

Victoria's Horse-Drawn Carriages: Concerns Over Safety, Health and Appropriateness

**Submission to the City of Victoria
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It has been almost one hundred and fifty years since the horse-drawn carriage was replaced by the automobile as a superior mode of urban transportation, yet horse-drawn carriages are still being used in the busy downtown core of Victoria. More progressive cities, such as Toronto, Las Vegas, London and Paris, have banned this use. Victoria still clings to this archaic practice believing that it adds ambiance to the city while providing a popular tourist activity. In this submission, I will argue that horse-drawn carriages should be phased out of operation in Victoria based on their hazardous safety record, contribution to pollution and other health concerns, and the inappropriate use of horses and limited City resources.

Safety

On May 3, 1995 – a day just like any other – an elderly visitor was out for a walk around the Inner Harbour. In the blink of an eye, this man went from enjoying a beautiful spring morning in Victoria, to staring down a runaway horse carriage. According to the carriage driver, the horses, Monty and Cruz, were calm and under full control until they were spooked by a noisy red truck as it passed them. The driver unsuccessfully attempted to rein in the horses, as they galloped out-of-control towards the Inner Harbour. As they neared the carriage stands, other employees tried to stop the horses but were unable due to their high speed. With his back to the oncoming horses, the warning calls didn't reach the pedestrian in time. At a full gallop, the horses collided with him. The man flew forward and when he hit the ground, the carriage ran over his back, diagonally from the waist to the shoulder.

This example is just one in a series of accidents that have plagued the horse-drawn carriage industry over the last 10 years. Three main areas concerning the safety of horse-drawn carriages in Victoria are the use of inexperienced/irresponsible carriage drivers, heavy downtown traffic, and the ease of which horses are spooked.

Inexperienced/Irresponsible Drivers

In several formal letters of complaint registered against the horse-drawn carriage industry at City Hall, the use of inexperienced and irresponsible drivers was cited as a contributing factor to the unsafe nature of the use of horses in the city.² Concerns raised include:

- Drivers spending 50% of their time turned around, talking to³ their passengers leaving the horses to direct themselves through heavy downtown traffic;⁻
- Drivers not always turning on their running lights at dusk, thus endangering the horses, passengers and the general public;⁻
- Irresponsible drivers allowing the illegal consumption of alcoholic beverages³ in the carriages as they proceed through residential neighbourhoods in James Bay;⁻
- Young drivers who loose control of frightened horses, and who are⁶ then unable to attend to the horses to calm them because the drivers become hysterical.⁻

As an employee working downtown observed:

I ...walk up town almost every noon hour. I can't tell you how often I see these horses out of control as I haven't kept count of the number of incidents but I can reasonably say it is quite often – almost every other day. It is my strong belief that the main cause for this problem is heavy traffic and horses – these two elements don't mix. Even in a perfect world with a fresh horse⁷ and experienced driver I doubt that the situation would be any different.⁻

Heavy Traffic

When residents were asked the last few years what they disliked most about visiting downtown, many found⁸ traffic was a major problem, citing the carriages as a source of congestion and frustration.⁻ The City has attempted to take steps to solve this problem around the Belleville Ferry Terminal by proposing that the parking meters be removed so traffic can go around the horse drawn carriages in James Bay.⁻ But this solution does not address the root of the problem – that traffic and horses are two elements that don't mix. In order to deal with this issue, other cities have acknowledge the incompatibility of horses and automobiles and banned the use of horses in their cities, choosing not to simply remove parking meters to allow more space for vehicles to pass the slow moving carriages. These cities recognised that in modern urban cities, the use of horse-drawn carriages is hazardous to both horses and the public – period.

The City has a¹⁰cknowledged that the amount of traffic in Victoria has been steadily increasing over the years.⁻ There is no reason to believe that this increase will subside, especially considering the recent influx of cruise ships to our port. As other cities have moved to ban horse-drawn carriages from their cities, there has been a push in Victoria by the horse-drawn carriage industry and Tourism Victoria to allow horse-drawn carriages unrestricted access to the

downtown core.¹¹— This expansion has been prevented by the City in the past due to traffic concerns.

In addition, as the amount of traffic has been increasing over the years, so has the size of carriages used by the industry. The James Bay Neighbourhood Environmental Association works closely with the City and the horse-drawn carriage operators since the tour routes go through this residential neighbourhood. The Association has stated that it supports the use of smaller and more mobile vehicles due to the narrow width of the streets.¹²— This was ignored by the industry when they introduced new larger wagons in 2000, prompting Council to question the safety and appropriateness of these new wagons.¹³—

It is time to re-evaluate the use of horse-drawn carriages in Victoria considering the suitability of a heavy traffic environment for the horses who:

- Wait with cars all around them, with drivers who only seem to be conscious of making the light and thus are impatient;¹⁴—
- Have to breathe in the fumes of the automobiles as they wait for the traffic light to change or as they are passed by impatient drivers;¹⁵—
- Have to deal with the stress of traffic, hot weather, tourists, bicycles rushing past them and startling them;¹⁶—

The impatience of drivers is evident from a reported accident on May 6, 2005 where a car struck a horse carriage which was stopped in traffic at an intersection. The accident caused the horse to bolt, breaking away from the carriage and injuring the driver.¹⁷ Witnesses indicated that the vehicle was speeding just prior to striking the carriage.¹⁸— Another example is of tourists on scooters driving recklessly around the horses attempting to spook them.¹⁸— As the amount of traffic on Victoria's roads increases, so will the number of accidents caused by frustrated, impatient and reckless drivers.

“Spooked” Horses

Horses are highly stressed when placed in a fast-paced urban environment. The use of blinders is one method that operators use to attempt to reduce this stress. Horses easily frighten and without a highly-experienced driver, they try to get away from what is scaring them by bolting out-of-control. While the horse-drawn carriage industry contends that the horses are used to this environment, such that emergency vehicles do not even have to turn their lights and sirens off when passing a carriage, police reports indicate otherwise.¹⁹—

Since 1997, there have been 15 reported accidents involving horses filed by the Victoria Police Department. This number is lower than the actual number of accidents during this time period, since many accidents are dealt with privately by the horse-carriage industry without involving ICBC or the police. In the documented accidents, the reasons for the horses becoming spooked include:

- **Wasp bite:** Horse was strung on the rear quarter by a wasp, causing it to panic, rear up and bolt, throwing a passenger from the carriage;²⁰—

- **Attempt to avoid small piece of cardboard on road:** Horse swerved and kicked the carriage with both rear legs. Frightened and out-of-control, the horse then ran into a vehicle. Frightened by the noise of the impact with the vehicle, the horse became even more out-of-control. The front seat rider position was destroyed when the horse kicked again, causing the driver to fall to the ground. Attempts to hold on to the ropes of the carriage failed. The horse sustained severe bloody injuries to both bottom legs;—
- **Back up alarm and hedge trimmer:** Landscaping crew working in the area with a hedge trimmer had a vehicle with a back up alarm that was emanating a high toned beep from it that caused the horse to spook and run, colliding with a parked car and ultimately into a power pole. At least one of the parties was thrown from the carriage during the accident, and two other passengers received injuries to the neck, back and hips. The horse, Luke, received a fairly severe cut to his leg. At the time of the accident, the carriage was operating as per their standard procedure. —
- **Passing garbage truck:** Horse and carriage tipped over because the horse got spooked after a garbage truck went by. —
- **Unknown reasons:**
 - Light damage of vehicle because horse spooked and tipped over carriage;—
 - Horse-drawn carriage went out of control and collided into parked vehicle – horse suffered minor injury. Operator failed to calm animal;—
 - Horse got spooked while dropping off three of its customers. The bridal came off the horse and he began to run through the Legislative grounds still carrying one passenger. Ran through traffic striking rental vehicle that was stopped in traffic;—
 - Horse became spooked and started to run. Driver unsuccessfully tried to stop the horse, who ran into a stair railing;—
 - Horse become spooked all of a sudden and ran causing the carriage and horse to flip on its side, ejecting five passengers including the driver. Horse sustained minor scrapes and cuts. —

Due to the highly-stressful nature of an urban environment, horses are easily spooked, endangering not only their safety, but also the safety of their passengers, drivers and the general public.

Health

Pollution

The evidence of the horse was everywhere in the piles of manure that littered the streets, attracting swarms of flies and creating an offensive stench; in the iron rings and hitching posts sunk into the pavements for fastening horses' reins; and in the numerous livery stables that gave off a mingled smell of horse urine and manure, harness oil and hay. —

Society has evolved significantly since the time when horses were used as the main method of urban transportation, but for many residents of James Bay, the “evidence of the horse” continues

to occur right outside their front doors. As expressed to Council: “The neighbourhood has only tolerated staging areas in residential areas based on the lack of suitable space. We would ask any member of council who believes horse staging to be a suitable use in a residential area to walk by, and savor the aroma of these sites, on any warm summer morning.”³⁰—

A normal city horse produces between fifteen to thirty pounds of manure³¹ per day, which makes keeping the streets clean vital to the health and safety of the community.³¹— The licensing and regulatory regime in place in Victoria³² places the onus on the horse-drawn carriage operators to pick up all manure from city streets.³²— There has been an ongoing feud between the operators in the city, which has continuously resulted in horse manure not being removed. While advising residents to deal directly with the horse-drawn carriage companies, the City has received numerous complaints including:

- Odours from the staging area at Ogden point;³³—
- Marked fall off in cleaning up after the horses, year after year, after year;³⁴—
 - Horse manure adorning the route taken by the carriages. Cars flatten the manure, crushing it into the asphalt and carrying some away on their wheels producing a terrible smell and extreme filth;³⁵—
- Hostile bylaw enforcement officers when contacted regarding the horse manure issue;³⁶—
- Residents being told by the horse-drawn carriage operators that “there is no need to clean up, the wind will do that within a few days,” when requesting manure clean-up in their neighbourhoods;³⁷—
- Intense odours in the Parliamentary district caused by the horse carriage stands;³⁸—
 - “I don’t think you would ever find a tourist telling a prospective visitor to ‘go to Victoria, it has the freshest air you can imagine.’”³⁹—

The City has repeatedly⁴⁰ acknowledged the pollution caused by the horse-drawn carriage industry, including:—

- The city is concerned about the amount of feed and feces that is entering into the catch basins around where the horses are tethered;⁴¹—
- The cleaning of horse droppings from road surfaces is very inconsistent;⁴²—
- The outfall that serves that area discharges below the wax museum and is an area of high profile and⁴³ has an accumulation of fecal coliform attributable to the horse-drawn carriages.⁴³—

This pollution not only has harmful effects upon the environment, but also has potentially deadly implications for human health.

Disease

When horses were used as the main method of transportation in cities, residents recognized the problems posed by this practice, including the creation of air contaminants harmful to health, noxious odours and noise. Streets polluted with horse manure contributed to outbreaks of cholera, smallpox, yellow fever, and typhoid. By the turn of the twentieth century there were

calls for the banishment of horses from cities due to these health concerns. People realized that they could no longer afford “the absurdities of the horse-infected city.”⁴⁴—

Victoria has a high population of elderly residents, whose immune systems should not be unnecessarily exposed to possible transmitters of disease. In a world where we have emerging viruses such as West Nile Virus and Bird Flu, and hospitals are reporting the emergence of Super Bugs that are resistant to all known antibiotics, it is careless to allow horses to remain in an urban environment. It is known that the presence of horses in cities a hundred years ago acted to transmit disease to the population. At that time, they did not have an alternative method of transportation – we do. To choose to keep the horses operating in the city for the entertainment of tourists is putting residents at risk at a time when the medical community is warning us of new emerging threats.

Appropriateness

Horse Use

The mistreatment of urban horses in the 19th century resulted in the creation of American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1866 by Henry Bergh.⁴⁵— As several letters to the City show, this issue is a live one today:

- “[Horses] were not meant to walk and stand on pavement all day and be subject to careless, sometimes angry people, in noisy and confusion making environments. Given that society is supposed to have evolved significantly in the past 100 years, it is unacceptable for this practice to continue. I am aware that the animals are checked by vets for legal reasons; however what about the ethical and moral obligations of our society?”⁴⁶—
- “I do not accept the premise that the horses are ‘used to it’, and climatized to sharing the roadways with motorized vehicles; realistically the animals must be under severe stress each time they travel among this traffic. Increasingly, individuals and groups are regarding the horse-drawn tourist tours as archaic, and exploitative of the animals as more of a commodity than creatures that can suffer distress, but can’t express it, or vocalize to any organization. Your consideration of bringing in line with a more enlightened and humane approach to these animals will be anticipated and appreciated.”⁴⁷—
- “I saw many horses with bad bruises...It is unacceptable to put at work animals in such conditions...the bruise will get bigger, the horse will become highly irritable and way harder to control, endangering public safety. Such self-regulated standards is a joke in this industry. It is more than necessary that the carriage horses are healthy and in perfect condition for work, this being approved by a veterinarian on a daily basis. For the safety of the horses and the peoples around them.”⁴⁸—

The horse-drawn carriage operators in Victoria follows the rules of the Carriage Operators of North America. According to these rules, “no horse shall work more than eight consecutive hours or ten hours with an hour and one half break, disconnected from ⁴⁹the carriage, in a 24 hour period. No horse shall work more than six days in a seven day period.”— According to these guidelines, it is perfectly acceptable for a horse to work 60 hours a week in a stressful work environment with minimal breaks. In addition, the horses must be transported into and out of the city daily, adding more stress and fright to their already strained existence. The CONA rules go on to state that “no animal shall be subject to any cruel or harassing treatment.”⁵⁰— If this isn’t cruel, what is?

City Resources

It is public knowledge that ⁵¹the horse-drawn carriage industry has been involved in an ongoing feud for a very long time.— Because of this, the City has been used as a mediator between the operators, who, in addition to filing anonymous complaints against each other, have caused the City to expend its limitless resources to regulate the industry. Dan Scoones, the Senior Bylaw Officer, has stated that 80% of the bylaw enforcement issues in the entire city involve ⁵²the horse-drawn carriage industry, consisting in part of petty bickering amongst the operators.— Documents show that the City has been anticipating a reduction in conflict and an increase to the positive side of this business since 1997 – this result has yet to materialize.⁵³— In the interim, the City continues to produce over 500 documents a year regarding the horse-drawn carriage industry.⁵⁴—

For the last decade, the City has been wasting needed resources to deal with an industry that residents do not approve of or use. Meanwhile, those resources have been diverted from the very serious issues facing the City,⁵⁵ such as the homeless population that ranked as the number one concern by residents in 2005.—

Conclusion

In short, by banning the use of horses in the City of Victoria, the City will address the serious concerns regarding safety, health and appropriateness raised in this submission. In addition, needed resources of both time and money will be freed to deal with the hard issues that are facing the community. This pre-emptive action will ensure that no one will ever again be forced to face down an out-of-control horse-drawn carriage while walking across the street. What happened to the elderly pedestrian is inexcusable; it is time that the City act to prevent accidents like this from ever happening in Victoria again.

¹ Victoria Police Department, File Number 95-1178 (May 3, 1995).

² Letters of complaint dated May 20, 1997, June 6, 1997 and August 7, 1997. Due to privacy issues pertaining to the Freedom of Information, the identities of the authors is unavailable.

³ Letters of complaint dated May 20, 1997.

⁴ *Ibid.*

- [5](#) Letters of complaint dated June 6, 1997.
- [6](#) Letters of complaint dated August 7, 1997
- [7](#) *Ibid.*
- [8](#) City of Victoria, *2005 Citizen Survey* (January 2006) at 130 available online: <http://www.victoria.ca/cityhall/pdfs/ctzn_survey2005_full.pdf>; City of Victoria, *Downtown Plan – Dislikes/Problems Report* (March 21, 2006) at 13 available online: <http://www.victoria.ca/cityhall/pdfs/downtown_wrkshp_dislike_060321.pdf>.
- [9](#) City of Victoria, Advisory Transportation Committee Minutes (April 18, 2006) at 2 available online: < http://www.victoria.ca/cityhall/minutes_boards/min030318_transport.pdf>.
- [10](#) City of Victoria response to letter of complaint dated August 20, 2001, written by a visitor from Burlington, Ontario.
- [11](#) Letter from Tourism Victoria dated October 27, 2006.
- [12](#) Letter from James Bay Neighbourhood Association dated December 27, 1996.
- [13](#) City of Victoria, Committee of the Whole Minutes (May 18, 2000) at 12 available online: <http://www.victoria.ca/cityhall/minutes_committee/min000518_ctw.pdf>.
- [14](#) Letter of complaint dated June 10, 1998.
- [15](#) *Ibid.*
- [16](#) *Ibid.*
- [17](#) Victoria Police Department, File Number 2005-20636 (May 6, 2005).
- [18](#) Victoria Police Department, File Number 1-00-015046 (June 17, 2000).
- [19](#) Letter from Victoria Carriage Tours dated November 10, 1997.
- [20](#) Victoria Police Department, File Number 2005-39152 (August 15, 2005).
- [21](#) Victoria Police Department, File Number 2005-43905 (September 10, 2005).
- [22](#) Victoria Police Department, File Number 1-03-001601 (September 15, 2003); “Three Injured When Horse, Carriage Bolts” *Times-Colonist* (16 September, 2003) D1.
- [23](#) Victoria Police Department, File Number 2006-42530 (August 31, 2006).
- [24](#) Victoria Police Department, File Number 1-97-001526 (July 25, 1997).
- [25](#) Victoria Police Department, File Number 1-00-000802 (May 8, 2000).
- [26](#) Victoria Police Department, File Number 1-02-001220 (July 22, 2002).
- [27](#) Victoria Police Department, File Number 2004-39738 (August 26, 2004).
- [28](#) Victoria Police Department, File Number 2006-37252 (August 4, 2006).
- [29](#) Joel A. Tarr, *The Search For The Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective* (Akron, OH.: University of Akron Press, 1996) at 324.
- [30](#) Letter from James Bay Neighbourhood Association dated October 27, 1995.
- [31](#) *Ibid.* at 323.
- [32](#) City of Victoria, Bylaw No. 03-60, *Vehicles for Hire Bylaw*, Part 3, Division 3.
- [33](#) Letter of complaint dated May 28, 1997; Carla Wilson, “Carriage Firms Team Up” *Times-Colonist* (20 September 2004) C1.
- [34](#) Letters of complaint dated: June 6, 1997; July 10, 2001; January 14, 2002; February 7, 2002; August 4, 2004.
- [35](#) Letter of complaint dated July 10, 2001.
- [36](#) *Ibid.*
- [37](#) Letter of complaint dated January 14, 2002.
- [38](#) Letter of complaint dated August 4, 2004.
- [39](#) *Ibid.*

- [40](#) Internal email regarding horse carriage operations review dated October 23, 1996; City of Victoria, *Horsedrawn Carriage Industry – 1996 Season Review* (December 24, 1996); Internal email regarding horse manure on city streets dated March 7, 2002; City of Victoria, *Victoria Harbour Plan* (November 1, 2001) at 31 available online: <http://www.victoria.ca/common/pdfs/planning_harbourplan.pdf>; City of Victoria, *Downtown Plan – Dislikes/Problems Report*, *supra* note 8.
- [41](#) Internal email dated October 23, 1996, *supra* note 40.
- [42](#) *Ibid.*
- [43](#) *Ibid.*; City of Victoria, *Victoria Harbour Plan*, *supra* note 40.
- [44](#) *Supra* note 29 at 330.
- [45](#) *Ibid.* at 327.
- [46](#) Letter of complaint dated June 10, 1998.
- [47](#) Letter of complaint dated August 20, 2001.
- [48](#) Letter of complaint dated June 6, 2005.
- [49](#) Carriage Operators of North America, on file with author.
- [50](#) *Ibid.*
- [51](#) Malcolm Curtis, “Horse Carriage Tour Rivals Settle Differences Over Turf” *Times-Colonist* (29 June 2002) B2; Gerard Young, “Covenant For Horses Could Sink Carriage Business” *Times-Colonist* (14 February 2003) C2; Gerard Young, “Council Settles Dispute Over Horse-Carriage Licence” *Times-Colonist* (21 February 2003) C3; Carla Wilson, “Carriage Firms Team Up” *supra* note 33.
- [52](#) City of Victoria, Commercial Use of Public Space Minutes (August 28, 2003) at 3-4 available online: <http://www.victoria.ca/cityhall/minutes_council/min030828s_cnc.pdf>.
- [53](#) City of Victoria, Committee of the Whole Report (April 11, 1997).
- [54](#) Phone conversation pertaining to Freedom of Information request with Sheryl Masters, Manager of Administration.
- [55](#) City of Victoria, *2005 Citizen Survey*, *supra* note 8 at 21.