

## SRA STATEMENT AGAINST PRIOR

Jan 26, 2019

All these people have come out today to send a simple message. The choice you make about Prior St isn't just about the best place to put the arterial. Your choice will have lasting ramifications for our future and the future of our neighbourhood. It will either open up possibilities or close them. So we're asking you to think about the future.

But first, we want to tell you a little about the past.

For 60 years, Prior was a quiet dead-end street with working class homes along either side. In the late 1950s, Prior was joined to Venables, which is why there's a curve near the tracks. Not long after that, the City decided we needed a freeway to downtown. The plan was to demolish all these homes to clear the way for it. Residents fought back and the plan was defeated. Somehow, the Georgia Viaduct got built anyway. But it was left with no freeway to feed into. So all that freeway traffic was rerouted onto a quiet residential street: Prior.

Today, in a neighbourhood where everybody walks, hardly anybody walks on Prior. It's busy, it's noisy, it's polluted. People don't use Strathcona Park because they don't want to cross Prior. School groups, community centre classes don't use the park because they don't want to risk somebody getting hit. There's a playground and a climbing wall that are rarely used.

The City is well aware of this.

In 2008, when the overpass was first proposed, engineers determined it should be on Malkin. In 2016, they reaffirmed that choice, posting on the city's website that "subsequent work has reconfirmed that the existing alignment along Prior/Venables is poorly suited to accommodate an improved link due to proximity to residential uses and a limited right-of-way to improve the existing conditions..."

It's too narrow. It's too close to homes. It's 9,000 cars a day over capacity.

In 2015 and again in 2018, City Council unanimously passed motions to restore Prior to a local serving street.

But that is not the message that the city is sending to you. This will be one of the rare times that anyone defends Prior to the Panel. Why is that?

The City wants to tear down the Viaducts, but they're also asking you to consider keeping a freeway on Prior. Because it's already here. The damage has already been done. The street has divided the neighbourhood for the last fifty years.

To us, that is just plain wrong. You made a mess, fix it. But no.

Instead that wrong is being compounded by the fact that this is all being done so that a second wall can divide Strathcona. The only reason for the overpass is so the railroad can turn a rarely used spur line into a busy mainline. All the other at-grade road crossings will be closed so that trains can run 24/7.

Which means Prior will not stay the same as it is today. Once the at-grade crossing at Glen and Parker is closed, Prior will be the only truck access for Produce Row. Once the overpass blocks access to Glen and Raymur, 4000 trucks a week will need to turn left here, at Hawks. Assuming that just working hours, that's one a minute. Prior will also become a primary ambulance route to the hospital. Plus a bus line, rush hour and residential traffic. That's one possible future.

But there's another possible future. What possibilities might happen if you decide that Prior should be restored to the residential street it was built to be?

For one. People will feel safe to cross it. School groups, community groups, families, and seniors, residents will start to use the greenspace that was intended for them.

Instead of being a park primarily designed for weekend baseball games, Strathcona Park could be re-imagined as a park for the people who live here. Birthday parties. Picnics. People sitting on the grass. A hundred trees could be planted to offset air pollution from trains and trucks, to preserve and provide habitat for eagles and other wildlife, to create an urban sanctuary in an area of town that already has insufficient greenspace, a neighbourhood with the city's highest density of social housing, of people who need a park.

What else?

People could walk on Prior again. Residents who live on Prior could finally park in front of their homes. This street traffic could help businesses popping up on Prior to flourish.

A pedestrian and bike under or overpass could be built to cross the railroad tracks. A re-routed shuttle bus could provide the same service the 22 bus provides now. The No. 1 Fire Station could be turned into a much-needed community centre.

I'm getting carried away. Maybe all these things won't happen. But I can guarantee that if you decide to put the arterial on Prior, none of them will happen.

Sometimes the cheapest choice, or the easiest choice, isn't is best choice. Sometimes investing a little in today opens the possibilities for a much better tomorrow.

Don't choose a street. Choose a future.