design – e.g., Columbia Street.
- Thank you for the opportunity to provide my input. I look forward to the forum.
- The pedestrian overpass across McBride Boulevard at Sixth Street is well designed as it incorporates intermittent and level rest areas instead of a continuous rise.
- There has been a noticeable shift to create a more bicycle and pedestrian-friendly City. This shift has benefited mobility aid users and should be applauded.
- There are several champions within City Hall who advocate on behalf of people with disabilities but there needs to be more if real and sustained change is to occur. This project is a good first step. Now, there is a need to follow it up with action.

- We are grateful for the improvements that the City has made for its walking citizens – e.g., signalized and zebra crossings in the Uptown and Downtown and shared sidewalks with healthy trees.

### **Suggestions:**

A number of survey respondents made suggestions to improve accessibility.

#### Multiple Responses:

- Designate accessible and safe routes for mobility aid users. (3)
- Ensure that bylaw enforcement officers are vigilant in enforcing bylaws – e.g., overhanging vegetation, sandwich boards, sidewalk merchandising, snow removal, etc. (3)
- Expand the project to over neighbourhoods – e.g., Queensborough and Sapperton. (3)
- Involve people with disabilities in infrastructure design and testing. (2)

#### Individual Responses:

- Create a more involved role for the Special Services and Access Committee.
- Develop a booklet on accessible routes and regulations governing mobility aid users.
- Enhance accessibility around Century House, the Public Library and Royal Centre Mall. There are many senior-oriented residences and a large number of mobility aid users.
- Ensure full accessibility to the new waterfront park at Westminster Pier.
- Ensure that curb cuts are sloped the entire width of the crosswalk – e.g., northwest side of Fifth Avenue at Sixth Street.
- Market the City as an accessible shopping and tourist destination.
- Paint curb cuts to make them easier to see for both pedestrians and motorists.
- Plant trees with constrained or limited root systems – i.e., this would result in less lifting of sidewalks.
- Provide training to City staff with regard to issues experienced by people with disabilities, including moving about the built environment.
- Publish the guidelines and standards related to pedestrian crossing times and trip hazards. This information should be publicly available on the City's website.
- Retain the services of an accessibility consultant to advise on major public projects.