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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2021

SUBJECT Regional Trails Widening Study

ISSUE SUMMARY

To receive the Regional Trails Widening Study and seek direction to conduct public engagement on the preferred option for widening, separating and lighting priority sections of the Galloping Goose and Lochside regional trails.

BACKGROUND

The 55 km multi-use Galloping Goose Regional Trail, established in 1987 along a former railway corridor, experiences nearly 2 million recorded visits per year. The 29 km Lochside Regional Trail was established in 2001, also within a former railway corridor, and has approximately 1 million recorded visits per year. The urban sections of these trails have a 3.0-4.0 metre wide paved surface with a dual direction flow for cyclist and pedestrian uses, and are classified as *Bike and Pedestrian Trails* in the 2016 Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Trails Management Plan (RTMP) for both recreation and active transportation corridors.

The 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 regional trails and to study whether to install lighting along the corridors. The CRD retained consultant services in 2019 to conduct the Regional Trails Widening Study. The study considered options to widen and separate trail users and potentially light the 6.6 km portions of the Galloping Goose Regional Trail between the Selkirk Trestle and Grange Road (adjacent McKenzie Avenue) and the Lochside Regional Trail between the Switch Bridge and McKenzie Avenue/Borden Street. Urban Systems and PBX Engineering (the “Consultants”) were retained for the project and submitted a report (the “Report”) with recommendations and conceptual design drawings to Regional Parks in 2020 (see Appendix A).

The consultants evaluated three design options for widening and separating the regional trails based on an analysis of the current trail conditions, projected user volumes and best practices. The options include: a widened 5.0 m multi-use pathway; a 6.5 m separated use pathway; and an 8.5 m separated use pathway with centre boulevard.

The Report recommends, and trail user numbers support, a separated use pathway design that is a 4.0 m dual-direction bicycle path and a 2.5 m adjacent, dual-direction pedestrian path separated by line painting. This represents an increase of approximately 1.0-3.5 m width along much of the corridor. Hard-wired, LED, pedestrian-scale lighting is also recommended at 40 m intervals along the trail corridors, except for the segment of Lochside adjacent to Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary, where reflective markings are suggested. Solar lighting is not recommended because estimated capital costs are approximately twice as high as hardwired options, lighting levels are difficult to achieve in winter months, and LED luminaires have low energy requirements.

The Report acknowledges that the recommended trail reconfiguration represents a long-term build out and improvements will likely be completed in sections as funding becomes available.

The highest priority area identified for improvement is the 1.6 km section of the Galloping Goose between Selkirk Trestle and Culduthel Road, near Uptown, due to it having the highest trail user volumes and narrowest trail widths of the sections considered in this report.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

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

1. That the Regional Trails Widening Study be received for information;
2. That staff be directed to conduct public engagement on the 6.5 m separated use pathway design with lighting and implementation priorities, as recommended; and
3. That staff report back to a future committee meeting with further recommendations.

Alternative 2

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

IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

Order of magnitude 'Class D' cost estimates were developed for each of the trail configuration and lighting options reviewed in the Report. Cost estimates were derived in 2020 costs, assuming total removal of existing pathway and stripping to design width of new pathway for comparative purposes. The total construction cost estimate provided by the consultant of constructing the separated use pathway for the entire 6.6 km study area is estimated to be \$14.2 million, including \$1.2 million for lighting and 33% contingency. The total project cost is estimated at \$17.8 million when all other costs are included, such as further detailed design work, permits, environmental studies and project management.

Opportunities for cost reduction have been analyzed for both the trail configuration and lighting components that may represent reasonable compromises yet still achieve the increased trail capacity and safety as outlined in the Report. Opportunities explored for cost reduction include: reuse of existing pavement and subgrade, realignment of some trail sections to avoid rock slopes and reduce trail width in constrained areas, retain the existing 5.5 m trail width (as recently reconstructed) through McKenzie Interchange area, and only light priority areas. Staff believe that a reasonable estimate of the magnitude of potential cost savings could lower the cost-per-metre from \$2,670 to approximately \$2,000, resulting in a total estimated project cost of \$13.2 million. These cost reductions have been provided by the consultant and are deemed by staff to be reasonable based on recent similar CRD projects.

Funding to support widening, separating and lighting the regional trails is limited and will require innovative cost-sharing approaches, partnerships and successful grant applications to acquire the necessary funds to support implementation, which is anticipated to be in a phased approach over a number of years.

Social Implications

The 2019 Regional Trails Visitor Use Survey results highlight a year-round use of the trails for commuting and recreation. Cyclists comprise the largest user group. A high satisfaction was expressed by survey respondents about their experiences on the trails. Respondents reported the following perceived issues on the regional trails: increase in user volumes and speed, lack of separation between trail uses, poor trail etiquette, lack of lighting, safety concerns at intersections, and crime. Widening or twinning the trails and providing lighting, among other suggestions, were proposed as actions the CRD could undertake to improve satisfaction.

The Report offers recommended trail design configurations based on user volumes, speed differential, user safety, personal security, traffic intersections, etiquette, changes in technology, as well as forecasted use trends, best practices and trail design standards. The recommended separated use pathway with lighting is proposed to address many of the concerns noted in the Visitor Use Survey and RTMP.

Stakeholders and the public should be engaged next to validate the recommended facility design, lighting and implementation priorities suggested. Staff recommend a medium-to-high effort engagement process and propose developing an engagement plan that ensures adequate and diverse opportunities in 2021 for public, local government and First Nations input and involvement.

Environmental & Climate Implications

The CRD Board Priorities for 2019-2022 identify green and affordable multi-modal transportation and reduced greenhouse gas emissions as desired outcomes. The Board declared a climate emergency in 2019, committing to prioritizing climate action initiatives, including mitigating the environmental impacts of transportation by providing opportunities for active transportation. The proposal to create a separated-use pathway and install lighting in the urban portions of the regional trails aligns with the initiatives in the Regional Trails Master Plan and Regional Climate Action Strategy.

Service Delivery Implications

Critical infrastructure on the regional trails within the 6.6 km study area identified for potential repairs or replacement in the next five years includes the Interurban Bridge, the Swan, Brett and Selkirk trestles, and some trail resurfacing on the Lochside Regional Trail. In 2021, \$70,000 is budgeted for resurfacing a section near Swan Lake and, in 2025, \$80,000 is budgeted for resurfacing a section between Swan Trestle and Quadra Avenue. Overall, the paved trail surfaces are deemed to be in good condition, with a projected lifespan of 25-30 years remaining. The asphalt replacement value of the entire 22 km of paved sections of the Galloping Goose and Lochside regional trails is approximately \$11.7 million.

Wider pathways with increased paved surface and more pavement markings would require incrementally more effort to maintain and upkeep over time. New electrical infrastructure, such as lampposts, would require ongoing preventative maintenance (i.e., cleaning, graffiti removal) and although LED luminaires require minimal maintenance, replacement may be required in 10-20 years.

Intergovernmental Implications

The implementation of the recommendations requires collaboration and coordination among government agencies and community partners. In particular, the segments of regional trails in the study area are owned by the Province (Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure) and road crossings are within the City of Victoria and District of Saanich jurisdictions.

CONCLUSION

The Regional Trails Widening Study, completed in 2020, addresses a priority action in the Regional Trails Management Plan and supports the Board's climate action initiatives. Three conceptual design options for widening, separating and lighting a 6.6 km section of the Galloping Goose and Lochside regional trails were evaluated and, based on factors such as current trail conditions, user volumes and best practices, the recommended design is a 6.5 m wide separated-use pathway with hardwired LED lighting, with the highest priority area identified for improvement being the 1.6 km section of the Galloping Goose between Selkirk Trestle and Culduthel Road. The total estimated project cost for the entire 6.6 km study area could be reduced from \$17.8 to \$13.2 million, if a number of cost saving measures are utilized, such as reusing existing pavement and subgrade where feasible, strategic trail realignments, and only lighting priority areas, such as intersections and underpasses. Staff recommend conducting public engagement next on the separated-use pathway design with lighting opportunities and priority sections for implementation, as presented, and report back to a future committee meeting with further recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION

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

1. That the Regional Trails Widening Study be received for information;
2. That staff be directed to conduct public engagement on the 6.5 m separated use pathway design with lighting and implementation priorities as recommended; and
3. That staff report back to a future committee meeting with further recommendations.

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

ATTACHMENT

Appendix A: Regional Trails Widening Study Report – Urban Systems (April 2020)