



## *sitelines*

BY STEVE COHLMAYER

# One way of looking at it

*Jimi Hendrix had it right — crosstown traffic is tricky*

JANE Jacobs, the well-known urban thinker everyone loves to quote, opened the discussion on one-way streets more than 40 years ago.

She claimed that downtown one-way streets might be good for moving traffic, but their effect on neighbouring businesses is negative — and therefore the effect on urban vitality, variety and livability is also negative.

Her observations have slowly become a form of accepted truth. They've inspired a growing movement in North American cities to reopen one-way streets to two-way traffic.

In Winnipeg, the latest news is that some of our downtown one-way streets may soon be converted back. All of which leads me to make two observations:

1) Any accepted truth should be taken with a grain or two of salt, even if handed down by Jane Jacobs. Experience and observation do indeed suggest that crosstown one-way streets, which are designed to move traffic efficiently, do not seem to attract small and medium-scale commerce (and actually seem to work against successful local commercial enterprise).

But one-way streets have been developed to great advantage in many cities. Former two-way streets have been re-signalized as one-way in residential areas of downtown. These streets often change their direction of travel every two or three blocks in order to encourage use by local residents and to thwart crosstown short-cutters. This also allows an additional lane for parking, effectively doubling the parking capacity on these streets.

Another evolving strategy has been to convert local commercial streets to run one way in order to make room for assigned two-way bicycle lanes. These strategies have actually enhanced the quality of urban life.

2) A few details on the "back to two-way" initiative in Winnipeg deserve further discussion. For example, traffic engineers believe that some "paired" one-way streets should be maintained as effective movers of traffic across downtown.

Two pairings in downtown Winnipeg act in this way: St. Mary and York avenues (east-west), and Smith and Donald streets (which continue north-south with King and Princess streets). There is a strong argument to be made that these two sub-systems should be maintained, especially if the intersection of Portage and Main is reopened to pedestrians.

However, the interim report also proposes to keep Fort and Garry streets and Notre Dame Avenue as one-way carriers. These are not significant crosstown arteries, and were all successfully used as two-way routes until the 1950s. They should be converted back to their original two-way use — especially as all three suffer from less-than-vibrant commerce and street life, and any action that might bring them back to life should be welcomed.

Perhaps the worst impact of changing our downtown streets to one-way routes 50 years ago was that the converted streets were widened, and hundreds of mature avenue trees were cut down. As we work to repair the damage, we should remember that.

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