

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee

DATE OF MEETING: September 18, 2023

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WARD(S) INVOLVED: All

DATE OF REPORT: September 8, 2023

REPORT NO.: DSD-2023-007

SUBJECT: Active Transportation Progress Report 2023

RECOMMENDATION:

That Development Services Department report, DSD-2023-007 be received as the first progress report for the Cycling and Trails Master Plan.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress made on Kitchener's award-winning Cycling and Trails Master Plan, as well as other active transportation and trail initiatives.
- The key finding of this report is that more people are walking, rolling and cycling thanks to Kitchener's strong progress on implementing the Cycling and Trails Master Plan.
- This report is for information purposes and does not have any financial implications.
- Community engagement included consultation with the Active Transportation and Trails Advisory Committee.
- This report supports People-friendly Transportation by improving connectivity and year-round maintenance to multi-use trails and pathways as prioritized through the Cycling and Trails Master Plan; and by building a continuous and protected cycling network.

BACKGROUND:

Kitchener's Cycling and Trails Master Plan (CTMP) was approved in 2020 and has since won awards for its community-based approach to active transportation and trail planning. The CTMP includes 35 strategic actions in three areas of focus: Connections, Experience and Culture. Action 3E-2 calls for staff to communicate on progress made and provide data on usership of the active transportation and trail network on a biannual basis. The last progress report provided to City Council was in 2016. This progress report will provide

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information from 2017-2022, and is found in Attachment A: Active Transportation Progress Report 2023.

There are many additional strategic initiatives that support a vision for Kitchener where residents can safely and enjoyably walk, roll and cycle to get around and for healthy, active lifestyles. These include the Sidewalk Infill Policy, Complete Streets, Vision Zero, Leisure Facilities Master Plan, Places and Spaces and the Official Plan.

REPORT:

Walking, rolling and cycling – the main forms of active transportation - bring many benefits. Everyone in the city can benefit when we collectively work to reduce automobile dependence and greenhouse gas emissions, provide more recreation and leisure options, increase social connections and physical activity, improve public health outcomes, and reduce infrastructure demands.

A recent province-wide poll¹ shows that there is a high prevalence of cycling amongst Ontarians. The majority of Ontarians want to cycle more often, and increased investment by governments in cycling infrastructure is something that a majority of Ontarians support. The poll finds:

- 68% of Ontarians (9.8 million people) ride their bike at least monthly.
- 65% expressed their desire to cycle more if there were improved cycling infrastructure.
- 72% believe investing in proper cycling infrastructure makes it safer for all road users.
- 65% say “investing in cycling is good for my municipality”.
- 58% agree that investing in cycling is good for their city’s business and tourism.
- Ontarians are both cyclists and drivers: 87% of Ontario’s 3.2 million frequent cyclists say they also drive frequently, while 85% of Ontario’s 9.8 million occasional cyclists say this is the case.

Cycling and Trails Master Plan progress

The Cycling and Trails Master Plan focuses on creating a city-wide network of cycling routes and trails that is comfortable for people of All Ages and Abilities (AAA). The CTMP’s vision is that “trails and cycling will connect Kitchener and create a sustainable, safe, equitable, and healthy community for everyone year-round.”

In the past five years, the largest increase in mobility infrastructure has been the active transportation and trails network. A map of new infrastructure is found in Attachment B – New Active Transportation Facilities Map 2017-2022.

	2017	2022	Increase
Sidewalks & walkways	1170 km	1225 km	+ 55 km
Total AAA cycling network	201 km	286 km	+ 84 km
Multi-use trails (off-road)*	166 km	191 km	+25 km
Boulevard multi-use trails*	32 km	74 km	+ 41 km
Protected bike lanes	3 km	15 km	+ 12 km
Neighbourhood bikeways	0 km	6 km	+ 6 km

¹ “Ontario Bike Summit Opens in Hamilton With Release of New Province-Wide Polling Data on Cycling in Ontario”, Share the Road Cycling Coalition, May 1, 2023: <https://www.sharetheroad.ca/news-media-p157824>.

Motor vehicle network (total lanes)	2239 lane km	2293 lane km	+ 54 lane km
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**Off-road and boulevard multi-use trails are also available for pedestrian use.*

Kitchener continues to benefit from many initiatives led by the Region of Waterloo, which are reflected in the numbers above and the map in Attachment B. Kitchener staff appreciate the vision and collaborative spirit of Region of Waterloo staff as we work together on a shared vision to see more walking, rolling and cycling in Kitchener.

At the end of 2022, 20% of the new or upgraded infrastructure identified in the CTMP has been completed. Construction of off-road trails is ahead of schedule, which at the current pace of funding and implementation will complete the short-term priorities within the ten-year capital forecast. The implementation of on-street cycling routes is slightly behind schedule, with the ten-year forecast to be completed in fourteen years at the current pace of funding. The delay in on-road is attributed to inflation and complexity working in the downtown.

In addition to expanding the active transportation network, progress has been made on 24 of the 35 actions identified in the CTMP. Highlights include:

- launching e-scooters and e-bikes with partner Neuron Mobility,
- upgrading walkways in a variety of neighbourhoods,
- an update to the City's Development Manual to integrate active transportation in new subdivisions,
- supporting the Region of Waterloo's work for a pedestrian overpass of Highway 7/8 at Strasburg Road,
- delivery of education campaigns for safe cycling, with more campaigns in development through Vision Zero education programs,
- boulevard multi-use trails have been added to the sidewalk inspection program for annual asset management inspections, and;
- wayfinding for people walking, rolling and cycling was implemented on the Iron Horse Trail and the Downtown Cycling Grid, with the next phases of expansion to include the Trans Canada Trail and Henry Sturm trail.

There will be further opportunities to accelerate the implementation of the CTMP during the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, through the main action items identified of city-wide active transportation routes (both on-road and off-road trails) and developing a localized safety improvement program.

Kitchener city staff regularly engages with other jurisdictions to share best practices, with many of those conversations being hosted here in Kitchener. Other cities have taken note of Kitchener's leadership in active transportation and trails and want to learn from our example. Over a dozen professional groups have visited to tour our infrastructure, including the Institute for Transportation Engineers Southwestern Ontario chapter, a delegation from South Korea and several nearby Ontario cities.

Active transportation highlights (in street right of ways)

The active transportation network is expanding through a combination of stand-alone projects for sidewalk infill, pedestrian crossings and cycling infrastructure, as well as street reconstructions required to replace aging underground infrastructure.

In the past five years, Kitchener has installed 28 new pedestrian crossings at mid-block, trail and roundabout locations. See Attachment B for locations.

The Downtown Cycling Grid was the top priority identified by the community in the CTMP, and it is now 75% complete, with the recent addition of a boulevard multi-use trail on Margaret Avenue and Otto Street. The final phase on Duke Street is on track for construction in 2024.

With the recent addition of new bidirectional, protected bike lanes on Cedar Street, Joseph Street, Ontario Street, Water Street, and Queen Street, city staff has retained a consultant to conduct an independent safety review of cycling facilities and adjacent street operations. The review will evaluate current conditions and provide a summary of how the design compares to current Active Transportation best practices, what is working effectively and key issues to consider. The review is expected to be completed in early 2024.

In partnership with Parks staff, the Joint Spot Improvement Program was launched in 2023 to make targeted safety improvements for all street users including pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. This work is guided by the spot fixes identified by the community in the Cycling and Trails Master Plan and Vision Zero.

Trail highlights (off-road)

Since the adoption of the Cycling and Trails Master Plan in 2020, approximately 8 km of trails have been constructed or upgraded. Focuses have been on upgrading stone dust trails to asphalt and making needed connections. Some of the major trails that have been upgraded are the Henry Sturm trail, Wilson Park trail, Traynor Trail, Shoemaker Greenway trail, and the Transit Hub trail (led by Region of Waterloo on City-owned land).

In 2023, a trails spot improvement project was initiated to address notable deficiencies in already paved trails, with some of these improvements being done as a result of the additional funding (\$600,000) Council approved for trail upgrades through the 2023 budget. Partnerships with Engineering, Transportation and Storm and Sanitary Utilities on projects has allowed for several trail projects to be delivered ahead of the master plan's implementation schedule.

How people are using the active transportation and trails network

City staff collect data to track usership over time. In most cases, when we add cycling infrastructure, we see an increase in the number of people cycling. That increase depends on the comfort level for people biking.

- On average, the number of people cycling on a street increases by 30% after painted bike lanes are installed.
- On Queen's Boulevard and Belmont Avenue, protected bike lanes using low-cost measures like flex stakes and bumper blocks brought a year-round increase of 64% for people biking.

- The Downtown Cycling Grid has seen a 164% increase in ridership as people of all ages and abilities are attracted to fully protected bike lanes. When Neuron e-scooters and e-bikes are added to the cycling numbers, the Downtown Cycling Grid has seen a 218% increase of trips.
- Through the first seven months in 2023, there has been a total of 54,781 cycling trips on the portions of the Downtown Cycling Grid currently completed.
- City-wide, there have been 23,821 Neuron e-scooter and e-bike trips since its launch in April.
- The Iron Horse Trail continues to grow in use, with an average of 2,894 daily users in June 2023, compared to 819 in June 2016, an increase of 270%. On the busiest day in June 2023, there were 4,923 people walking, rolling and cycling at the three counter locations.

Further data is presented in simple-to-understand graphs in Attachment A.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports People-friendly Transportation by improving connectivity and year-round maintenance to multi-use trails and pathways as prioritized through the Cycling and Trails Master Plan and by building a continuous and protected cycling network.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report is for information purposes only. Capital and operating impacts are discussed during annual budget cycles.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

INFORM – This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting. It has also been shared with Bike Kitchener newsletter subscribers and will be posted on the city’s cycling webpage.

CONSULT – The Active Transportation and Trails Advisory Committee reviewed the findings of the report on September 12, 2023 and will share their feedback as a delegation.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- 2019-2022 Strategic Plan
- INS-20-015 – 2020 Cycling and Trails Master Plan

APPROVED BY: Justin Readman, General Manager, Development Services
Denise McGoldrick, General Manager, Infrastructure Services

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A – Active Transportation Progress Report 2023
- Attachment B – New Active Transportation Facilities Map 2017-2022