



Sept. 10, 2019

Mayor Helps and Council  
Victoria City Hall  
1 Centennial Square  
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

Dear Mayor Helps and Council,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Vancouver Humane Society (VHS) in regard to Victoria City Council's recent discussions surrounding the future of horse-drawn carriages in the City of Victoria. As an organization dedicated to the humane treatment of animals and committed to working with decision-makers to enact policies that protect animal welfare, VHS strongly recommends prohibiting the operation of horse-drawn carriages and trolleys in urban settings.

The regular exposure to traffic, noise, and pollution; the long hours of standing and walking on hard surfaces; and the hard labour under sometimes extreme weather conditions are not consistent with a horse guardian's responsibility to provide high-quality, long-term care for horses.

As urban carriage horses are active in the summer tourism months, they risk exposure to heat-stress. This risk is increased by pulling heavy loads on hot pavements, high humidity, infrequent watering, poor conditioning and obesity.

Horse-drawn carriages share the roadway with motor vehicles, putting both the animals and public at risk. This is a growing concern, as traffic congestion has worsened in recent years with the city's increasing population. As prey animals, horses have a highly developed flight drive that is easily triggered when they are startled by an unexpected or threatening stimulus. This reaction can happen to even the best-trained and well-mannered horses, and is often the cause of accidents for horse-drawn carriages.

Numerous welfare and safety concerns have been raised over the years by concerned citizens, including an especially troubling incident at Ogden Point in May of last year. On this occasion, a traffic incident with a bus led two trolley horses to fall on the street and struggle to get back up. The entire incident went on for over five minutes, with members of the public attempting to intervene and inadvertently putting themselves at risk of injury, indicating a lack of emergency protocols and training of staff.

Carriage horses used in urban settings can spend considerable amounts of time close to automotive exhaust pollution, exposing them to respiratory health risks. Carriage horses also spend a great deal of time on paved streets, making hoof care challenging.

Ultimately, the urban conditions that create welfare and public safety issues cannot be adequately addressed through regulation of the industry. Increased traffic congestion, noise and pollution, as well as unnatural environments and walking surfaces are inherently inhumane environments for these horses. For the reasons outlined above, VHS concludes that cities are not suitable for horse carriages/trolleys and supports prohibiting the use of horses for such purposes. We strongly encourage Victoria City Council to follow Montreal's lead in phasing out and banning the practice, as well as supporting the industry and workers in transitioning to alternative employment.

I look forward to your response to this letter and welcome any questions or feedback you may have.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Austin', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Austin  
Executive Director

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