Ongoing issues with the Pitt River Bridge Cycling infrastructure (DRAFT, 6 feb 2013)

Introduction

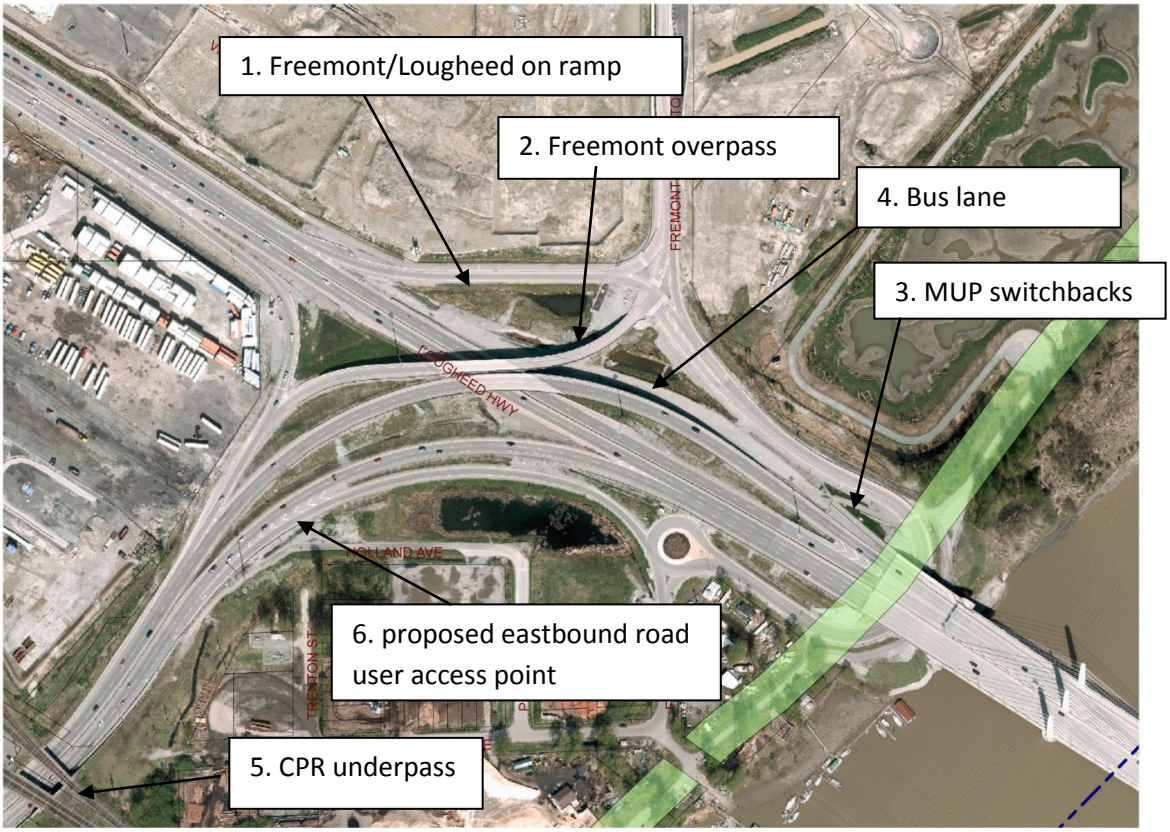
Despite the bridge being open now for several years, there are still many outstanding problems with its cycling infrastructure. Local cyclists and cycling advocates actively and in good faith participated in the public consultation phase of the PRB project and were generally pleased with the outcome, which included changes to the conceptual plan to better accommodate cycling. Unfortunately, the finished product bears little resemblance to the conceptual plan from the standpoint of cycling access.

In our opinion, the main issues can be fixed with negligible expenditure and would greatly improve the connectivity of the regional bicycling network. The Pitt River Bridge is a key link, not only for cars, but especially for cyclists who have no other option if they wish to cross the Pitt River. The bridge includes a built-in 2m wide MUP for recreational users on the north side which connects with a paved MUP on the north side of Lougheed and also provide access to the PoCo trail.

It is important to distinguish between two user classes of cyclists. The existing facilities do a reasonable job of addressing the recreational user, although there are some issues with the layout. Commuter cyclists, who are generally travelling much larger distances, at higher rates of speed, require much lower cost facilities. Generally they can get by with using existing shoulders along major arterial routes. We are very concerned at the recent restrictions imposed on commuter cyclists since the new bridge was finished. In addition there are some issues with the MUP that should be addressed.

For commuter cyclists, access over the river has actually become more challenging since the bridge was completed. Formerly road cyclists could access the eastbound shoulder of the old bridge from Lougheed. This is no longer possible. Westbound cyclists used to be able to directly connect with Maryhill after crossing the bridge. Now they must use a convoluted MUP network that primarily serves the needs of recreational cyclists and does not offer a direct route.

Map showing location of areas of concern: (from PoCo GIS webserver)



1. Cycling prohibition: Freemont connector to Lougheed, westbound

(Photo courtesy G. McFadden)

At the entrance ramp from Freemont to Lougheed (westbound) there is a sign prohibiting cyclists from using the wide shoulder on Lougheed. This is the only place on Lougheed where there is such a restriction. Cycislts are free to ride on the shoulder at all other locations. The shoulder is ~ 2m wide. The speed limit is 60km/hr. There are no challenges here for average road cyclists. A good example of a comparable structure where cycling is permitted is the shoulder on the xxx bridge. Recreational weekend cyclists have an alternative off-road MUP which is adjacent to this area.

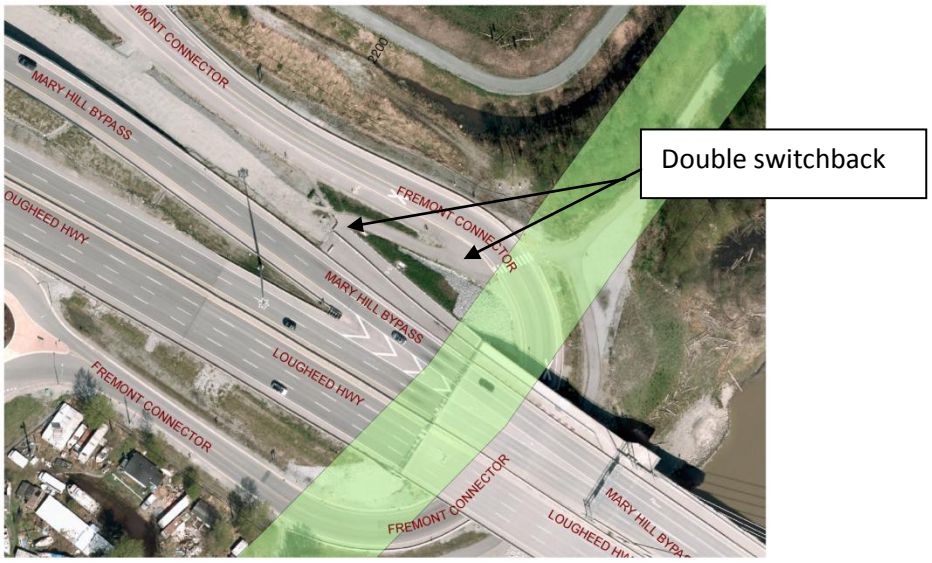
2. Cycling prohibition: Freemont overpass to Maryhill bypass.

(Photo courtesy G. McFadden)

The Freemont overpass provided key access for commuters travelling from PoCo or points east to the Maryhill Bypass. There is a 2m wide shoulder. Cars are travelling at low speeds (50 km/hr posted limit). There is no credible reason for prohibiting cyclists from using this ramp.

3. Switchbacks on western end of Pitt River Bridge mixed use path

(Photo from PoCo GIS webserver)



The current design of the multi use path (MUP) on the Pitt River bridge has a serious problem on its western end. Riders are forced to make two very sharp 180 degree switchbacks to bring them down to the MUP onto the Freemont Connector. The switchbacks are a hazard for cyclists particularly in the winter during icy conditions. Tandem riders and cyclists with trailers may not be able to negotiate the switchbacks at the best of times. The design of the switchbacks isn't supported by any design guidelines that we are aware of. We can see no reason for the switchbacks, and request that they be removed and replaced with a single straight connection. We have been requesting help on this for over three years. A video of the situation is available here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYL3no0eo_A

Another problem is that after descending down the switchbacks the cross walk is placed in the apex of the curve for the Freemont Connectors. Cars approaching from the east are going downhill and then veer right onto the cross walk. Cars coming from the south veer left across it. Pedestrians (and people on or walking bikes) on the South side of the Freemont connector have to look across about 270 degrees to ensure there is no traffic. First to their left, and can only see about 100m to the crest of the hill. Then to their right where they can only see about 75m under the bridge. The cross walk should be 100-200m farther west where the connector is straight and driver's attention is directly ahead to see people crossing. The users of the cross walk would then only need to look across 180 degrees and have a longer distance to view incoming traffic. By coincidence, possibly the best location is where the extension of the walkway from the bridge hits the existing sidewalk (currently an unofficial dirt track through a ditch.)

4. Bus lane:

There is a new bus lane being constructed to channel buses under the Freemont connector directly onto Lougheed (westbound). This lane has a width of 24 feet and could easily support a 2 m shoulder on the north side. Access to this lane was temporarily granted in the fall of 2012 as shown below, however, the concrete dividers have now been closed back up.

5. CP rail underpass

This is a longer term issue, however we can see no good reason why there cannot be a shoulder on the south side of the eastbound lane on the Maryhill bypass where it passes under the CP rail tracks just west of the bridge. This would require relocation of the road markings by 2m to the north, but there is plenty of room to do this.

6. Lack of eastbound access to the bridge from south side of Maryhill bypass

Another issue is access to the eastbound shoulder of the main bridge roadway, which is legal for cyclists to use but which cannot be accessed unless one takes the roadway through the CPR underpass described previously (# 5). There should be bicycle access provided from the adjacent MUP north of the underpass to the shoulder of the eastbound Mary Hill ramp to the bridge, at least until the requested shoulder space through the underpass is provided.

Also, if one uses the eastbound shoulder on the bridge one finds oneself on a very narrow shoulder (perhaps 60 cm wide?) between the Esso station and the Dewdney Trunk intersection. This shoulder, which appears to have been narrowed by the inappropriate placement of concrete barriers, should be widened to a minimum of 1.5 m.

Another problem with #3 or possibly a separate issue to the switchbacks.

The other problem is that after descending down the switchbacks to the cross walk, it (the cross walk) is placed in the apex of the curve for Belfast St. Cars approaching from the East are going downhill and then veer right onto the cross walk. Cars coming from the south veer left across it.

Pedestrians (and people on or walking bikes) on the South side of Belfast have to look across about 270 degrees to ensure there is no traffic. First to their left and can only see about 100m to the crest of the hill. And then to their right where they can only see about 75m under the bridge.

The cross walk should be 100-200m farther West. Where Belfast is straight and drivers attention is directly ahead to see people crossing. And the users of the cross walk only need to look across 180 degrees and have a longer distance they can view traffic coming from.

By co-incidence, possibly the best location is where the extension of the walkway from the bridge hits the existing sidewalk (currently through the ditch.)