

Harvie Passage Roadway Access Needs A Resolution

The **Calgary Bow River Weir Project** was proposed in 2001 by the **Bow Waters Canoe Club** to develop a safe river user passage through the Western Irrigation District Weir in the heart of the City of Calgary. The project later developed into the **Harvie Passage Project** that was first completed in 2012 and later redeveloped after the devastating 2013 Flood. The facility was finally reopened to the public in 2018. From its humble conceptual beginning as a safe passage through the Western Irrigation District Weir it has developed into a world-class whitewater park used by thousands of Calgarians and visiting recreation river users.

As the Harvie Passage development grew in scope, it became evident that access and parking would become an issue. But although several surveys and investigations identified the importance of addressing this concern, there has been no resolution to this infrastructure need on the part of Calgary and Provincial government agencies. The **Harvie Passage Alliance** stakeholders campaigned throughout the development to find solutions to Harvie Passage access and parking and more recently **Calgary River Users' Alliance (CRUA)** has taken up the challenge to find a resolution to vehicle access and parking need.

This report documents the development of Harvie Passage from its inception in 2001 to where we are today with a world-class river recreation facility but with limited interconnect with the local community and transportation needs. **CRUA** is committed to finding a resolution to the access and parking challenge and are hoping that government agencies commit to do the same.

Conceptual Design:

Harvie Passage was first proposed as a project to enhance recreational river users in and around the Western Irrigation District Weir (WIDW) in 2001 by the Bow Waters Canoe Club that grew into a group of stakeholders referred to later as the **Harvie Passage Alliance** ⁽¹⁾ with a vision to develop *"A river park in the heart of Calgary, to celebrate the Bow River and its natural abundance"*. And a mission *"To complement and connect Calgary's communities, parks and public facilities on the Bow River through a redevelopment of the existing weir"*.

The Harvie Passage Project as it was called at the time was initially sponsored by the Parks Foundation Calgary in association with Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation and under the direction of the City of Calgary, and Alberta Environment & Parks. Since its inception, many stakeholders have become engaged in the project to ensure that their organizations are represented in developing the project's scope and direction. Today the main stakeholders include Alberta Environment and Parks, the City of Calgary Parks Department, the Calgary Fire Department, Sam Livingston Fish Hatchery/Bow Habitat Station, Inglewood Community Association, and the **Calgary River Users Alliance (CRUA)**. Key Harvie Passage Alliance members, the Alberta Whitewater

Association, Alberta Slalom Canoe Kayak, Bow Waters Canoe Club, and Rocky Mountain Paddling Centre are also members of CRUA and therefore represent river users interests in any stakeholder discussions.

The original development proposal ⁽²⁾ centered on the following objectives:

- *To connect a constellation of invaluable public spaces and amenities in the heart of the city*
- *To re-naturalize the river and shoreline environments in the weir area*
- *To eliminate the current extreme drowning hazard*
- *To maintain all existing infrastructure functions and services*
- *To enable continuous river passage for fish, wildlife, and people.*

The proposal went on to say: *“Countless benefits will flow from this project - for people, fish, birds and wildlife, and the environment itself. This new park will provide a central connection node for numerous public amenities in the area, Naturalization of the area will improve local habitat, movement corridors and riparian functions, allowing all kinds of wildlife to pass freely up and down the river. Perhaps most importantly, the hydraulic roller known as the “drowning machine” will be eliminated, giving safe and unrestricted access to emergency safety patrols, recreational paddlers, and fish”.*

Later it became evident that there was a possibility to add recreational infrastructure into the development that has now become a world-class whitewater destination within the heart of Calgary while still maintaining the original objectives of safe passage through the weir and enhancing outdoor recreational opportunities for the general public.

The question of parking was discussed in the original proposal ⁽¹⁾:

“Most people using the revitalized weir area will simply be passing through on a longer trip from some point upstream to a destination further downstream. The City of Calgary is currently conducting a study of all possible parking and access options in the area, in conjunction with other stakeholders and adjacent facilities and attractions” .

The City of Calgary undertook a *“Bow River Weir Access and Parking Study”* ⁽³⁾ in 2005 that identified four potential access sites (Figure 1). Three of the potential river access points were dismissed because of potential conflicts. They were, “Location A” with access adjacent to Cushing Bridge, “Location B” access on the east side of the river at what is now referred to as Albert Park, and “Location C” using the Pearce Estates parking lot. The fourth option at “Location D” north-east of the WID headwaters diversion channel with access across CP Rail lines was also later dismissed as a viable Harvie Passage option. **Calgary River Users’ Alliance (CRUA)** is unaware of any further analysis that has been conducted by either the City of Calgary or the Government of Alberta to address what has become an ever-increasing urgent resolution to a shortage in parking and river access needs.



Figure 1: Harvie Passage Proposed Access Sites

Stage 1 Development – Pre-Flood

Local engineers Klohn Crippen Burger ⁽⁴⁾ were commissioned to deliver the Harvie Passage project within a budget of \$16.6 million. The design and construction took place between 2006 and 2011 under the direction of Parks Foundation Calgary, The City of Calgary, Alberta Environment and Parks, and Alberta Transportation.

Although the consensus was that the original conceptual objecting was met there was a weakness in the design that it was hoped would be corrected in the future.



Harvie Passage 2012

And as has been alluded to previously, it became evident that site access and parking would become a bigger issue than what was envisioned in the conceptual design.

The University of Calgary Report, *“Exploring Stakeholder Perspectives of the Bow River Weir Project”* ⁽⁵⁾ from 2009 reviewed all surveys and reports in support of the Harvie Passage Project. Of significance is the assessment of river access and parking:

Access and Parking Study (City of Calgary, 2005)

As indicated by the pre-design study, parking was a key concern of the Harvie Passage Proposal that needed to be addressed (Golder 2003). The City of Calgary undertook a “Bow River Weir Access and Parking Study” in 2005. This study identified four possible sites for the parking-based need for required space, river ingress and egress points, user conflicts, and other various acceptability criteria (Figure 1). The study also completed a user survey to determine desired location and requirements for river users.

***Location “A”** had potential conflicts with current landowners, river users, pathway users, and emergency services (which currently use the site as a boat launch). As well, the access road does not meet current intersection spacing requirements and would require upgrades. This parking area would provide eight stalls and provide river access at location “1”.*

***Location “B”** does not meet proper intersection spacing from the Deerfoot Trail exit ramp and has no area for boat launch. Drivers would have to enter from the east and exit to the west resulting in a circular travel pattern. The potential for river and pathway user conflicts exists at this site because boaters would be utilizing the pathways for portaging watercraft. Potential for river ingress is at location “2.”*

***Location “C”** is the parking lot for Pearce Estate Park and the Sam Livingston Fish Hatchery. There are 250 spaces in this lot but it was deemed inappropriate to have paddlers accessing the river through Pearce Estate Park. Locations “3A” and “3B” would be potential points of ingress from this lot. Location “D” has no current parking lot or boat launch but has the possibility for construction. There is currently a dirt road which connects this area to the Calgary Zoo. This site also creates potential user conflicts between river and pathway users. The river ingress point would be location “4.”*

Major results from the City of Calgary’s user survey are as follows: “River users are on the river for extended periods. On average, 90% of users are on the river for more than 2 hours. 80% of users are in groups of 3 or more. Vehicle occupancy averages 2.4 persons (excluding buses). Usage is heaviest on

weekends and holidays. Usage is evenly spread out through the daylight hours. Cycling through the area is an important use. The study area is currently used for every category on the survey except for tubing. 35% of users cited a concern for personal safety or safety of unattended vehicles. 75% of concerned users would visit more often if safety concerns were addressed. The currently available launch points in the area do not match the desired launch points. Finally, usage of this area will increase upon completion of the improvements to the weir" (City of Calgary, 2005).

The parking study ultimately determined that location "D" is the most desirable parking site due to minimal conflict with other users, no impact on neighborhoods or the Calgary Zoo, desirable location for river users, good access to roads, and sufficient land with availability for expansion. This site would require a river crossing to prevent any illegal crossing of the CPR bridge. Locations "A", "B", and "C" were eliminated for a variety of factors. Inadequate size, user conflicts, unsuitable road access, unsuitable river access, and landowner issue were identified as the main limitations. These sites compromised the usage of Pearce Estate Park, Sam Livingston Fish Hatchery, and the operation of Sam Livingston Fish Hatchery. Building a parking lot of appropriate size and location would ensure that nearby residents of Inglewood are not making significant compromises for the sake of this amenity.

What is evident from both the City of Calgary parking study and the conclusion made by the University of Calgary review document that both City of Calgary and the Government of Alberta were unable to address the importance of Harvie Passage river access and parking assignments. There was a clear failure on the part of the City of Calgary to address the access and parking component of the future development during the early Harvie Passage consultation phase:

Location A: The City of Calgary decision to allow the Calgary Fire Department (CFD) to restrict a public access boat ramp to emergency use only. There is no evidence that this action would enhance emergency vehicle access to the river. But rather a department policy to restrict public access to the river that had previously been a respectful coexistence by both the CFD and the public. This decision was further complicated by a City of Calgary Development Permit for the adjacent SoBow Condo Development that designated the public access corridor between 17 Avenue SE and the proposed condo developments as restricted emergency vehicle access, without any trade-off from the condo development for public vehicle access to the river edge.

Location B: Although public vehicle access to the east side of the river at Albert Park does not service the HP- Low Water Channel use area, it does more advanced paddlers who would use the HP High Water Channel more accessible access from the east riverbank. This would alleviate parking on the west side of the river where parking is at a premium. Although one-way entrance to and exit from the site is considered problematic by both Alberta Transportation and City of Calgary Roads Department, the site continues to be used as a recreation and dog walking park. The addition of a river use staging area would have little impediment to the flow of traffic locally.

Location C: It is difficult to understand why both the City of Calgary Parks Department and Alberta Environment and Parks have jointly blocked further development of an enhanced parking lot and public roadway access across Pearce Estates Park to the HP – Low Water Channel. With more than 250 parking stalls and a realignment of a service roadway close to the southern perimeter of the park, the open area

at the Harvie Passage – Low Water Channel could be used as a staging area for river use. There is sufficient waste area adjacent to the proposed staging area to develop a short-term parking lot.

Stage 2 Development – Post Flood:

The unprecedented flood in June 2013 of the Bow and Elbow Rivers resulted in a 1 in 100-year flood discharge and a large influx of sediment through Harvie Passage ⁽⁴⁾. The flood caused major infilling, damaged portions of the divide island, and eroded an old river channel. It also lowered downstream river levels, creating unsafe hydraulic conditions. Harvie Passage was closed from 2013 until its rehabilitation in 2018. Several new features have been incorporated in the redesign at a cost of \$ 8 million to make the passage safer and provide a more enjoyable experience for river-based recreationists.



Harvie Passage - Low Water Channel

Additional benefits of the project include the new shoreline spaces along the passage that have been developed for people wishing to enjoy the beauty of the Bow from the land. There are tree-lined walkways and beach areas for the public. These spaces are a delightful complement to the nearby Pearce Estate Park. A new trailered boat ramp has been included in the design to accommodate an ever-increasing need for the fishing communities' drift boat use. But unfortunately, there is no public vehicle access to it.

Harvie Passage Trailered-Boat Access:

The **Bow River Trout Foundation (BRTF)**, as a member of **CRUA** presented a case for vehicle access to Harvie Passage in the 2017 document *“A Boat Ramp to Nowhere – A Proposal for Access to Harvie Passage”* ⁽⁶⁾. Two vehicle access options were presented (Figure 2):

Option 1: Use the existing right of way from 11A Street SE traffic circle on the north side of SoBow Condo Development, running east adjacent to 17 Avenue SE to a point east of the riverbank Pathway. The roadway would extend north on land allocated for future city park development to where it would reach the southern boundary of Pearce Estate Park and then transcend the Pathway to a staging area and boat ramp at the outflow for Harvie Passage - Low Flow Channel.



Harvie Passage Boat Ramp

Option 2: A new public roadway on the southern boundary of Pearce Estate Park, crossing the Pathway at the same location as Option 1. This proposal would give the most direct link between the Pearce Estate parking lot and Harvie Passage. Would not appreciably impact current park character, alleviate pressure on park facilities, and congestion.

The report made the following conclusions:

“A comparison of the two options and deciding which is most desirable for all stakeholders will depend on land-use restrictions and development costs. But from a river user viewpoint, the more direct route outlined in Option 2 would be preferred but development costs and timelines may be the limiting factor. Option 1 would appear to be an immediate development possibility with a relatively low cost but is complicated by current roadway access from the 11A Street access.”

Regardless of the complications with site development, public as well as emergency road access to Harvie Passage is paramount preceding the opening of the Low Flow Channel in July 2018. Therefore, river access infrastructure needs an immediate resolution”



Figure 2: Harvie Passage Boat Ramp Access

Bow River Boat House Proposal

In 2019 The paddling clubs and river users in Calgary joined through the **Bow River Boathouse Society (BRBS)** to propose the construction and operation of the **Bow River Boathouse** in Pearce Estate Park⁽⁷⁾. The Boathouse would provide the washrooms and change rooms for the public with accessible parking nearby. Onsite storage for boats and equipment would make the facility more user friendly and improve visitor satisfaction. The building would house paddling operations at Harvie Passage and be the central hub for everyone visiting Harvie Passage.

The Boathouse proposal would need road access and parking adjacent to the proposed construction west of the Harvie Passage -Low Water Channel outflow (Figure 3). The proposed access route is the same as the **BRTF** boat ramp access proposal. But the Matco SoBow Condo Development Municipal Reserve (MR) was considered a preferred location for short-term parking.



Figure 3: Bow River Boat House Access Proposal

The CRUA Current Position:

The combined efforts of principal stakeholders within CRUA have engaged with the City of Calgary Parks Department and Alberta Environment & Parks for the duration of Harvie Passage development plan to resolve what are impediments to rational access requirements for a facility of the size and scope of Harvie Passage. There are entrenched beliefs and turf protection that are creating unnecessary obstacles to the development of a Harvie Passage road access:

Bow Habitat Station and the associated AEP Livingstone Fish Hatchery has seen to object to any infrastructure enhancement that would secure a Harvie Passage access roadway allowance. Considering that the GOA has invested upwards of \$25 million into the development of Harvie Passage it is unexplainable that this agency who had supported the conceptual design would now flatly reject any discussions on proposed access and parking needs.

Calgary Parks Department appears to be ambivalent to Harvie Passage roadway access and parking needs in or close to Pearce Estates Park – a property that the City of Calgary has assumed responsibility to maintain up to the riverbank adjacent to the Harvie Passage – Low Water Channel.

Alberta Environment & Parks Department as the developer of the instream structure of the WID Weir Project that later became Harvie Passage have negated roadway access development infrastructure to the City of Calgary even though access across crown land will be needed to secure vehicle access to a boat ramp installed into the Harvie Passage development.

Matco Developments the owner of the adjacent SoBow Condo Development was approached to discuss a possible roadway access concession across their property to the Municipal Reserve where it may have been possible to secure short-term parking and roadway access to Harvie Passage through an agreement with the City of Calgary and the GOA. After some cordial discussions on the subject our proposal was rejected.

The Decision: CRUA is committed to finding a resolution to the access and parking challenge, and we are inviting all government agencies to commit to do the same.

Peter Crowe-Swords

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