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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2021

SUBJECT Regional Trails Widening and Lighting Project

ISSUE SUMMARY

To provide the outcomes from the public engagement process on the proposed 6.5 metre separated use pathway design with lighting for priority sections of the Galloping Goose and Lochside regional trails and to confirm next steps for securing funding through grant opportunities, partnerships, and reallocation of resources for project assessments, design and construction.

BACKGROUND

The Regional Trails Management Plan (RTMP) provides direction to conduct a comparative study to assess the engineering feasibility and cost/benefits of widening and separating the urban portions of the Galloping Goose and Lochside regional trails (Appendix A) and to study whether to install lighting along the corridors. The Capital Regional District (CRD) retained consultant services in 2019 to conduct the Regional Trails Widening Study (Report). The Report was received by the Regional Parks Committee at its meeting of January 27, 2021.

The Report recommends, and trail user numbers support, a 6.5 m wide separated use pathway design with lighting (Appendix B) and implementation priorities (Appendix C) to address many of the issues on the regional trails noted in the 2013 and 2019 Visitor Use Surveys and the 2016 RTMP, including high user volumes and speed differentials, lack of separation between trail users, poor trail etiquette, lack of lighting, safety concerns at intersections, and crime. The proposed facility design also considers forecasted use trends, changes in technology, best practices and trail design standards, and would enhance access to active transportation options in the region to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), which is a current Board priority.

At its February 10, 2021 meeting, the CRD Board directed staff to expedite public engagement on the proposed separated use pathway design, lighting and implementation priorities, including consideration of low-intensity lighting in the trail segment adjacent to Swan Lake, aiming for balance between wildlife and public safety considerations. The Board further directed that public engagement and detailed designs be expedited, with a view toward having a shovel-ready project. Staff delivered an engagement process in spring 2021 for the Regional Trails Widening and Lighting Project that included opportunities for public, government and First Nations input and involvement, and that complied with COVID-19 safety protocols. Feedback highlights strong support for the separated use pathway design, proposed lighting scheme, and the priority sequence for implementation. The report of public engagement is included as Appendix D. Staff have also actively pursued partnerships with provincial and municipal agencies to determine funding options and to advance the project.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That staff be directed to actively develop partnerships and pursue grant funding opportunities, including submission to the federal Active Transportation Fund, to support implementation of the separated use pathway design with lighting.

Alternative 2

That this report be referred back to staff for additional information.

IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

The total construction cost estimate provided in 2020 by the consultant of constructing the separated use pathway for the entire 6.6 km study area is estimated at \$14.2 million, including \$1.2 million for lighting and a 33% contingency. The order of magnitude 'Class D' cost estimates were derived in 2020 costs, assuming total removal of existing pathway and stripping to design width of new pathway. Staff estimated the total project cost at \$17.8 million, when all other costs are included, such as detailed design work, permits, assessments and project management. Staff and the consultants examined opportunities for cost reduction, such as reduced lighting and trail narrowing, and determined an overall project cost of as low as \$13.2 million.

Feedback from the engagement process indicates strong support for full implementation of the separated use pathway design with lighting concept. While cost saving measures are available, compromises to the overall facility design do not align with public feedback received.

The federal Active Transportation Fund is a \$400 million, five-year investment to fund projects in Canada that support active transportation infrastructure. The Fund will contribute up to 60% of municipal capital projects (40% where the asset is provincial), with the remaining funds sourced by other levels of government. Application intake is expected to open in fall 2021. Funding opportunities of this significance are not anticipated to be available beyond this five-year investment. Staff seek direction to submit a funding application for the project.

At this time, this project is not considered in the capital plan and there is no opportunity to fund the project through the CRD Regional Parks capital program, as the budget is fully subscribed on asset renewals to address critical infrastructure and public safety. To advance the project, reallocation of resources and innovative cost-sharing approaches are required to support implementation of the project in a phased approach over a number of years.

Service Delivery Implications

At its meeting of July 14, 2021, the Board advanced implementation of priority active transportation actions, including upgrading heavily-used urban sections of regional trails. User volumes continue to increase, with over 800,000 recorded cyclists on the Galloping Goose at Selkirk Trestle so far in 2021, and with average daily user volumes over 3,700 in August 2021, compared to 2,600 for the busiest months over the past five years. Development of a shovel-ready regional trail improvement project is within scope of the existing CRD service; however, additional staff and financial resources would be required to support the increased service level.

Critical infrastructure on the regional trails within the 6.6 km study area identified for improvement in the next five years include: \$20,000 for repairing the Interurban Bridge and \$80,000 for repairs to the Lochside trail at Borden Street in 2022; and \$4.45 million for assessment, design and replacement of the Swan and Brett trestles between 2023-2026. Where existing infrastructure requires repair or replacement, opportunities to integrate the proposed facility design should be considered. Planned improvements by Regional Parks or other agencies with jurisdiction in the trail corridors offer opportunity for efficiencies by aligning project work; however, flexibility in the sequence for implementation of the separated use pathway is required. Examples of project synergies determined through stakeholder discussions include: City of Victoria's cycling network

improvements on Gorge Road in 2022 and underground utility replacement within the Galloping Goose corridor in 2023, and Saanich's planned mobility hub improvements at Uptown.

Intergovernmental Implications

Implementation of the separated use pathway design with lighting requires collaboration and coordination among government agencies and community partners. The segments of regional trails in the study area are owned by the Province (Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure - MOTI) and road crossings are within the City of Victoria and District of Saanich jurisdictions. Staff-level discussions with government agencies to date indicate strong support for advancing the project.

The CRD, MOTI and the BC Transportation Financing Authority have established an agreement to collaborate on providing input on design and implementation of the Regional Trails Widening and Lighting Project, with an aim to achieve active transportation targets and implement design standards.

First Nations with an interest in the project area wish to provide further input should the project be implemented. Comments on the proposed project were received from the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council and Esquimalt and Songhees Nations. This feedback indicates interest in understanding any archaeological and environmental implications, in having cultural monitors present during land altering activities, and in any economic development opportunities arising from the project. An archaeological assessment would be required as a next step to inform development of the project.

Social Implications

The public engagement process for this project included an online survey, virtual open houses, meetings with stakeholders, and a variety of communications materials (Appendix D). In total, 1,784 online surveys were completed between May 25 and June 13, 2021. Overall, the majority of respondents support or strongly support the separated use pathway design (90% for Section A Selkirk – Switch Bridge; 88% for Section C Switch Bridge – McKenzie Avenue; and 87% for Section B Switch Bridge – Grange Road). With regards to the proposed sequence for implementation, 83% of respondents indicated support or strong support. The majority of respondents also indicated support or strong support for lighting the three sections of regional trails (87% for Section A Selkirk to Switch Bridge; 84% for Section C Switch Bridge – McKenzie Avenue; and 83% for Section B Switch Bridge – Grange Road), with 79% supporting or strongly supporting low-intensity lighting options adjacent to Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary between Darwin Avenue and Quadra Street. Of the 239 responses objecting to low-intensity lighting in this section of trail, the majority indicated preference for no lighting. An additional 904 comments were received from survey respondents relating to lighting, trail etiquette, trail widening, ecological values, wildlife and habitat, facility design, separation of users, opposition and concern for project costs. Similar themes were identified in the 10 email submissions received about the project.

Overall, public feedback received indicates strong support for the proposed separated use pathway design with lighting and implementation sequence. Should the separated use pathway with lighting improvements be implemented, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the success of the facility could be assessed through future Visitor Use Surveys, trail counter data, and analysis of regional multi-modal transportation targets.

Environmental & Climate Implications

The CRD Board declared a climate emergency in 2019, and Board Priorities for 2019-2022 identify green and affordable multi-modal transportation and reduced greenhouse gas emissions as desired outcomes. The Regional Trails Widening and Lighting Project aligns with these priorities and with the CRD Regional Trails Management Plan, Regional Climate Action Strategy, Regional Transportation Plan and Regional Growth Strategy, and with policies from other agencies, such as the National Active Transportation Strategy, Clean BC, Move, Commute, Connect, and the South Island Transportation Strategy.

Potential impacts of widening and lighting the regional trails was raised during the engagement process. Environmental and geotechnical assessments would be required as next steps to inform preparation of detailed design drawings. Opportunities for natural areas restoration, removal of invasive species and stormwater management could be realized through the project. In addition, efficiencies can be gained where the new facility design can be incorporated into planned projects.

CONCLUSION

Public engagement on the Regional Trails Widening and Lighting Project was conducted in spring 2021. Results indicate strong support for the separated use pathway design and lighting concept, as well as for the proposed implementation sequence. Municipal and provincial partners are also in support of advancing the project by identifying project synergies, collaborating on design and pursuing funding. A significant amount of funding for active transportation projects is being released by federal and provincial programs, including the Active Transportation Fund. The CRD will continue to pursue partnerships and grant funding opportunities to support the project.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That staff be directed to actively develop partnerships and pursue grant funding opportunities, including submission to the federal Active Transportation Fund, to support implementation of the separated use pathway design with lighting.

Submitted by:	Jeff Leahy, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Larisa Hutcheson, P.Eng., General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: Regional Trails Widening Study Area – Map
- Appendix B: Separated Use Pathway Design
- Appendix C: Implementation Priorities
- Appendix D: Regional Trails Widening and Lighting Project – Report of Public Engagement