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Mayor & Members of Council
City of Courtenay
830 Cliffe Ave, Courtenay V9N 2J7

CV Regional District Board of Directors
770 Harmston Avenue, Courtenay V9N 2X6

Mayor & Members of Council
Town of Comox
1809 Beaufort Ave, Comox V9M 1R9

BC Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure
550 Comox Avenue, Courtenay V9N 3P6

Dear Mayors, Members of Council, CVRD Directors & MoTI Representative:

Re: Make Back Road Safe

Over the past several months we have met with our neighbours along the entire 3.3 km length of Back Road to hear their views on neighbourhood traffic and how it may be impacting them. We knew immediately that we had tapped into what would become an outpouring of concern over the transformation that is taking place in our neighbourhood. The effect of that change is overwhelming and concerning for residents who have lived here for 3 years or for 30+ years.

To imagine 8,000 vehicles per day transiting along Back Road, as projected in the City of Courtenay's 2005 Traffic Study Report, seems incomprehensible to residents. Given the current design, engineering and poor state of this Road, it is alarming to envision traffic levels that could potentially reach 3 times the current estimated level. We live on a road that is collapsing along its edge and bordering a steep embankment from 10th Street to the First Nations and the design and engineering has not been improved since it was built 75 years ago to move farm vehicles.

Exiting our driveways is an increasingly difficult challenge and that's before we navigate the road where multiple cars are riding our bumper, passing when it's unsafe and pull around where there are no shoulders.

There are no sidewalks, no shoulders, no parking, no safe access for pedestrians or cyclists, blind corners, poor sight lines, steep driveways, hidden driveways, acute angled driveways, and driveway grades that make it impossible to check for oncoming traffic before you are out on the roadway.

There are 125 homes with driveways that have direct access to the right-of-way, and 13 direct access roads with both small and large numbers of homes that use Back Road to transit to an Arterial road. We face an ever more perilous situation just exiting or entering our driveways because of the increased traffic volume and high speeds

Over time we have observed that when non-local traffic is re-routed from Comox Avenue onto Back Road, more and more drivers discover that this route is faster than the Arterial routes. After the completion of the multiple high-density residential developments in Comox over the past two years, we have noticed another increased wave of traffic on Back Road. The detour route from those developments is off Lerwick or Lancaster down MacDonald to Back Road. The route avoids any traffic lights, stop signs, or speed enforcement. The stop sign at MacDonald doesn't slow most drivers as they roll right through the intersection onto Back Road. The intersection is poorly designed, as admitted by MoTI, and the danger is that vehicles need to move past the stop sign to check for oncoming traffic.

Back Road has been transformed into a 24/7 thoroughfare that increasingly feels like an Arterial route, and that makes our lives increasingly unsafe. There have been a number of accidents at Valley View, regular near head on collisions in the hairpin, and weekly incidents at MacDonald all due to speed, visibility issues and reckless driving behaviour. As was kindly pointed out to us by a City staff person, *'no one has been killed, yet'*.

Residents who see and hear the high-speed traffic and have encountered reckless drivers, will not risk their life riding a bicycle or walking along this Road. The effect is that people have stopped these activities altogether. A paved shoulder would be a vast improvement over what exists right now. In the 2005 City of Courtenay Traffic Study the reference to a *Collector Road* states that, *in residential areas sidewalks should be provided on both sides*. We raise this issue further on, but suffice to say that we suspect building sidewalks on Back Road would be a multi-million dollar rebuild.

High Speed = Increased Noise Levels

The noise caused by high-speed traffic causes sleep deprivation, stress, and anxiety and together these symptoms have long term health consequences. Studies show that noise levels and its effect in residential neighbourhoods is exponentially worse with even small incremental increases in vehicle speed.

MacDonald & Back Road Speed Boards

In May, a Speed Board was installed in the 30 km/h playground zone on MacDonald, registering speeds between 63-89 km/h. MacDonald is one of the most travelled access routes to Back Road, making our respective neighbourhoods the favourite route for Comox residents transiting to Courtenay and beyond.

Residents celebrated when the City installed three Speed Boards on the Courtenay section of Back Road in August. During the 4-week period some thought there was a minor change in driver speeds, however once the Boards were removed, the same reckless speed patterns have returned.

Policing & Enforcement

The Police are too busy to log our complaints any longer and they do not respond to our calls to intercept street racers. In fact, on any warm summer evening multiple street racers streak

past our homes at excessively high speeds and the only ones alarmed by this are those of us who live here.

Recently we were advised by the Police Inspector that Back Road is not safe to have an Officer operate speed enforcement or to safely pull over a speeding vehicle. We know it's not safe, because we live here. And yet with every call to any branch of government we will be referred to take our complaints to the Police.

There are insufficient resources for active and ongoing speed enforcement in the Comox Valley, and Back Road is just one area impacted by this reality. We feel it is negligent to expect that it is remotely possible for two full time traffic officers in our Police detachment to effectively provide enforcement for the entire Comox Valley and Regional District with a population of 95,000 residents.

Based on our reading of the Q2 Police report, the total *Traffic Incidents* were 286 over a 3-month period, an average of 95 Traffic Incidents per month and 48 incidents for each of the two Traffic Officers. Even if the *Total (monthly) Incidents* represented speed violations only, it doesn't begin to address the speed epidemic. To underscore the scope of the problem, we parked along MacDonald Road adjacent to the 30 km/h Park zone on a Friday afternoon and counted 87 drivers *speeding excessively* in a 50-minute period. The result corresponds with the Speed Board findings from a few months earlier.

The presence of a Police Officer conducting a neighbourhood drive-through is not effective speed enforcement nor will it have any effect, beyond the moment, in people's driving behaviour. Speeding and excessive speeds is a 24/7 problem that will not be solved through Policing. The most discouraging aspect in what we've learned over the past six months is just how absent enforcement is at all levels of government for vehicle related violations. However it does explain why we're here and why the problem is of epidemic proportions.

Camera Speed Enforcement

Over 70% of British Columbians support the use of photo speed enforcement, and support levels are consistent over a 5-year period. While we agree that it is an effective solution for speed enforcement, the Province would not grant authority to Municipalities for its use in 2017, suggesting instead that there were other tools available. The Province meanwhile uses camera enforcement on Provincial highways. Many larger Cities have implemented calming measures, reduced speeds, blocked residential streets to eliminate speedways, and introduced noise cameras Courtenay has just started down this path. We urge the Comox Valley governing bodies to pursue their demand that the Province extend authority to Municipalities to use camera enforcement and that this would include the Province setting up a meaningful enforcement strategy.

Speed Limits, Driveways, Blind Corners, etc.

To understand one of the challenges when it comes to speed, just take a drive along Back Road starting at the SE boundary before the hairpin. There is a slow to 30km/h sign, and in less than a 100m stretch, Morrison enters at an acute angle from the downhill side and on the uphill side is the entrance to Glacier View Lodge. Within 100m you will exit the hairpin and there is a slow to 40km/h sign for the blind corner where Marsland enters on one side and several houses enter from below the Road at acute angles. A short 0.5 km section downhill, there is a new slow to 40km/h sign at the blind corner before Snowbird Lane. Between Snowbird Lane and Valley View Drive there is another 40 km/h sign where two more driveways adjoin the road, one on the downhill side at an acute angle and one on the uphill next to Snowbird that has no sightline to traffic before they're on the road. Between Valley View and 10th Street there are no more signs but there are driveways that both access at an acute angle and at extremely steep grades down to Back Road and around another blind corner, which arguably should also have some speed reduction protection.

From 10th through to Ryan Rd, there is a transit stop on the road, then a blind corner hiding a bicycle and vehicle left turn lane onto 6th, a short downhill to a new pedestrian controlled crosswalk at Tunner Drive followed immediately by the backed up traffic that is the new normal onto Ryan Road. In addition we can expect significant increases in traffic exiting Tunner onto Back Rd when the Broadstreet development is finished and Tunner is extended.

After observing traffic and traffic patterns at different times of the day, the problem with speed starts from the time vehicles turn onto Back Road at Ryan Road, at Comox Avenue and at MacDonald. Drivers are in a hurry, impatient and oblivious to how unsafe their driving is in someone else's neighbourhood.

Similar problems exist when driving in the opposite direction on Back Road, except there is a somewhat clearer view of the intersections at Valley View Drive and Snowbird Lane. There are blind corners and hidden driveways, many of them at acute angles for almost all properties with homes on the downhill side along the entire length between Ryan Road and Comox Avenue.

There is a much higher risk for properties located immediately below Back Road, and for the homes along Farquharson Drive there is the possibility that an out-of-control vehicle would careen directly into their home, rooftop or onto their property. We have learned that a single homeowner has had a vehicle land in their yard twice and an electrical pole sheered in that location leaving residents without power for over 5 hours. We estimate that most of the patios and homes directly below the Road at Farquharson are less than 10 metres from the edge of the Road, with absolutely nothing that would protect their life and property. The only barrier that exists in that location is a single 6 ft cement curb, put there to protect a fire hydrant.

In our opinion, this illustrates the need for a continuous 40km/h speed limit on Back Rd between Comox Avenue and Ryan Road.

Collector Road Classification

We have conducted research on many issues that have helped to inform our understanding of the issues and our proposed solutions.

One of the areas of our research is the road classification system as set out in the MoTI Parameters & Guidelines for Road Design. In our review of other Municipalities and regions we note that their individual Traffic Plans will expand on each of MoTI's classifications and description to make it applicable to the purpose and use in their region. For example a Collector Road may serve a variety of purposes and be classified as a Local, Minor, Major or Neighbourhood Collector Road. The description within each of the classifications is unique as well to the specific area within a community such is the case in Courtenay where they have added a classification for an Industrial Collector Road. For the section of Back Road within the Town of Comox, Glacier View Drive is classified as a Minor Collector Road.

Consistent with the basic MoTI Guidelines, the City of Courtenay's definition for a Collector is a road, *whose function is to collect traffic from local roads and provide a suitable route to Arterials*. What is added in the Courtenay description is that, *traffic movement and land access are of equal importance*. *In residential areas sidewalks should be provided on both sides and Collector routes carry traffic volumes of up to 8,000 vehicles per day*.

By including language that implies that vehicle movement is equal to land access fails to recognize the incompatibility of those two purposes. The expected purpose of a Collector Road, within both MoTI's basic design parameters and in most other jurisdictions, recognizes the need to reduce the number of conflict points including residential driveway access. In fact, the MoTI guidelines state that, *a Collector provides for traffic movement between arterials and local streets with some direct access to adjacent property*.

The MoTI guidelines don't recommend land access as being equal to vehicle use because of the inherent and present risk to residents when high traffic volumes conflict with residential access. Isn't this the reason we don't have access to individual residential properties along arterial routes and freeways? The MoTI 's design limits restrict angles, grades, and the distances between each access point to allow safe access to the adjoining roadway and to reduce vehicle conflict on the right-of-way.

This issue is of the highest priority in order to protect the integrity and function of our neighbourhood road. It is our position that the governing bodies need to amend their current classification to designate Back Road as a Neighbourhood Collector Road to reflect the current use and function and for continuity across all jurisdictions.

Closing

Increased volume, excessive speed and high-speed noise are negatively impacting our lives, both inside and outside of our homes. Accessing and transiting Back Road causes enormous stress and puts us at high risk against drivers so impatient that they pass when it's unsafe, fly through the hairpin over the centre line, and transit at terrifying speeds. On any

normal day while exiting our driveway, there will be multiple vehicles suddenly appear on our bumper coaxing us to drive faster or to get out of their way. These events happen every single day.

Few residents, who observe the daily traffic and excessive speeds, would consider risking their life to walk or cycle on Back Road. It is for this reason that we have asked the City of Courtenay to install signage that warns cyclists and pedestrians that the road is unsafe for this use and the Town of Comox and MoTI should do the same.

Recommended Solutions

- The City of Courtenay in cooperation with the MoTI, CV Regional District and Town of Comox prioritize resident safety and livability by establishing Back Road as a *Neighbourhood Collector Road* in recognition of the number of properties with driveways that connect directly to the right-of-way; and, undertake a review of the necessary road improvements that will allow for local cyclist and pedestrian use.
- The City of Courtenay in cooperation with the MoTI, CV Regional District and Town of Comox reduce the posted speed limit on Back Road to 40 km/h, on a trial basis.
- The City of Courtenay in cooperation with the MoTI, CV Regional District and Town of Comox install a 3-way stop in a minimum of three locations on Back Road including Valley View, Marsland and MacDonald to slow speeds at three of the most dangerous intersections, on a trial basis.
- The City of Courtenay in cooperation with the MoTI, CV Regional District and Town of Comox install Speed Humps (Cushions or Tables) to enforce speed compliance.
- There should be NO diversion of traffic from Comox Avenue onto Back Road during the two-year CVRD Sewer Conveyance Project.

The *Make Back Road Safe* resident group requests that we be invited to participate in future discussions that may directly impact our neighbourhood safety and livability.

We will be pleased to attend as a delegation before your Council or Board to share our research and/or to answer any questions.

Yours truly,

Original signed

Carolyn & David Rice
On behalf of the Residents of Back Road