

Abbotsford

28-Feb-2020

Parking & MFB

Dear Councillors,

Recently in San Francisco, the Fire Department bought new vehicles that are narrower, shorter and with smaller turning radii. Why? "...It was built to adapt to San Francisco's evolving urban streetscape and Vision Zero goals."

- *Fire Department's New 'Vision Zero' Truck [StreetsBlog]*
- <https://sf.streetsblog.org/2017/11/03/fire-departments-new-vision-zero-truck/>

Also, "...fire department worked with Walk San Francisco and the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition on the design. 'Sometimes it feels like we are a competing interest, but we are not.'" But honestly, this coalition came out of prior tensions just like what we have right now.

"While I and others have disputed [SFFD's] assertions," said Wiener, "if the department is concerned, the solution is to take a hard look at truck design."

- *Scott Wiener: SFFD's Next Fire Truck Fleet Needs to Be More Versatile [StreetsBlog]*
- <https://sf.streetsblog.org/2014/04/21/scott-wiener-sffds-next-fire-truck-fleet-needs-to-be-more-versatile/>

Importantly, local board supervisors called out SFFDs claims they needed widened streets, which end in a mutually beneficial result. Better still, this ultimately ended in a movement for a state bill to mandate 'complete streets' designs in California: "Senator Wiener discussed plans to introduce new legislation mandating safer street design at the state level. Senate Bill 760 would require CalTrans, the state transportation agency that regulates highways, to implement 'complete street' safety designs."

- *New 'Vision Zero' Fire Trucks are a Big Step Towards Safer Streets*
- https://www.thebaycitybeacon.com/politics/new-vision-zero-fire-trucks-are-a-big-step-towards/article_73c04ab2-c4f8-11e7-8186-7bfc79b2a5f.html

Similarly, in Portland (Oregon) the Fire Department has worked collaboratively with the local Bureau of Transportation to ensure that safe streets are not compromised by wide street design.

As Portland has built out bike lanes, narrowed car lanes, and added pedestrian safety measures, the fears about slower response times did not materialize, says Fire Chief Mike Myers.

“There has been no reduction in response times by working with urban planners and transportation leaders to build out Portland,” Myers said on a recent webinar hosted by the National Association of City Transportation Officials.

It also helps to have fire response vehicles that fit well on narrower streets conducive to walking and biking. Compared to European cities, American fire departments use bigger vehicles with wider turning radii.



What's best for City of Yarra?

- *How Fire Departments Stopped Worrying and Embraced Safer Street Design*
- <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2018/05/29/how-fire-departments-stopped-worrying-and-embraced-safer-street-design/>

Similar results in Beaufort County, where right-sized equipment not only saved them a ton of cash, but improved their responsiveness to actual emergencies.

- *Beaufort's new fire trucks hailed for a 6-figure savings*

- <http://www.thedigitel.com/s/beaufort/news/beauforts-new-fire-trucks-hailed-6-figure-savings-110507-74112/>

A few other good reads on the topic:

- *It's Time to Redesign the Big Old Red Fire Truck* – <https://www.citylab.com/design/2016/01/firetruck-design-smaller-city-street/425142/>
- *Are American fire trucks too big? Congestion and street width are just two of the factors that force us to consider the right size for our rigs* - <https://www.firerescue1.com/fire-products/fire-apparatus/articles/are-american-fire-trucks-too-big-YBcUmD5TGHp0I9HJ/> (Written by a Battalion Chief)
- *How Fire Chiefs and Traffic Engineers Make Places Less Safe* – <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2017/3/28/how-fire-chiefs-and-traffic-engineers-make-places-less-safe>
- *Why do we have such big fire trucks for so few fires? And why are our cities being designed around the needs of the trucks instead of vice versa?* – <https://www.mnn.com/green-tech/transportation/blogs/why-do-we-have-such-big-fire-trucks-so-few-fires>

Is this in defense of car parking? Not at all. The excessive amount of public space handed over to car parking is problematic for City of Yarra, not to mention the plague of foot-path parking in Abbotsford.

The issue I'm highlighting here is that MFB expect to operate outside of the framework that CoY has for addressing local place issues, namely the LAPM process. The above case studies show that positive community outcomes arise from community collaboration and bringing the stakeholders together. Many of us in the community (individuals and organizations) advocate for improvements to street safety, street amenity, and improved walking and cycling provisions. Even minor fixes often meet a standard response of "wait for the LAPM process". Where were MFB during the LAPM for Abbotsford? Were they involved?

As per above articles, the best albeit blinkered intentions of emergency services typically have the opposite effect, in that they make our streets worse off, both in terms of amenity, and actual safety. These concerns cannot be meaningfully addressed outside of a consultative framework like LAPMs. To illustrate this, the community advocated to address rat-running through Abbotsford, which has become "Hoddle Bypass". This concern was not given proper credence, although the risk of death or injury to traffic violence is at least an order of magnitude greater than that of fire. Why should the lesser threat of fire risk get a free pass to upend the community when addressing a more significant threat posed by motor vehicles be put on hold? It's unfair to community advocates, unjust, and *unsafe*.

The MFB proposal as it stands will likely worsen rat-running as the streets become wider and feel safer to speed down. Parking, MFB access and rat-running are orthogonal issues, but intersect in a way that requires a holistic solution. Smaller emergency vehicles? Yes. Less on-street parking/more car-share? Yes. Remove through-traffic to eliminate rat-running? Definitely Yes. But

we missed the opportunity to address this holistically. Trying to fix one issue isolation will exacerbate others.

Since the state government is watching what happens in Yarra, as usual, we have the opportunity to have a broader influence upon Melbourne. Not only can we show the right way to involve MFB in a consultative approach to local placemaking (LAPM), we can influence them to use better equipment that is the right size (and cheaper and more effective) and for MFB to become genuine partners to a more realistic safe-streets paradigm. Akin to the bill push in California, the greatest potential outcome would be state government legislation dictating street safe design and how that meshes with emergency services. City of Melbourne have made positive changes with regards to urban maintenance vehicles.



- Safer garbage trucks in Melbourne City
- <https://www.bicyclenetwork.com.au/newsroom/2019/07/04/safer-garbage-trucks-in-melbourne-city/>

NACTO also has some interesting case studies:

- Case Studies: Downsized Street Maintenance Vehicles
- <https://nacto.org/Downsized-Street-Maintenance-Vehicles/>

If council does decide to act outside of the LAPM process I do strongly endorse the submission made by Jeremy Lawrence on behalf of Streets Alive Yarra, since it details a street design that is more pleasant, more equitable, and safer. It provides a way to leverage MFB's request to improve the outcome for Abbotsford.

Thanks for your consideration. As always, thank you for your dedicated service to the community.

Sincerely,

