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Pedestrians take over Portage and Main

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About 50 local pedestrians took control of historic Portage and Main for 30 minutes Sunday morning — with the help of a police escort.

The group was one of many Jane's Walks this weekend offering tours of city neighbourhoods and streets. Organized by BridgmanCollaborative Architecture, the Portage and Main walk explored opening up the famous corner that has been closed to pedestrians since the 1970s.

With drivers who were tied up in traffic blaring their horns in anger, the group stood on the street chanting: "People over cars! People over cars!"

"It was really exciting to be with so many people who just decided to come and engage in this important moment," said Marcella Poirier, BridgmanCollaborative's marketing director who helped organize the walk across the windswept city centre. "Jane's Walk is about taking to the street on a safe walk in a neighbourhood. What greater neighbourhood than Portage and Main? So, we wanted a celebration.

"It's significant because Portage and Main, in the past year, has really become a centre of many discussions on what could happen here in a visionary way ... It's a celebration to say that good cities have spaces that are shared between pedestrians, cyclists, strollers, wheelchairs, walkers, cars."

Kailey Kroeker actually rode her bicycle alongside the walkers who occupied the corner.

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"It's import for the pedestrians to have more control of the city, to be able to occupy the spaces that we contribute to," she said. "There were lots of people honking. People were pretty upset about it, I would say. But it feels nice to be able to occupy the street again."

Laura Kroeker (no relation) walked across the corner.

"It's just so nice to be able to walk around the streets and feel safe," she said. "It makes people feel so much more connected to the city and to each other."

Mayor Bowman made a commitment to tear down the barricades to open the corner to pedestrians in 2017.

"It's time that people should be allowed to walk freely," said Downtown BIZ executive director Stefano Grande. "It's so important here because this is the heart of the city centre."

A transportation study is being done "to understand how to safely move people, cars and bikes in one location," Poirier said.

"In 2016, I don't believe that we as citizens tolerate the idea that bicycles shouldn't safely share the road or that people who use mobility scooters, or walkers, or strollers shouldn't be safely protected from cars."

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