

HUB Cycling Route Assessment

W14th Ave: Ontario St to Alder St

Alder St: 14th Ave to 7th Ave

Dates: 30 September 2017, 11 February 2018
Conditions: September: Overcast, Saturday morning (light traffic)
February: Sunny, Sunday afternoon (light traffic)

Introduction

As the city transforms 10th Avenue through the Hospital Precinct (Cambie St to Oak St) in 2017/2018, travel along the 10th Ave Bike Route will be significantly affected. To make it easier for east/west cyclists to get around this obstacle, the City has designated West 14th Avenue from the Ontario Bike Route to Alder Street as a “local street bike route” and Alder Street from 14th Ave to 7th Ave (the Off-Broadway Bike Route) as an “interim local street bike route”. See <http://vancouver.ca/streets-transportation/14th-avenue-and-alder-street-bike-route.aspx>

In addition to the bicycle traffic generated by this construction detour, W 14th Ave has been used as non-official bike route by local residents for some time. Furthermore, many students who attend L’Ecole Bilingue Elementary School (between Spruce St and Alder St on W 14th) ride their bicycles to and from school along W 14th Ave.

The Vancouver/UBC Local Committee of HUB Cycling assessed issues related to cycling on this route both before and after these routes were created.

Top issues



The width of the available lane in some sections is too narrow to support cycling and vehicular traffic at the same time due to a narrow road and parked vehicles on both sides of the street (“car canyons”)



Visibility at some intersections is poor



Vehicle speeds along some sections can be too high for comfort



Construction between Willow St and Heather St has the potential to impede traffic and reduce cyclist safety without proper traffic management



Top cycling safety issues identified on the new 14th Ave/Alder St Bike Routes

Lane Width

Particularly between Oak St and Willow St, the width of the road is insufficient to allow for both a motor vehicle and bicycle to travel in the lane. Parking is allowed on both sides of the street, which is already narrower than typical. This often results in unsafe passing behaviour by motorists. This is exacerbated by higher vehicle volumes from the medium-density housing in the neighbourhood.



There is insufficient width to safely pass between Oak St and Laurel St due to parked vehicles

Checking [BikeMaps.org](https://www.bikemaps.org), one can see that there have been multiple incidents reported along this stretch of W 14th, with a particular hotspot at W 14th and Laurel St.

A similar situation exists between Yukon St and Ontario St, where parking is permitted on both sides of the road. In that section, however, the road is wider and the danger from motorists passing people on bicycles is somewhat reduced.

Visibility at Intersections

At two intersections along these new bike routes, the ability for people on bicycles to see cross traffic is particularly bad. These intersections are the “joggle” at Heather St and W 14th Ave, and the intersection of Alder St and W 10th Ave.

At the “joggle”, W 14th Ave does not continue straight across Heather St. Instead, you must drive along a short section of Heather St to continue along W 14th. Visibility is especially bad heading westbound, looking north. The distance to parked cars along the east side of Heather St and the geometry of the intersection makes it difficult for westbound people on bicycles to see southbound motor vehicles until they are unsafely into the intersection. Note that another “joggle” at Columbia St does not have the same visibility issues.



Looking north at 14th Ave and Heather, heading westward

The situation is different at Alder St and W 10th Ave. The geometry of the intersection is regular, but visibility northbound is challenging. Vehicles parked close to the intersection on the south side of W 10th Ave obscure traffic along W 10th Ave in both directions.

Vehicle Speeds

Since November 2017, when 30 km/h speed limit signs were posted, there has been no apparent reduction in speeds along the route. Travelling at unsafe speeds is particularly noticeable in the reduced-width sections of the bike route, as the feeling of danger is elevated by the narrow lane and lack of “escape routes” for people on bicycles who feel endangered. Speeding occurs often where the route crosses Oak St, where motorists will “race” the changing light, and between Yukon St and Ontario St, where the wider roadway encourages higher speeds. One noticeable exception is the stretch between Heather St and Ash St, where there are speed bumps in place.

Construction

There is a major construction project happening between Willow St and Heather St, the “Heather Place” redevelopment. This has the potential to significantly affect travel along W 14th Ave unless there is a traffic management plan in place that ensures the safety of people on bicycles.



Major development project between Heather St and Willow St, with on the north side

Summary

The Alder St and W 14th Bike Routes are a welcome addition to the City’s bicycle network. Posting signs indicating the presence of a bike route, 30 km/h speed limit, and the reorientation of several stop signs along Alder St have made the unofficial route somewhat safer.

Several challenges are outstanding, however. In particular, the segment between Oak St and Willow St feels quite unsafe by most people on bicycles and the number of issues reported on BikeMaps.org reflects this concern. This is a relatively high-volume, narrow travel lane pinch point that is common on narrow neighbourhood roads in Vancouver. Addressing this concern must be a priority if the city is aiming to provide safe cycling routes for people of all ages.

The remaining challenges identified in this report could be resolved with limited traffic calming measures and the reassessment of parking restrictions in certain areas.

The 14th Ave Bike Route and Alder St Bike Route connector have the potential to be good alternatives to east-west travel during the Hospital Precinct construction period, as well as providing good neighbourhood bicycle routes, servicing the local community and the L'Ecole Bilingue school population.