

West End commercial streets

Davie, Robson and Denman

public engagement executive
summary
spring 2023



West End commercial streets

Community feedback helps us understand what should be prioritized

Spring 2023 public engagement on commercial streets in the West End

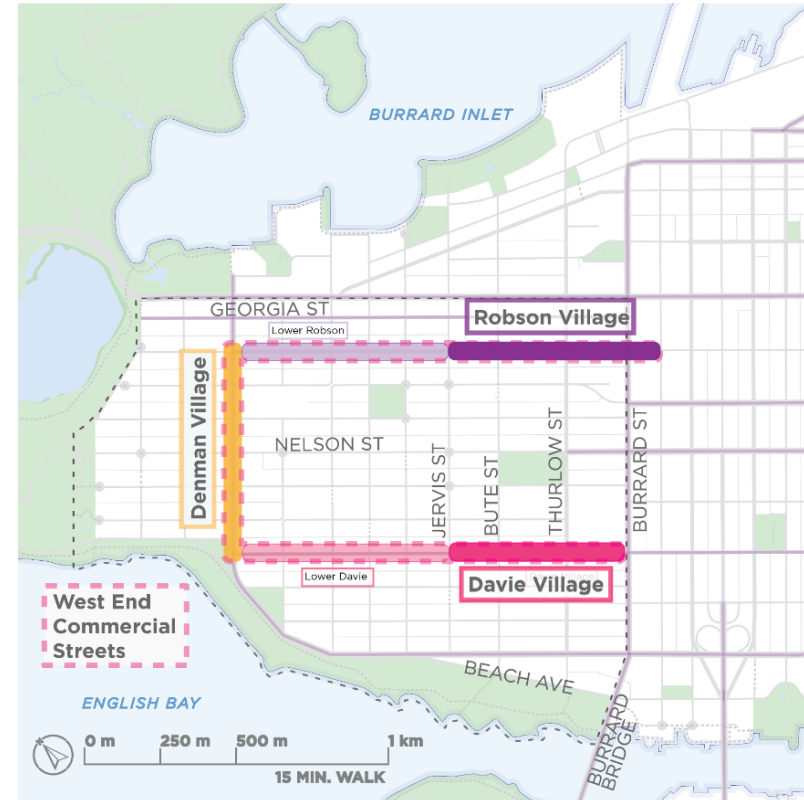
The West End's commercial streets include Davie, Robson and Denman streets. In spring 2023, the City of Vancouver asked for feedback on how transportation and public space improvements could help to:

1. improve walkability;
2. strengthen public life; and
3. support local businesses.

This report shares what we heard

Design options will be advanced individually for the commercial streets, based on this early feedback. There will be further opportunities for community input as these emerge.

To stay up to date, visit:
www.shapeyourcity/west-end-streets



Davie, Robson and Denman are the commercial streets in the West End (West End Community Plan, 2013)



West End commercial streets

More walking space can improve everyone's experience



Prioritize space for people

Participants shared that:

- walking, waiting or dining often don't have the space they need.
- Vehicle traffic volumes, speeds and noise negatively affect important uses like walking and dining.
- Using mobility devices* or pushing strollers can be difficult on narrow or uneven sidewalks.
- There was interest in considering measures that reduce vehicle traffic on these streets.

Overall, there was a strong interest to see changes on these streets to improve the walking and transit experience, while considering local vehicle access needs.



Narrow sidewalks currently must support different uses like walking, dining, waiting (for transit or food pick-up) and business signage. Image: a Denman Street sidewalk, fall 2022

*such as wheelchairs

West End commercial streets

Transit journey times vary, and bike connections could be improved



Unreliable transit journey times are a key issue

- Buses getting stuck in traffic or taking too long limits their appeal over other modes.
- People told us that overcrowding – onboard and at bus stops – can be a barrier to having a comfortable experience.

Overall support for active transportation lanes, but with some concerns

- Many advocated for new bike infrastructure, with emphasis on protected lanes. A smaller number felt strongly that these changes were not needed or wanted.
- There were concerns with people using e-bikes or e-scooters on sidewalks or in plazas.



Interim bus bulbs create space and reduce boarding and travel times. But transit users felt that high traffic volumes lengthen journey times, impacting overall transit reliability. Image: Interim bus bulb at the intersection of Robson and Burrard streets.

West End commercial streets

People value being able to spend time outdoors when visiting the commercial streets



Positive support for outdoor dining patios

We heard:

- Patios are a welcome part of the streetscape.
- Accessible, year-round patio options with rain protection should be explored.
- Patio look and feel could be improved.
- Patios would benefit from being further away from moving vehicles.

Near-universal enthusiasm for new trees, greenery and rainwater management

Support for:

- more tree shade in the summer.
- Additional trees and plants to give shelter and manage rainwater in the winter.
- new trees and greenery to be coupled with more seating opportunities for socializing or resting.



*Outdoor seating transformed many streets during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many feel strongly that design changes should continue to support them.
Image: Ladurée patio, 1141 Robson Street, fall 2022*

West End commercial streets

Bigger changes are needed on some streets to retain or improve destination appeal*



Many appreciate what the commercial streets represent and have to offer now

We heard that:

- changes should support local businesses and customers.
- Existing characteristics and histories should be made visible and celebrated. On Davie Street, this included its 2SLGBTQ+ histories. On Robson Street, the focus was on its regional retail and dining appeal.
- Consideration should be given to how we keep public spaces clean, safe, well-loved and desirable over the long term



Davie Village's neighbourliness and welcoming vibe was loved by many, but some suggested its appeal to West Enders could be improved.

Image: Davie Village during Pride 2022

Davie Village

71% feel transit, walking, biking and rolling should be prioritized



Support for new space for walking and rolling

We heard:

- Sidewalks are very crowded & new crossings are needed.
- Sidewalks are uneven, changes should include smooth surfaces.

Faster and more reliable transit

- The experience and frequency of service is viewed as worse than in other parts of Downtown.

Prioritize active travel

- Participants suggested protected lanes or measures that slow vehicle speeds for safety.

Some vehicle access is essential, but it has an impact

- We heard that high traffic volumes detract from the pedestrian and visitor experience.
- Participants shared an interest in less parking to create wider sidewalks.
- Slow traffic flow and vehicle access issues were a concern for some residents.



Most felt that wider sidewalks and new mid block crossings would add to a safer and more comfortable walking experience.

Image: rainbow crosswalks at Bute St and Davie St, September 2022

Davie Village

Existing “community feel” is highly valued



Neighbourliness, community feel and 2SLGBTQ+ history were all highly valued by responders

- Diverse population and varied appeal is Davie Village’s best asset (e.g. unique stores and restaurants).
- It’s like a “small town in a big city”.
- Some worried about the erosion of 2SLGBTQ+ legacy.

Support for changes that encourage people to spend time

- Places to sit and gather; trees and greenery, and rain protection are needed.

New spaces for spending time should be inviting to locals

- Cleanliness and frequent upkeep were viewed as essential.
- There were concerns over people sleeping, drinking, smoking or using drugs, and public safety in and near to Jim Deva Plaza.
- Responders explained that sometimes people riding e-scooters get in the way of people sitting or walking.



Parklets have contributed to the public seating demand, but many felt there was still unmet demand.

Image: parklet outside Los Amigos, 1118 Davie Street, September 2022

Robson Village

More space for people, transit and biking



Limited space to stroll detracts from the visitor experience

- Crowded sidewalks and intersections can make it difficult to move through the street.

Many supported exploring a people-first street* to improve Robson Street’s character and appeal.

- Support for the idea of a car-free or car-lite** street, with many citing vehicles (and the space allocated to them) as a limitation to the street’s attractiveness.

More space for bikes and transit

We heard that...

- There is interest in safe and convenient active transportation infrastructure
- Transit journey times felt unreliable, and buses can be crowded
- Bus stops need more room, and that transit should be prioritized.

**streets that are redesigned to improve walking, biking, and transit; create more space to manage water; create ecological corridors; and for people to gather and enjoy the outdoors.*

***Spaces where vehicles are not permitted, are only allowed for a limited time, or only certain vehicles are allowed (e.g. delivery trucks or local residents).*



Many expressed concerns overcrowded sidewalks, and some felt they detracted from Robson Village’s “visitor appeal”.

Image: Robson Street on a weekday early afternoon, October 2022

Robson Village

Interest in creating a more people-focused street



Space to sit, interact, and experience new things were top of mind in responses

- More space for patios.
- Awnings for rain protection to allow outdoor seating year-round.
- Entertainment, markets, pop-ups, music or community events, and more greenery were all supported.

Opportunities to expand on Robson's appeal and image

- Many people love the combination of retail – including unique and flagship stores – and great restaurants or eateries.
- Expensive retail stores were seen by some to be cost prohibitive to some.

Some were hesitant about any change due to:

- Noise and disruption from construction.
- Long-term cleanliness and maintenance concerns.
- Vehicle access issues for residents.

**Includes the unique qualities of the street, or the key reasons for visiting or spending time there.*



Space for people can feel limited, particularly where dining and seating needs overlap with walking and shopping space.

Image: Ladurée patio, 1141 Robson Street, fall 2022

Denman Village

Narrow sidewalks and high traffic volumes detract from people's experience



Many conflicting needs in narrow sidewalk spaces

We heard:

- Sidewalks are narrow and in high demand.
- Merchandise displays and other obstacles often get in the way.
- Walking and wheeling on Denman is often uncomfortable.
- Patios are well-liked, but with narrow sidewalks, some feel they can make it challenging to navigate the street

Traffic volumes feel incompatible with the transportation needs of West End residents

We heard:

- Congestion makes it harder to get around by transit or car, especially in the afternoon and on weekends.
- Many are frustrated with “non-local” traffic passing through and causing congestion, but not visiting Denman Street.
- Higher traffic volumes detracts from the walking, biking and rolling experience.



Many identified a conflict between traffic volumes and other street functions, like walking and shopping.

Image: Narrow sidewalks on Denman Street, fall 2022

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Davie, Robson and Denman



Thank you for reading the executive summary of what we heard.

For a full breakdown of the findings, please review the full report at shapeyourcity.ca/west-end-streets (external link).