

## CASE IN POINT 2018

# Public Engagement in Winnipeg's Osborne-Downtown Walk Bike Bridge Project

*Lessons from Calgary's Active Transportation Bridges*



By: Calvin So

### Abstract

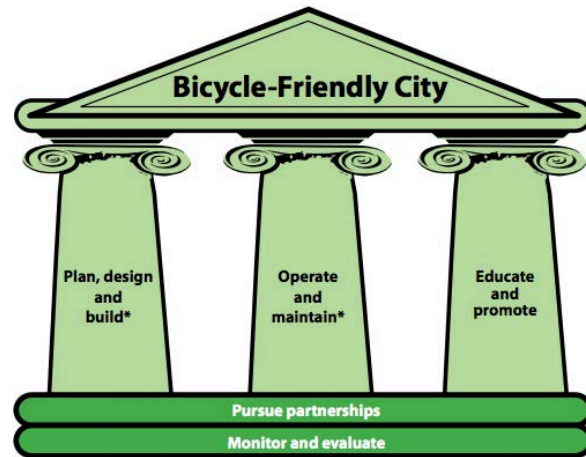
In collaboration with  
Chris Baker, Pedestrian and  
Cycling Planner, City of  
Winnipeg

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Promoting active transportation in cities is important in increasing transportation options, especially for those without a personal vehicle. Investing in active transportation, such as walking and cycling, helps in offering alternative modes of travel from driving. However, in a city where 77.4% of commuters drive to work (Statistics Canada, 2016), it is important to effectively engage with all stakeholders to ensure transparency and that all perspectives are taken into consideration.

The City of Winnipeg is planning an active transportation bridge across the Assiniboine River, between McFadyen Park in Downtown and Fort Rouge Park in Osborne Village. The proposed bridge would provide an alternative to active transportation users crossing the Assiniboine River, who currently must use the Osborne Street or Midtown Bridges; both high traffic roads with minimal bike or pedestrian infrastructure.

This Case-in-Point project will study Calgary's two active transportation bridges across the Bow River: The Peace Bridge and St. Patrick Bridge (now George C. King Bridge). The project will look at the differences in planning, engagement, and design process for the two bridges, the current usage of the facilities, and lessons that can be applied in the planning for the Osborne-Downtown Walk Bike Bridge Project in Winnipeg.



\* Focus on enhanced bicycle level of service in high use/high growth areas.

## Background

The City of Calgary unveiled their Cycling Strategy in 2011, which highlights 50 actions and short, medium, and long-term goals for improving cycling in Calgary. The strategy involved looking back at previous achievements in developing the cycling infrastructure Calgary has today, identifying the top cycling issues in Calgary through surveys and committees, analyzing current trends in cycling, and developing an implementation strategy for becoming a bicycle-friendly city.

Calgary currently has two active transportation bridges connecting neighbourhoods to downtown via the Bow River: Peace Bridge and the George C. King Bridge. The Peace Bridge connects Calgary's Sunnyside neighbourhood with the downtown core, while the George C. King Bridge connects the Bridgeland community to Downtown's East Village area.

Both bridges were designed with the intent of optimizing mobility along river crossings, which the river would otherwise be a barrier to mobility. The experience and lessons from designing these two bridges will be beneficial in the planning for Winnipeg's Osborne-Downtown Walk Bike Bridge Project.



## Vision:

*“To become one of the premier cycling cities in North America.”*

*- City of Calgary Cycling Strategy*

# Facts of the Case

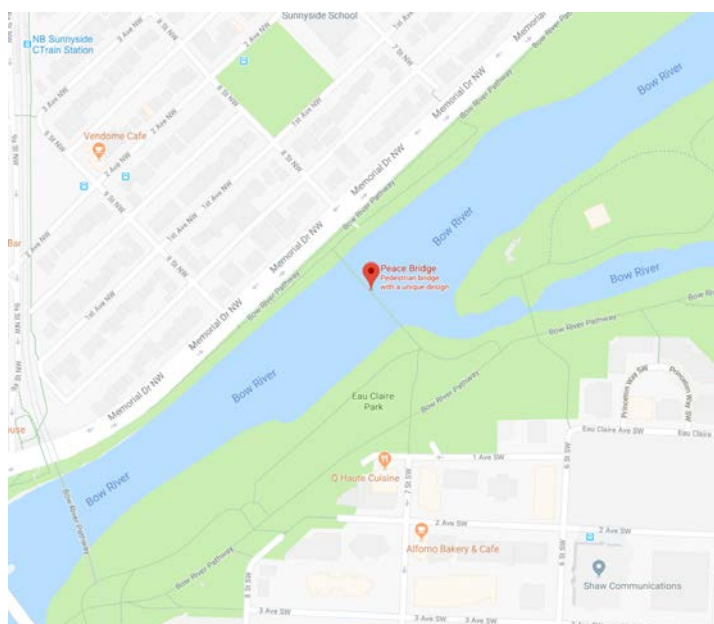
## Peace Bridge

The Peace Bridge was constructed in 2012, connecting Calgary's Sunnyside community with the downtown core via the Bow River. The purpose of the bridge was to address the projected increase in residents and jobs in both the downtown and Sunnyside communities and further Calgary's Centre City Plan, which included placing a higher priority on pedestrian and cyclist movement.

Construction of the Peace Bridge was met with resistance from several fronts, as residents criticized about the lack of transparency in bridge costs, whether the bridge would be heavily used, and delays caused by the bridge's architecture (Klingbeil, 2017).

As per the Centre City Plan, the Peace Bridge was designed to have a distinctive look as a gateway bridge into the downtown core. The bridge was also designed with social, environmental, and economic implications in mind, including:

- Improved transportation choice for those in the surrounding communities
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by improving cycling as a mode of travel
- Protecting the natural environment along the Bow River
- Increasing potential tourist attractions in Calgary by giving the bridge a unique character



# Facts of the Case

## St. Patrick's (George C. King) Bridge

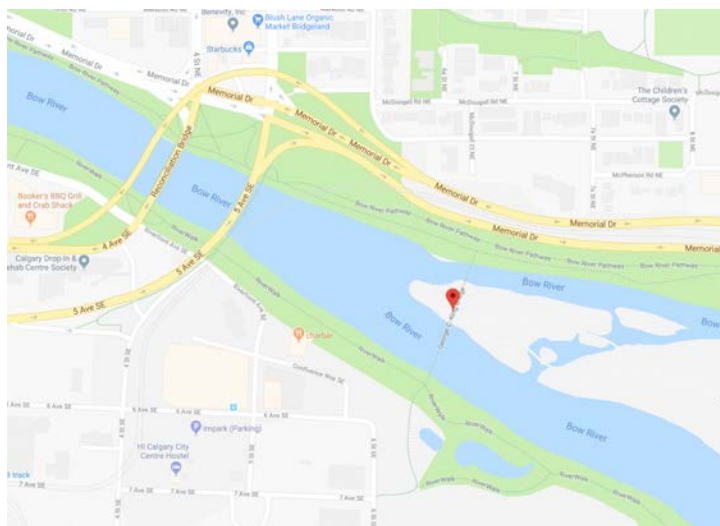
The St. Patrick's Bridge was constructed in 2014, one year later than expected because of the effects from the 2013 Alberta Floods. The active transportation bridge connects the growing Downtown East Village neighbourhood with the Bridgeland community to the northeast.

Constructed by the Calgary Municipal Lands Corporation (CMLC), the St. Patrick's Bridge was met with less controversy than the Peace Bridge. CMLC, an arm's length away from the City of Calgary, invested \$45 million into revitalizing the Rivers District, which included constructing the active transportation bridge and revitalizing St. Patrick's Island, one of Calgary's oldest parks that ran under the bridge.

CMLC ensured transparency throughout the whole process by engaging with Calgarians from the beginning. Planning for the bridge included a design competition that attracted:

- 33 international concepts
- Collective input from over 2,000 Calgarians
- Ideas from 8,000 Calgarians on both how to design the active transportation bridge and revitalize one of Calgary's oldest parks (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, 2015)

The St. Patrick's Bridge was renamed the George C. King Bridge in 2015, to commemorate the 2nd mayor of Calgary (CBC News, 2015).



# Conclusions

## *Peace Bridge*

The Peace Bridge was a case in how public engagement is important in ensuring residents are informed and supportive of the project's proceedings. While the bridge was an excellent idea in promoting connectivity and active transportation, the lack of communication over the awarding, financial figures, and projected usage of the site made the project a tough sell for Calgarians.

However, the Peace Bridge has proven to be successful in encouraging active transportation, with over 6,000 users daily and an increase in cycling usage in the Sunnyside community since 2014 (City of Calgary, 2016).



## *St. Patrick's (George C. King) Bridge*

The bridge design, combined with the revitalization of St. Patrick's Island, amounted to a place where residents and tourists can access and enjoy its many features in a recreational setting. The continued public engagement and transparency over this project created support from residents, and the bridge was opened with a grand procession from Mayor Naheed Nenshi, students, civic leaders, and Indigenous groups (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, 2015).

Today, the George C. King Bridge is used by 1,050 bicyclists daily between 6:00am and 10:00pm (City of Calgary, 2018), and the island is populated with festivals, family picnics, and nature walks that embrace the park's history and features.



## Lessons Learned

### ***Engage All Stakeholders from the Start***

There should be a conversation with stakeholders from the start in developing support for projects such as active transportation bridges. Considering how many Canadian cities are car-oriented, it is expected that there would be some resistance when tax dollars are used for non-vehicular projects.

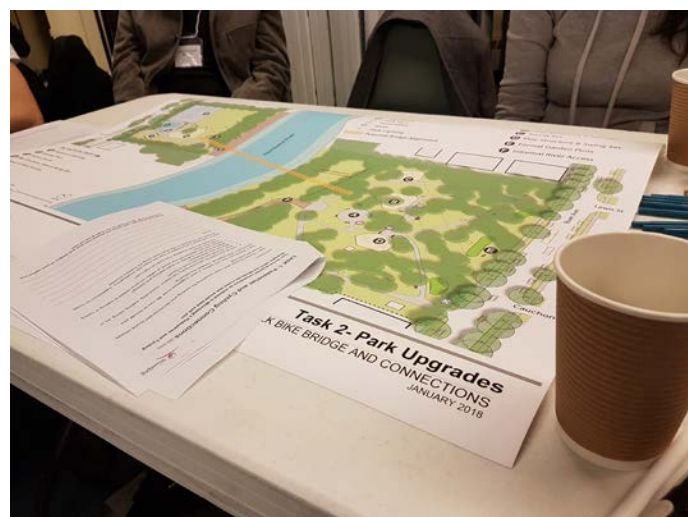
The City of Calgary learned from the resistance in the planning process for the Peace Bridge project, and developed a Cycling Strategy that outlined the direction Calgary wants to take in promoting active transportation. The CMLC also ensured transparency and that stakeholders were engaged during the planning and design process for the St. Patrick's Bridge.



### ***Broaden the Conversation Beyond Infrastructure Spending***

Developing active transportation bridges can be more than just talking about infrastructure spending and how, on the surface, it only benefits bicyclists and pedestrians. Instead, the conversation should focus on how these infrastructure projects can benefit drivers as well, since they would no longer have to compete with bicyclists and pedestrians for road space, which in return would reduce their travel times.

Infrastructure spending could also be combined with investment in public spaces because of the project, which may further generate support for it. The CMLC combined the St. Patrick's Bridge project with the revitalization of St. Patrick's Island, which was welcomed by Calgarians as part of the East Village revitalization plan.



## Lessons Learned

### ***Rivers are Barriers to Mobility until You Optimize Them for Mobility***

In cities that have rivers as a main feature in mobility, they can be barriers in trying to access communities across from rivers, especially for bicyclists who may not be keen on cycling on vehicular bridges.

By developing active transportation bridges across rivers, it would promote connectivity for bicyclists and pedestrians between communities that may otherwise not be possible without driving. It may also attract new pedestrians and bicyclists who otherwise would drive across the river to reach their destinations.



# Looking Ahead: Winnipeg's Osborne-Downtown Walk Bike Bridge Project

Winnipeg has a unique opportunity to link two dense neighbourhoods and two parks with an active transportation bridge, which would benefit a wide range of users including bicyclists, pedestrians, car users, tourists, and even those who may use the bridge for leisurely purposes.

Public engagement is important in getting residents and councillors on board with this project. As demonstrated in Calgary's active transportation bridge projects, a lack of transparency and engagement may mean fierce resistance from residents and councillors on whether the project is suitable for that location. Having support from the start would reduce the barriers needed for unique projects such as walk bike bridges to be approved.

The City of Winnipeg recently concluded its initial engagement phase for the Osborne-Downtown Walk Bike Bridge Project, which included an online survey, a workshop, a pop-up warming hut on the river where the proposed bridge would cross, and a postcard initiative at two places on opposite sides of the river. Over 1,100 people participated in the initial engagement phase.



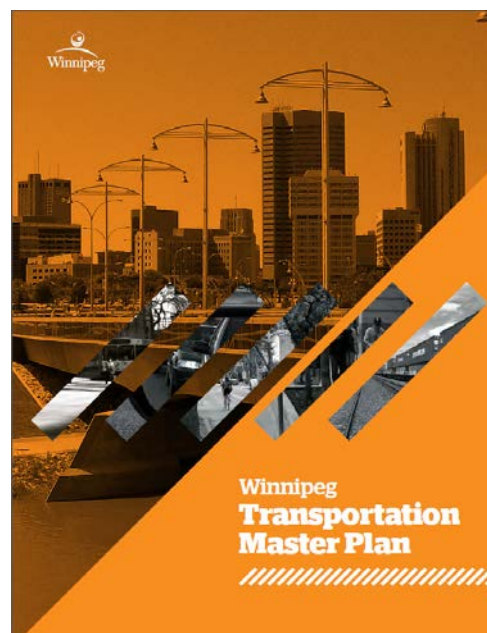
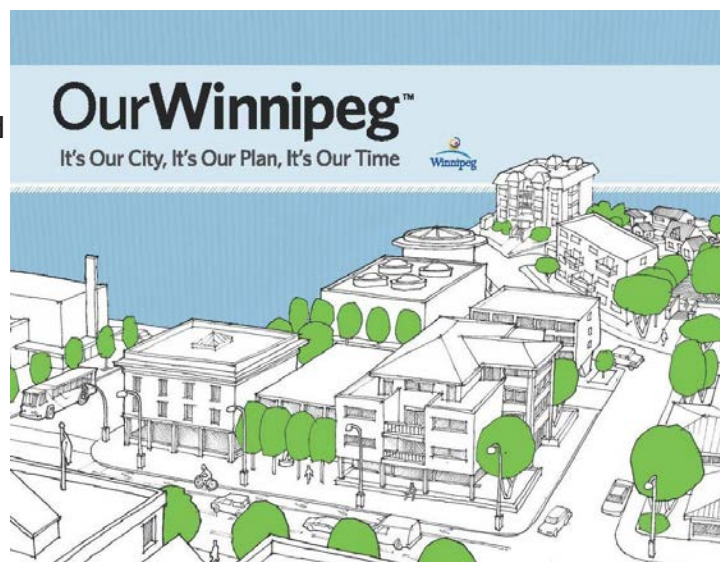


# Looking Ahead: Winnipeg's Osborne-Downtown Walk Bike Bridge Project

To continue with this initiative, the project team should consider the following:

- Emphasize the need for safe connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists, as outlined in the City's Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies policy document. 48% of respondents in the online survey mentioned they do not bike due to either a lack of bike lanes, paths, or the fact current travelling distances on a bike are impractical. (City of Winnipeg, 2013)
- Consider the opportunity to revitalize the two parks that this walk bike bridge project would connect to. The opportunity to revitalize public spaces may generate further support for this initiative.
- Include car drivers in the conversation about this project and how developing an active transportation would benefit them as well. By diverting bicyclists to safer options such as the proposed active transportation bridge, drivers would experience improved safety, as there would be less bicyclists on the Osborne Street or Midtown Bridges to contend for space.

By developing this active transportation bridge, the City of Winnipeg would be able to fulfill many of the initiatives in OurWinnipeg, Sustainable Transportation, the Transportation Master Plan, and the Winnipeg Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies in developing a city that promotes all forms of travelling, not just by single occupancy vehicles.



## About the Authors

**Calvin So** is a second-year student graduate in the City Planning program at the University of Manitoba. His research interests are on transit and transportation planning, including active transportation and planning for access and mobility.

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## Image References

Page 1 (from left to right):

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Page 2 (clockwise from top left):

<http://www.calgary.ca/Transportation/TP/Documents/cycling/Cycling-Strategy/2011-cycling-strategy.pdf> (first two images)

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Page 6: All images taken by Calvin So

Page 7 (clockwise from top left):

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Google Earth

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