

# Canada Walks Master Class

2009

Case Study

City of Whitehorse



Transport Canada

Transports Canada

# Canada Walks Master Class Case Study

by Canada Walks, in partnership with Walk21

Canada Walks is an initiative of Green Communities Canada

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# Acknowledgements

Green Communities Canada extends our thanks to the following people and organizations without whom the Canada Walks Master Class would not have taken place. First the cities that agreed to participate and be benchmarked against the International Charter for Walking. Although Metro Vancouver was not a full participant of the Canada Walks Master Class we were fortunate enough to deliver a professional workshop and a public lecture at Simon Fraser University so we have recognized those people here as well:

- ◆ Hamilton, Ontario
  - ◇ Sharon Mackinnon, Public Health Nurse, Hamilton Public Health Services and the entire Hamilton team
- ◆ Moncton, New Brunswick
  - ◇ Jennifer Dallaire and Jocelyn Cohoon, Recreation, Parks, Tourism and Culture
- ◆ Kelowna and West Kelowna, British Columbia
  - ◇ Wendy Majewski, Mike Kittmer and Jerry Dombowsky, City of Kelowna
  - ◇ Annette Beaudreau and Carla Eaton, City of West Kelowna
- ◆ Whitehorse, The Yukon
  - ◇ Sabine Schweiger and Wayne Tuck, Engineering and Environmental Services
- ◆ Vancouver, British Columbia
  - ◇ Cara Fisher, British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association
  - ◇ Sandy James, City Plans Division, City of Vancouver

Our appreciation go to our expert team, who gave their time and ideas to create an inspiring atmosphere for participants to dream of what their Cities could be:

- ◆ Bronwen Thornton, Walk21, UK
- ◆ Rodney Tolley, Walk21, Honorary Research Fellow, Staffordshire University
- ◆ Jim Walker, Chief Executive Walk England
- ◆ Jacky Kennedy, Canada Walks, Green Communities Canada
- ◆ Jody Rosenblatt Naderi, University of Texas AM, U.S.A.
- ◆ Paul Young, Public Space Workshop, Toronto, Canada
- ◆ Catherine O'Brien, Cape Breton University, Canada
- ◆ Adrian Bell, Applied Information Group, Vancouver, Canada
- ◆ Gordon Price, Program Director, Simon Fraser University Lecture Series

Green Communities Canada recognizes our funding partners:

- ◆ Moving on Sustainable Transportation (MOST), Transport Canada
- ◆ Each city who contributed cash and in-kind to make this project possible

# Overview

## ► Introduction

### *What is the International Charter for Walking?*

The International Charter for Walking was developed by a team of international experts as part of the Walk21 conference series and was formally launched at the 2006 Walk21 conference in Melbourne. Since that time it has been translated into several languages, and communities and individuals around the world have signed the Charter including many from Canada. To view and sign the Charter visit [www.walk21.com](http://www.walk21.com).

### *What is Walk21?*

Walk21 is an organization that exists to champion the development of healthy, sustainable and efficient communities where people can and do choose to walk. Each year, Walk21 hosts an international conference that brings together visionary and influential planners, practitioners, politicians and advocates to discuss the development of walkable communities. For more information about Walk21, visit [www.walk21.com](http://www.walk21.com).

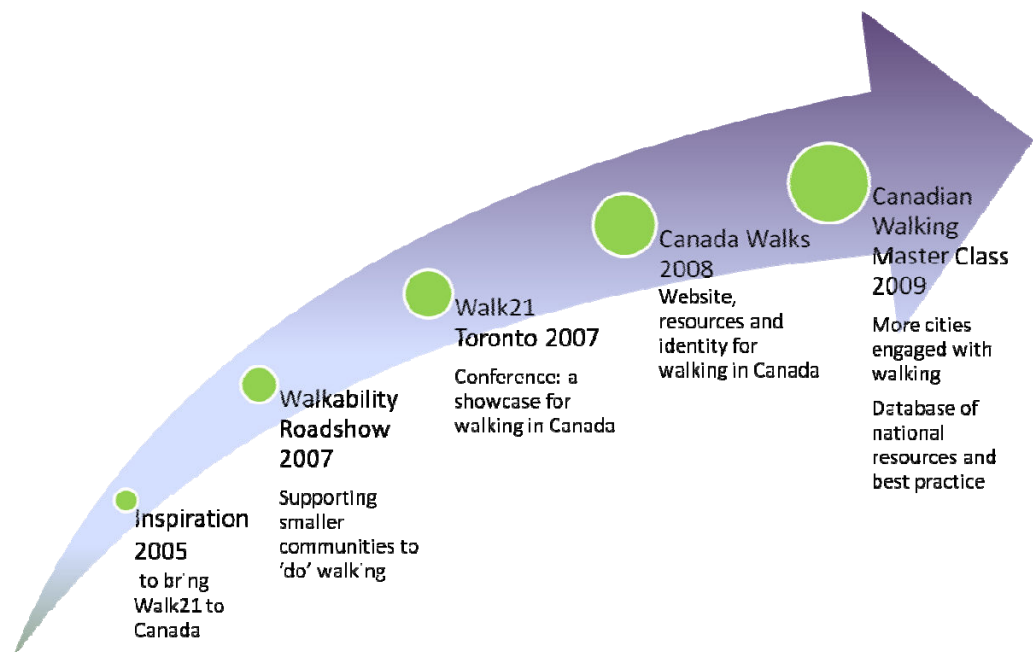
The Canadian Walking Master Class project was initiated to support the implementation of active and sustainable transportation policies and plans in communities across Canada.

Through a step-by-step process that includes inspiring political and senior decision makers, training professionals, engaging the public and providing international expertise and ideas to specific walkability issues and opportunities, the project aims to support local action to deliver enhanced walking environments and enable people to walk more.

The Walking Master Class builds on the success of the Canadian Walkability Roadshow 2007, to bring this proven process to more communities across Canada and enable them to deliver communities where people choose to walk.

Many communities across Canada have conducted Active Transportation (AT) or Sustainable Transportation (ST) workshops and have completed AT/ ST community plans. However, often in these communities there are missing links between creating a plan and implementing that plan.

The International Charter for Walking provides both the strategic direction and detailed actions for creating walkable communities around the world. The Master Class uses the International Charter for Walking in a Canadian context to benchmark walking within communities and as the foundation for building more walkable communities through ideas, initiatives, inspiration and action.



# Overview

## What is Canada Walks?

Canada Walks is an initiative of Green Communities Canada that aims to become *the* national body to go to for information and action about walkable communities and active transportation across Canada. The mission of Canada Walks is to change the current social paradigm so that walkable communities are the cultural and social norm in Canada.

The main goal of Canada Walks is to increase the number of Canadians walking, both for pleasure and for transportation. To achieve this goal, Canada Walks focuses on:

- supporting the creation of more walkable communities, i.e. changing the built environment to make walking a safe and inviting choice;
- and changing Canadians' walking attitudes and habits so that they *choose* to walk.



The Master Class team worked with four Canadian communities:

- ◆ Hamilton, Ontario, with representation from Halton Region, Region of Peel, Region of Waterloo and the Town of Milton
- ◆ Moncton, New Brunswick
- ◆ Kelowna and West Kelowna, British Columbia
- ◆ Whitehorse, Yukon Territory
- ◆ plus an extra workshop in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Whitehorse,  
Yukon

Kelowna and  
West Kelowna,  
British Columbia

Metro Vancouver  
British Columbia



Hamilton, Ontario

Moncton,  
New Brunswick

The Master Class was facilitated by Green Communities Canada, led by Walk21 and supported by local experts.

The team were:

- ◆ Jacky Kennedy, Green Communities Canada
- ◆ Bronwen Thornton, Walk21, United Kingdom
- ◆ Rodney Tolley, Walk21, United Kingdom
- ◆ Jody Rosenblatt Naderi, University of Texas AM, U.S.A.
- ◆ Paul Young, Public Space Workshop, Canada
- ◆ Dr. Catherine O'Brien, Cape Breton University, Canada
- ◆ Jim Walker, Walk England, United Kingdom
- ◆ Adrian Bell, Applied Information Group, Canada
- ◆ Gordon Price, Simon Fraser University Lecture Series, Canada

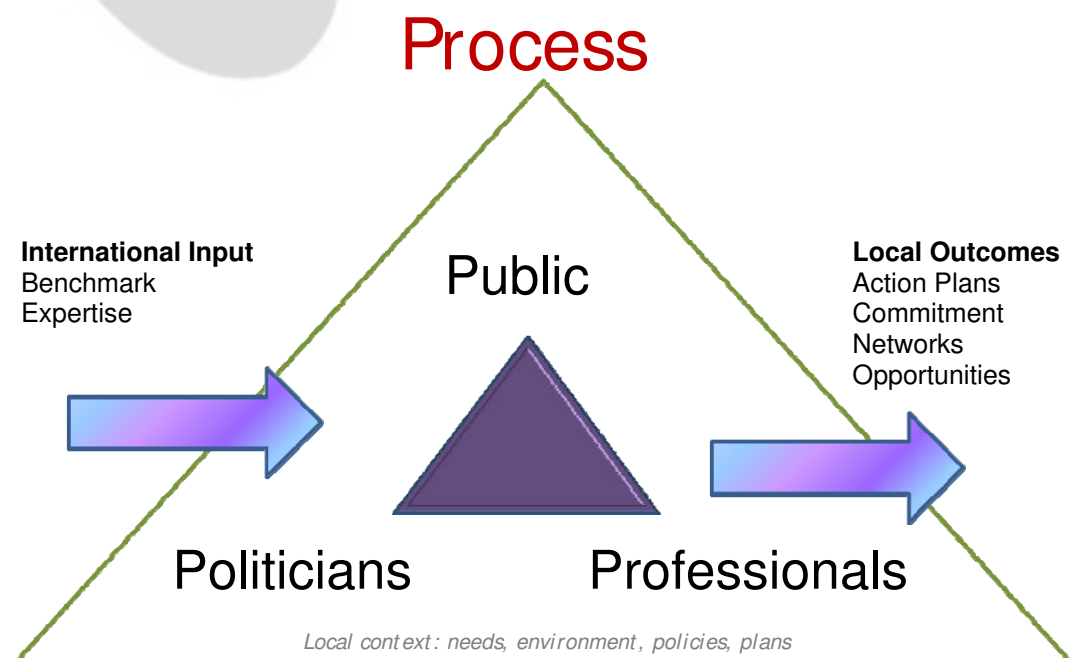
# Overview

## ► Objectives

1. To promote walking as an indicator of sustainable, healthy places and demonstrate the benefits of walkable communities to reducing the impacts of climate change.
2. To encourage and educate transportation professionals, municipal decision-makers, local NGOs and ENGOs, and members of the public to commit and invest in practical actions which build sustainable, liveable places where people choose to walk.
3. To research, publish and share Canadian best practice as part of the continuing process of ensuring the International Charter for Walking is a practical delivery framework for local action.
4. To build and support a national network of skilled professionals across Canada to share and evolve best practice and deliver walkable communities.
5. To showcase the positive outcomes for each city and to follow their progress for one year following completion of the project.

## ► Outcomes

1. A national political understanding, appreciation and commitment to sustainable, healthy communities where people choose to walk.
2. A national community of connected professionals skilled with the tools and knowledge of how to deliver more Canadian walkable communities.
3. Engaged communities demanding infrastructure and services that give residents the chance to choose to walk as an everyday activity.
4. Projects planned with detailed timelines for completion, including infrastructure upgrades and programs to track the increases in the number of people walking.



# Overview

## ► Program

The project consisted of the following steps:

Questionnaire to benchmark against International Charter for Walking and to identify opportunities and challenges within each Municipality and community



Analysis and Homework to develop Agenda for each community and prepare for the Master Class community visits



Webinar with each community to share issues, ideas and initiatives



Master Class in each community –consisting of three days of activities encompassing the following:

- ◆ Breakfast Presentations to inspire councillors and senior staff
- ◆ Workshops to support and skill professionals
- ◆ Walkabouts to identify opportunities and issues
- ◆ Community Meetings to engage the public
- ◆ Best Practice Notes to share ideas
- ◆ Wrap up Presentations to feedback and motivate senior managers.



The project and results were presented at the Walk21 International Conference on Walking and Liveable Communities in New York City in October 2009 and all Master Class case studies are published on [www.canadawalks.ca](http://www.canadawalks.ca).

# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

Background

## ► Introduction

The City of Whitehorse is located along the Yukon River corridor in the South Central Yukon. It is surrounded by mountainous topography, including Haeckel Hill, Mount McIntyre, Golden Horn, and Grey Mountain. Whitehorse is a large municipality, some 41,600 hectares, extending approximately 30 kilometres north to south and 14 kilometres from east to west. The existing pattern of settlement is somewhat spread out, with each enclave surrounded by natural open space. Although the settlement pattern is not contiguous, it generally follows the alignment of the Alaska Highway from Cowley Creek and Mary Lake subdivisions in the south to Hidden Valley and MacPherson subdivisions in the north. The downtown, which is situated almost in the geographic centre of the municipality, acts as the nucleus due to its concentration of employment opportunities, retail and commerce, and its diverse mix of land uses and activities.



## Growth Projections and Trends

During the first part of the 20th Century, the movement of people in and out of Whitehorse tended to be quite high. This was largely due to the Whitehorse economy reacting to fluctuations in the mining industry and highway construction. Over the past 50 years, the population stabilized as Whitehorse became the government and business centre for the Territory. Today, population shifts do occur in response to mining and resource activity, but they are not as prominent.

According to the 2006 census, the population of Whitehorse was 20,461. This was up 7.4% from 19,058 in the 2001 census. To gain some understanding of potential population growth, a high, medium, and low rate of growth has been calculated. The low rate of 0.5% is approximated based on historic growth rates between 1971 and 2006, a medium rate of 2.0% is based on the average growth rate of 2.5% between 2004 and 2009 (Yukon Bureau of Statistics), and the high rate of 3.5% is the same rate as the highest recently recorded growth rate recorded in 2008. Actual growth is difficult to predict and will fluctuate largely in response to economic conditions.

## Guiding Documents

The City of Whitehorse uses the Official Community Plan (OCP) as the tool to guide decisions related to the land development, taking into consideration residential and commercial development, industrial activity, transportation infrastructure, and environmental considerations. The Official Community Plan 2010 has been approved. A major change from the 2002 OCP is the inclusion and integration of the 40 year Strategic Sustainability Plan, developed in 2008.

The OCP 2010 recognizes that greenspace is highly valued as part of the vision for the City of Whitehorse and its residents. As such, the 2010 OCP reserves nearly 60% of land within the City boundary for greenspace. Through the combination of the strong



# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

## Background

value placed on easily accessible greenspace, and the historical development pattern of the City, Whitehorse is a sprawling municipality, with a limited population and tax base to support itself. As such, the OCP identifies future areas for development that are designed to reduce sprawl through compact development forms in strategic locations. Locating development near existing infrastructure, services, and amenities helps to reduce the tax burden, preserve pristine wilderness areas, and support active transportation within communities.

In the downtown core, the focus is to encourage commercial activities that are primarily pedestrian oriented in a highly urban environment, and to preserve the unique housing character of downtown neighbourhoods. In the urban residential areas, the focus is to permit fully serviced residential lots that are close to the downtown core, or represent complete neighbourhoods, with a diversity of functions.



Murals bring colour and history into the downtown, especially vacant lots and carparks

## OCP 2010 Vision

Whitehorse will be a well planned self-sustaining community that is a leader in energy conservation and innovation that maintains and conserves wilderness spaces for future generations. Whitehorse will continue to strive for a better quality of life that is reflected in its vibrant economy and social life.

# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

Walk21  
Preparation

## ► Walk21 Preparation

In preparation for the Master Class, cities were asked to clarify why they became involved and what their hopes and expectations were. The responses from Whitehorse were as follows:

Why do you want to be involved?

- ◆ We have invested significantly in active transportation infrastructure, now we want to see a shift from recreational walking to walking for Active Transportation (AT)
- ◆ We are looking for an outside critique on what we have accomplished, what our strengths are and what we need to improve on if we want to attain a vision of a more walkable, sustainable community

How can the Master Class help you?

- ◆ Learn how to better utilize our existing paths and trails
- ◆ Engage community groups in promoting AT
- ◆ Integrate walking policy into key documents and plans

What do you want to achieve for your community short term/long term?

- ◆ Explore ways to connect major facilities with walkable areas
- ◆ Integrate active transportation into complete neighbourhood design

Benchmark  
Questionnaire

## ► Benchmarking Questionnaire

The initial Benchmarking Questionnaire, subsequent Webinar discussion and document review provided the background information needed to start preparing for the visit to Whitehorse and to inform development of the recommendations. Key points from the questionnaire are:

The top 4 priorities

- ◆ Active Living within a healthy community - walking as a part of everyday life
- ◆ Young People - cross generational interaction to make walking part of the culture for youth and children
- ◆ Community involvement - a sustained and planned education and outreach program
- ◆ Integrate walking and cycling policy to foster a mobility priority (in design, construction, and maintenance)



The top 3 barriers

- ◆ Weather conditions in winter - the low temperatures and long dark periods
- ◆ Proximity to various amenities - the community is spread out and not planned with multi-purpose in mind (i.e. residential areas are significantly separated from commercial and service/ retail). Time constraints and fitness levels cannot (do not) overcome the distances.
- ◆ Awareness of trail network

The topography and distances between places in Whitehorse were seen as substantial barriers to active travel as well as the local culture and there seems to be a perception that walking is a recreational activity, but not a means of transportation.

# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

Master Class  
Events

## ► Master Class events in the City of Whitehorse

Walkabouts, June 1, 2009  
around downtown including First Avenue,  
Main Street, Black Street and the new  
escarpment steps and then  
F.H.Collins Secondary School



Meeting, June 1, 2009  
Meeting with Environmental Sustainability  
Committee, YG Department of Education  
June 1, 2009 – presentation on  
active school travel



Presentation to Council, June 1, 2009  
delegation to Council meeting,  
broadcast live on cable TV.



Breakfast Presentation, June 2, 2009  
with the Mayor, Senior Managers and staff.



Workshop, June 2, 2009  
with professional staff from the City.



Wrap up presentation, June 3, 2009  
to the Mayor, Councillors, Senior Managers,  
staff and downtown businesses.

### Expert Team

- ◆ Bronwen Thornton, Development Director, Walk21
- ◆ Rodney Tolley, Honourary Research Fellow, Staffordshire University
- ◆ Jacky Kennedy, Director, Canada Walks, Green Communities Canada

# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

## Master Class Events

### Participants over the course of all activities

- ◆ The Mayor and Councillors
- ◆ Planning Department staff
- ◆ Engineering and Environment staff
- ◆ Sustainability Coordinator
- ◆ Parks and Recreation staff – Trails
- ◆ Recreation Parks Association of the Yukon
- ◆ Riverdale Community Association
- ◆ Yukon Conservation Society
- ◆ Downtown Business Association
- ◆ Yukon Disability Coalition
- ◆ Department of Education Sustainability Committee members

### Media

- ◆ Whitehorse cable television broadcast the presentation Monday, June 1, 2009 to the community.
- ◆ CBC television filmed the walkabout at the Black Street stairs, interviewing the visiting and local experts. This was broadcast on North Beat June 1, 2010.
- ◆ Both the Whitehorse Star and the Yukon News covered the Master Class in newspaper articles.



# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

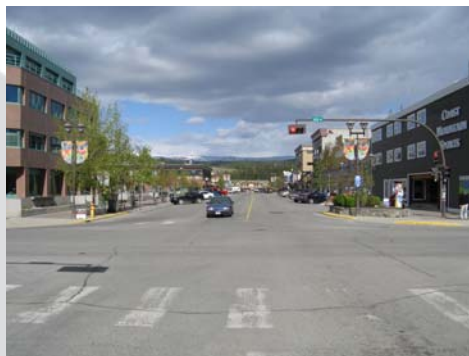
## Walkabouts

### ► Walkabouts

The walkabouts were the opportunity for the team to walk around selected streets in the city and discuss site specific issues, ideas and projects, for locals to 'see' the streets from an outsider's informed perspective and for the outsiders to experience walking in Whitehorse directly.

In Whitehorse the team visited F.H. Collins Secondary School and the downtown including Second Avenue, Black Street and the new escarpment steps linking the airport to downtown

There was very good media coverage of the walkabouts.



Downtown Whitehorse provides ample accommodation for motor vehicles (left), and on the main shopping streets, comfortable sidewalks for pedestrians (below). It was also observed that at many intersections the road space was narrowed with bulbs next to car parking.



More of these bulbs, midblock, would provide more frequent and safer opportunities for people to cross the road and remind drivers to manage their speed. These bulbs would also provide extra space in front of selected shops, cafes, ice-cream parlors for them to spill out in the summer months, at very little expense to car parking. This will invite people to gather and spend time in public space.

Sidewalks on the key shopping streets were comfortable, with street trees, bins and seating in a clear clutter zone along the edge with parked cars.

An example of an innovative way to better accommodate cafes that only spill-out during the warm summer days is to install removable side-walks.



Halifax and Moncton offer concrete examples of how this could benefit Main Street Whitehorse.

# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

## Walkabouts



These bulbs also enable more bike parking spaces and street art to enhance the downtown environment for people on foot. It was noted that this is already happening in Whitehorse, and should be expanded to include other streets and considered in all reconstruction projects.

Murals, while a distinctive feature in most Canadian towns, are exceptional in Whitehorse. They provide a vibrant, informative and at times amusing, contribution to the public space. Whitehorse should examine opportunities to create special spaces in the downtown by utilizing the murals as backdrops and pocket parks. In some cases it may be appropriate to encourage outdoor seating in the summer. As this would affect downtown parking, it could be included in the parking management strategy.



The expert team walked up from the centre of downtown to experience the new escarpment steps. The team were very pleased to be following locals, as there was absolutely no signage or information about the steps, even when you are leaving the streets to reach the base. It is so important to link these facilities into surrounding areas with proper information and access, so that people are invited to use them.

The steps seemed highly used and provide a fantastic facility for locals and visitors alike. The team met both during the visit to the steps, including people pushing their bicycles up! The quality of the steps is impressive, but the trails leading to them at both the top and the bottom require improvements, particularly signage and surface grading/ consistency.



There was an interesting temporary art installation at the top of the stairs – visitors could phone a unique number and hear a short play/ commentary written by Whitehorse youth and featuring the current location. The site was one of 10 throughout Whitehorse.

This form of public engagement and interpretation should be considered for Whitehorse trails, complete with maps and directions. This is an innovative way to promote and help residents and visitors explore and experience the trails.

# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

## Walkabouts

Without signage, walkers are left a little in no-man's land. While locals may seek out the right way, if you are wanting to encourage more people to use the stairs it is necessary to provide adequate signage to make these missing links.



There is already some good signage on the Trans Canada Trail and it is understood more signage is planned. Way-finding and signage systems are essential for ensuring that local people, as well as visitors, can find their way around Whitehorse, and are encouraged to explore it on foot. Signage

gives people the confidence to do something differently.



Boulevards like Lewes Boulevard are where the facilities provided for people to walk and cycle should be as generous as the road space for vehicles. While this sidewalk is well set back from the road, it is only the minimum width. A wider sidewalk and segregated cycling facility, especially for children, is the minimum for places like this. It is a key link from Riverdale into downtown and a very accessible distance. While there is a riverside trail, many would choose this more direct link on a regular basis, especially to encourage more walking and cycling to the local schools. This should be a key consideration in the re-development of FH. Collins.



# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

## Walkabouts

The Bus Stops in Whitehorse varied from sub-standard through bare minimum to basic provision. To promote transit and encourage people to use it, consistent, quality bus shelters, with seats, bins, information, lighting and clear sightlines are essential.



A sustainable city for the future must address the needs of its young people and encourage them to adopt sustainable transport habits. The walk to school is where this understanding and habit-forming activity can begin. Providing narrowed road space outside schools, safe crossing points, priority access into school grounds and a rewards system for those who walk are key elements of building sustainable transport habits into the daily lives of school children.

The challenge in Whitehorse is that most secondary students do not live within walking distance of the school. School bussing is provided to most Whitehorse schools, and the winters are long and dark.

Schools in new developments such as Whistle Bend provide a unique opportunity to position the schools in optimal locations to encourage higher usage of active routes to school. Designing for year round access will further encourage year round activity.





# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

## Meeting and Presentation

Meeting with Environmental Sustainability Committee, YT Department of Education

There was a short presentation on the various aspects of active school travel, including the School Travel Planning process. This was followed by discussion around what might work for well for Whitehorse. The Committee was interested in participating in a School Travel Planning pilot project, and agreed that Parks and Recreation Association of the Yukon would play the lead role.

In subsequent months, this pilot project was undertaken with RPAY. Following the meeting, the team met at the FH Collins School site to discuss the proposed re-building of the school. It was recognized that this re-building presents a tremendous opportunity to integrate active transportation into the site and culture of the school grounds.

It was recommended that the building committee seek input from the students on how to meet the transportation needs that attain the LEED standards for schools. Students living in Riverdale should be encouraged through environmental design to access the school on foot or by bike. It was also understood that the school would become the central community hub for Riverdale, increasing the necessity for active transportation outside of school hours. High quality pedestrian access should be provided, and not in conflict with drop-off from private vehicles. Consideration should be given to school buses and City Buses having higher drop-off priority than private vehicles.



Presentation to council

Members of the Walk21 team and local officers attended the Council Meeting and Walk21 gave a brief presentation about the importance of walking and its potential in Whitehorse. The presentation was broad cast live to the Whitehorse community and archived on the City website.

## Workshop

Workshop

The Workshop held on June 2, was attended primarily by city staff. The Walk21 Team presented their initial thoughts on the status of walking in Whitehorse, based on the downtown walkabout, the International Charter for Walking and drawing on comparisons from other Canadian communities.

Riverdale Community Association shared their draft neighbourhood plan, and discussed the key features that will allow their neighbourhood to evolve into a more complete neighbourhood with higher sustainability features.

The Planning Department introduced Whistle Bend, a greenfield development proposed to be built-out over the next decade. This sustainable development will provide the majority of new-housing stock designed to meet growth projections in Whitehorse. The team worked with the planning department to fine-tune the green-linkage connections and discuss the importance of phasing. The active and

# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

## Workshop

alternative infrastructure must be completed at the same time as the initial lots and traditional road infrastructure, to build a culture of active transportation from the outset. This will help set the culture of the neighbourhood and provide the visual affirmation that Whistle Bend is different from other Whitehorse neighbourhoods. Given the distance to downtown Whitehorse, and the projected commercial development in the area, a transit loop into the neighbourhood at the same time as the first housing lots, is imperative. It was also recommended that the central meeting space be developed immediately, to allow the establishment of the space and walking routes to the site from the outset. The space will evolve into the commercial hub and more sophisticated community hub as the area is built out residentially.



## Wrap up and Next Steps

On the last morning the Master Class team met with the Mayor, Councillors, Managers and staff from the City of Whitehorse and interested citizens and business owners to present their findings and ideas from the range of walkabouts and workshops held over the preceding days. This group discussed the critical issues for the city and where the first steps for change might be taken.

# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

## Key Findings and Recommendations

### ► Key Findings and Recommendations

Whitehorse is a city with opportunities and challenges for more walking that are both unique to the town and very much in common with other communities across Canada. The long summer days entice people to be outside, enjoying trails and walking around the city. The cold, dark and short days discourage the majority of people from choosing to walk during the winter months. The city has been built with the motor vehicle as the design standard and suburban development has sprawled beyond easily walkable distances between key destinations.

The relatively compact downtown with its grid layout and capacity for growth through densification and the potential for trails to link communities across the bigger distances and wild spaces present real opportunities for supporting more walking in Whitehorse. With new developments in the planning stages, policies and principles supporting a sustainable future and some successful infrastructure investment already, there is real potential for Whitehorse to start making the concrete changes that are needed.



The new developments on the drawing board need to be fully committed to a sustainable future from the design stage right through construction to how people live and enjoy their new community. Construction phasing must build, from the very beginning, local destinations and the walking connections within the community. New residents must be rewarded for using local services and encouraged and enabled to adopt sustainable transport habits.

New school projects can also set a positive example by giving active transportation the priority in how access to the school is designed, for example walking and cycling access are the most obvious and well promoted, followed by bus access and finally private car drop off zones.

With new sustainability plans in place, now is the time for the Council to promote a strong policy position that not only supports walking but establishes a clear action plan for walking. This plan should place pedestrians at the top of the road user hierarchy and outline how resources, personnel and projects will build a culture of walking in Whitehorse.

# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

## Key Findings and Recommendations

Collect and collate data so you have the information base you need to allocate resources, personnel and dollars to deliver walking. Local benchmarking projects can help you build on successes and learn from where things were not so productive.

A key dimension of growing a culture of walking will be to establish a strong way-finding system for existing and future trails and walking streets. It will be important to develop a 'palette or brand' for all signage and apply this consistently across the city. The system can use on-site information, area boards and finger posts showing time and destinations and off-site information - printed maps, on-line maps and journey planners. Ensure best practice for signage and mapping, as there are now plenty of examples from around the world. For example and easy reference, the Legible London project captures the key dimensions of way-finding systems and the principles they adopt reflect best practice from around the world. (<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/microsites/legible-london/>)

Consider on the ground indicators that walking and cycling are priorities –for example at intersections continuing the bike path/ sidewalk visually through the intersection with bold colour applied to the pavement. This is particularly important at large intersections (such as Range Rd/ 2 Mile Hill and Alaska Highway) where traffic is not in close proximity to the pedestrian route, and at intersections where vehicle traffic is predominately turning right, yet looking left to find the gaps in the traffic.

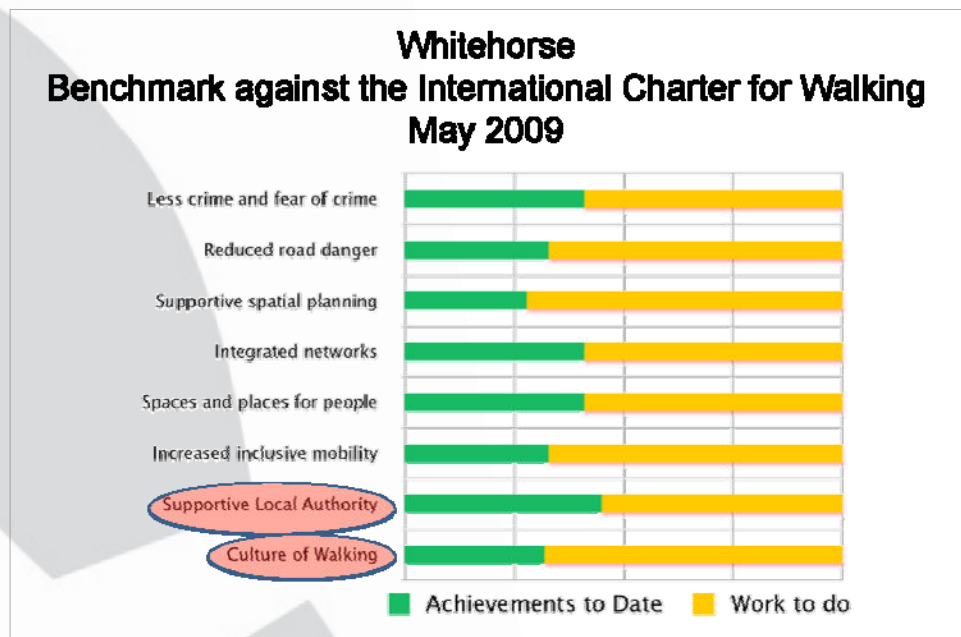
Make the most of local centres and communities, developing local maps with local businesses and rewarding people for choosing to walk there! Local mapping can be found within the Sustainable Travel Towns UK project <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/demonstrationtowns/sustainabletraveldemonstrati5772> And finally, remember that walking is a fun way to get around, to get to know your neighbours, to build sustainable, happy communities for the future. So have some fun!

# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

Recommendations against the International Charter for Walking

## ► Recommendations against the International Charter for Walking

The responses in the benchmarking questionnaire and the observations of the visiting expert team were consolidated into this descriptive graph against the 8 principles of the International Charter for Walking. The graph provides a qualitative snapshot to highlight where achievements have already been realised and where there is work to do.



While there is work to be done within all the principles of the Charter, having a strong lead from the Council and clear policy direction will build the strongest base from which to undertake the other challenges. Integrating walking policy into all City documents is critical – OCP, downtown plan, parking management strategy, transportation master plan. In addition, building on existing successes such as the trails routes with way-finding systems and activities to encourage people to choose to walk will engender a greater understanding of and engagement with walking as an everyday activity.

On the following pages are key findings and recommendations mapped against the 8 principles of the International Charter for Walking which provide an overview of the type of works that the City of Whitehorse can undertake to start building more walkable communities and ensuring the viability and liveability of the City for generations to come.

# Case Study: City of WHITEHORSE

Recommendations  
against the  
International  
Charter for Walking

## 1. Increased inclusive mobility

*People in communities have the right to accessible streets, squares, buildings and public transport systems regardless of their age, ability, gender, income level, language, ethnic, cultural or religious background, strengthening the freedom and autonomy of all people, and contributing to social inclusion, solidarity and democracy.*

### Key Findings

The independent mobility of children, young adults, people with a disability and seniors is currently compromised by the dominance of motor vehicle priority in the City. The allocation of space to motor vehicles, distances to destinations, vehicle speeds, insufficient safe crossing points and the impact of noise and air pollution on any comfortable and attractive walking opportunities all deter these groups from choosing to walk as part of everyday life.

All the recommendations outlined in this report, which will build a more walkable city for the people of Whitehorse, must be premised on ensuring access to local communities for everyone, especially groups with particular needs. An accessible walking environment (linked with public transit) is key to enabling the people in our communities, who do not have their own vehicle, to enjoy their local shops, schools and services.



### Recommendations

- 1.1 Identify priority areas to develop walking opportunities or improve existing facilities, such as where more seniors or people with a disability live, around schools, youth facilities and local centres and along key routes into and around downtown or to public buildings. For example, provide more benches on trails and implement best practice signage to support navigation.
- 1.2 Continue implementing current systems for supporting people with a disability, ensure all road crossings provide wheeled access (curb cuts at right angles to the traffic) and identify new opportunities for enhancing access for people with a disability. As the projection for Whitehorse includes an increase in senior citizens, it becomes more important to design and build the downtown infrastructure to accommodate a wider range of mobility aids such as walkers, canes and wheel-chairs. This will include changing the maintenance policies for snow clearing and sanding in winter.

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## 2. Well designed and managed spaces and places for people

*Communities have the right to live in a healthy, convenient and attractive environment tailored to their needs, and to freely enjoy the amenities of public areas in comfort and safety away from intrusive noise and pollution.*

### Keyfindings

The layout of the downtown in Whitehorse is highly walkable, a grid layout that links from the riverfront, through the main shopping streets to the base of the escarpment. This is a fantastic asset, but the value of this foundation for a walkable community is being eroded by the plethora of car parking lots, lack of consistent pedestrian facilities and services and lack of a coherent understanding of this potential within the community.

The downtown has a few lovely spots that give local people an opportunity to enjoy their public realm, the parks and plazas near the riverfront, a couple of buzzing street cafes, and the generally wide sidewalks. The diversity of street art also enhances the public realm, from the big murals, through the bike parking to the tiny details cast into concrete on new pavements. And with a diversity of architecture and street trees, the area is interesting and engaging when moving around on foot. This should be continued and expanded in all new developments.

But unfortunately, the scale of road space, abundance of car parking lots and speed of motor vehicles on key routes, detract from the ambience of downtown, disconnecting some key public services, such as the library from the rest of downtown. In addition, the big box developments destroy any sense of walkability or public space at the northern end of town.

Just out from downtown there are some older neighbourhoods which are comfortable to walk around and into downtown from, but the majority are too far either by actual distance or difficult to walk because of steep hills. Whitehorse is clearly committed to building more sustainable community centres as the town continues to sprawl outwards. But infilling can also be a growth opportunity. Even at the big box developments, opportunities exist to provide good public spaces and not just deserts of car parking.

### Recommendations

- 2.1 Develop a public realm strategy for downtown Whitehorse which supports the objectives of the City to give pedestrians priority and attract more residential development. This strategy needs to identify a clear process for creating a continuous experience of good spaces and places for people, linking existing places and enhancing others and the connections to them. It will also need to address the volume and speed of motor vehicle traffic through the downtown core, through traffic reduction, diversion and management techniques.
- 2.2 Identify local neighbourhood centres out from downtown and prioritise pedestrian access and amenities in these areas, for example Riverdale. This can include good pedestrian access to the shopping centres, seating and local information boards. The Riverdale Community Plan is a good example of re-investing and diversifying a neighbourhood.

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- 2.3 Recognise the need to retrofit big box developments and establish design standards for any future developments to make them more inviting and accessible for pedestrians so at least the people living closest can choose to walk – good crossing points at the road, clear walking routes through the parking lots and direct to the door, connections between boxes and over the longer term develop plans for strategic infilling of parking lots with residential and commercial uses.



- 2.4 Undertake works 'temporarily' so that people can experience the change and learn how to use the space differently. Take out a traffic lane and install a wide sidewalk and cycle lane, with planters, trees and white paint to quickly, cheaply and effectively change public space. Install these temporary works for a summer to measure impact. And hold out against negative public reaction until real impact can be measured. Provide benefits to those who perceive they are 'losing out', but not with more road space somewhere else! Install them as part of a package of summer initiatives that also includes community events and activities to bring people downtown and experience the changes positively.



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## 3. Improved integration of networks

*Communities have the right to a network of connected, direct and easy to follow walking routes which are safe, comfortable, attractive and well maintained, linking their homes, shops, schools, parks, public transport interchanges, green spaces and other important destinations.*

### Keyfindings

Whitehorse has already built some very high quality trails and walking links out from the downtown, including the river trail/ Trans Canada Trail, the escarpment steps and up Two Mile Hill. These good systems need to be linked in more directly to residential communities and promoted for everyday active travel.

Marking where the trail heads intersect with the street network and promoting that this network is available from people's front doors are good foundations for encouraging more walking. Good signage that links people into the trail, as well as along it and off again not only helps people find their way, but promotes the potential of the trail to be an everyday route. For example, the escarpment steps were comprehensively hidden away, with no information on-street, even when leaving the street network to reach the base.

Linking walking routes and pedestrian priority to public transit opportunities will also enable more people to walk. Valuing the people who ride public transport with proper provision of shelters and services is essential to encourage more patronage and thus more walking at both ends of the journey.

While recognising the funding issues and different responsibilities involved, it seems there would be substantial benefits to the town to have an integrated transit and school bus service, so that passenger numbers can be maximised and the level of service enhanced for everyone.

### Recommendations

- 3.1 Prioritise existing plans to install signage and develop maps for the existing trails network. Allocate funds to make a high quality visible difference as quickly as possible. Select a few high profile locations in neighbourhoods (not downtown) for installation of signage that will attract both media attention and local interest.
- 3.2 Reward people for choosing transit and attract new customers with high quality bus shelters that are lit after dark and contain seating, rubbish bins and information about both the bus and the local area.
- 3.3 Ensure that any reviews of public transit/ school bus services and all strategic planning recognizes the need to consider not only the vehicle system, but also the access routes from within the commuter catchment, the quality of the experience for the passenger beyond the door of the bus and links with key walking routes, centres and destinations.
- 3.4 Identify best routes to schools through travel planning with schools and prioritise these for comprehensive improvements that give highest priority to people walking, including within the school grounds.

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## 4. Supportive land-use and spatial planning

*Communities have the right to expect land-use and spatial planning policies which allow them to walk to the majority of everyday services and facilities, maximising the opportunities for walking, reducing car-dependency and contributing to community life.*

### Key Findings

Whitehorse is a city blessed and challenged by its topography. While the downtown is built on a classic grid layout, expansion beyond the downtown core, out along the Yukon River and up into the hills, has been on a sprawling cul-de-sac layout in pockets of residential neighbourhoods strung along highway connections. Whitehorse is a city very much in its natural surrounds, giving it a wilderness beauty but failing to provide a core community environment for the majority of residents.

The council is now committed to creating communities that are more sustainable than some of the existing suburban developments, but within the context of the wilderness setting in which Whitehorse exists.

Plans for Whistle Bend were reviewed by the expert team and promise real potential for change. It is imperative, however, that these developments are not built with the motor vehicle as the only design standard and priority mode of transport but that facilities for walking (and cycling) are central to the basic design parameters and that they are not only built first, but that local destinations are also in the first stage of construction. Good links into downtown for cycling and walking are also essential to realize real change with this new development.



To preserve the reasons people move to Whitehorse in the first place and to ensure a sustainable future for the town, infilling land closer to, and within the downtown is essential and will put people within reach of the choice to walk.

Existing big road, big box developments need to be retrofitted with clear, direct and safe walking access, not minimal, disconnected sidewalks, so that, at least, local people cannot only choose to walk there but are 'rewarded' for doing so.

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## Recommendations

- 4.1 Revisit all planning policies and guidelines to ensure walking is given (at least) equal priority with other modes and highest priority in residential neighbourhoods, local shopping streets, and commercial developments and around schools for all new developments and roads maintenance work.
- 4.2 Ensure current steps towards more sustainable development patterns are highlighted, prioritised and promoted to developers and existing property owners. Make walking around new developments easier than driving your car!
- 4.3 Identify opportunities to reduce sprawl by building mixed use developments into existing street networks, consolidating housing within the downtown and other town centres and ensuring street layouts that are continuous and connected to enable people to choose the shortest, most comfortable walking route to local centres.
- 4.4 Insist on proper pedestrian access to big box developments such as wide (space), continuous (no changes in level) and safe (clear crossing points) pedestrian walkways into and between (along) separate businesses. Ensure the pedestrian phasing on traffic controlled intersections leading into these developments provide sufficient safe crossing time and that a full pedestrian phase is provided on each change of the light.



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## 5. Reduced road danger

*Communities have the right for their streets to be designed to prevent accidents and to be enjoyable, safe and convenient for people walking –especially children, the elderly and people with limited abilities*

### Key Findings

Whitehorse, like most cities in North America, has provided for motor vehicles at the expense of pedestrian movement. It is encouraging to see plans for future developments and some existing trails and sidewalks seeking to redress this imbalance, but properly providing for pedestrians in high speed, high volume environments needs to happen in many locations around Whitehorse, particularly crossing points and intersections.



There are wide clear sidewalks within the downtown and these make for comfortable walking space. Unfortunately where the key arterial routes of Second and Fourth Avenue shoot through town, vehicle priority over pedestrian movement has led to some compromises to pedestrian safety, such as the 'ban' on crossing outside the Whitehorse Library.

Participants in the Master Class identified December to March as the most 'dangerous' months for walking with snow and ice on uncleared paths and less daylight as key factors. These do not have to be a barrier, with proper clearing and lighting, walking can be sustained through the winter.

### Recommendations

- 5.1 Reduce the impact of traffic volumes and speed throughout Whitehorse, but especially, along key shopping streets and around schools and residential areas with a range of measures to provide a better environment for pedestrians: narrowed road space, sufficient crossing points with controlled signals that give pedestrians priority, wide sidewalks with a buffer zone to traffic that can contain street trees, street furniture and bicycle lanes.
- 5.2 Address points of immediate concern, such as Second Avenue with more crossing points and slower vehicle speeds.
- 5.3 Reward slower speeds by programming the flow of green lights down long corridors to change for vehicles travelling at 50km/ h.
- 5.4 In residential areas, reduce vehicle speeds to 30km/ h and enable local residents to install traffic calming measures such as traffic calming infrastructure and signage.
- 5.5 Prioritise clearing snow and ice from trails and sidewalks to enable people to continue walking in the winter months, especially routes to schools and within downtown.



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## 6. Less crime and fear of crime

*Communities have the right to expect an urban environment designed, maintained and policed to reduce crime and the fear of crime.*

### Key Findings

Crime and fear of crime was not a substantial issue during the visit to Whitehorse. While there is crime within the community (just as any other) it was not seen as a significant factor influencing whether people choose to walk or not.

It is important to ensure that crime or the fear of crime don't become reasons people choose not to walk. It is important to create environments that displace anti-social activity with good design, active street frontages and by attracting more people to occupy public space with positive activities.

Good lighting and clean environments also displace negative activities and it's good to see that public spaces such as Shipyards Park are designed for year round use.

### Recommendations

- 6.1 Create opportunities and space for people to spend time in the public realm which displaces anti-social activities and intentions. Hold events and activities in the downtown, as well as Shipyards Park, more than once and enable local community events to prosper by facilitating street closures and other municipal support mechanisms.
- 6.2 More people in public spaces and walking along our streets and trails puts more eyes on the street or trail, which deters crime. People attract people, so attracting people to walk to local neighbourhood centres, schools and services and around downtown will create a greater sense of ease.
- 6.3 Undertake walking audits during the day and after dark to ensure lighting, sightlines, cleanliness, etc., are providing an environment that is not only safe to walk in, but feels safe to walk in.
- 6.4 Utilize Crime Prevention through Environmental Design principles (CPTED) to ensure new developments support safe streets and public spaces (no blank facades, hiding places, good lighting, clear sight lines, etc.)

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## 7. More supportive authorities

*Communities have the right to expect authorities to provide for, support and safeguard their ability and choice to walk.*

### Key Findings

The Mayor is positively committed to improving the sustainable prosperity of Whitehorse. Providing for walking can be one of the foundation stones of this commitment, as more walking will support not only individual health but also cheaper transport infrastructure and stronger community relationships.

There is a clear recognition amongst staff and Council of how challenging it is to provide for and promote walking in Whitehorse. This can deflate the energy needed to take on this challenge, to potentially take a few risks to realise outcomes and to properly commit to making walking viable. Holding out against 'community push back' takes political courage and commitment to the new ideas and the timeframe needed to engage people in the new directions.

There is a distinct need for the City to consolidate its policies and plans about walking into a clear policy framework that builds on current successes, supports existing plans and ensures walking is given the focus and resources it needs.

The International Charter for Walking can provide the framework for mapping existing and future projects against the principles of a walkable community, to identify new opportunities and to confirm current projects will deliver the desired results.

To support this vision and commitment, municipal staff will benefit from professional development opportunities to enable officers to not only prioritize walking within their projects, but to know how to cost effectively deliver best practice facilities and opportunities for walking in Whitehorse.

There has been some project specific data collection (qualitative), counters on trails and the bi-annual citizen survey. There is a need to build a comprehensive dataset about walking, both qualitative and quantitative, to inform future decisions and directions about staffing, resources and priorities.

### Recommendations

- 7.1 Make a clear commitment to walking as a priority mode for both transport and recreation, as the yardstick for public realm developments and as a key contribution to the sustainable future of the city. The first step in demonstrating this commitment could be signing The International Charter for Walking and secondly to give it higher priority in the Official Community Plan, Transportation Plan and all other strategic documents. Adopt a road user hierarchy that places people at the top!
- 7.2 Consolidate current and future walking initiatives into a comprehensive Walking Plan so that all departments, developers and citizens can see how and when the City is progressing on truly delivering sustainable transport.

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- 7.3 Support internal relationships between different departments through a staff network to promote and provide for walking, via e-newsletters, lunchbox training sessions, meeting opportunities.
- 7.4 Engage other government departments such as Education and Health to support and promote active transportation and walking initiatives.
- 7.5 Collect data about walking on a consistent citywide basis to inform strategic transport planning as well as local projects. Collect information about people's walking experiences (qualitative) as well as the numbers (quantitative). Counts must include all segments/ legs of the journey, not just the dominant mode. Map the distribution of demographic groups more likely to walk, road crash statistics and community hubs and services to build a more comprehensive understanding of walking in Whitehorse and its potential.

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## 8. A Culture of Walking

*Communities have a right to up-to-date, good quality, accessible information on where they can walk and the quality of the experience. People should be given opportunities to celebrate and enjoy walking as part of their everyday social, cultural and political life.*

### Key Findings

Whitehorse has some great opportunities for people to walk and has recognised the need to support more active transportation through plans and projects. Changing the culture of the city so that people choose to walk for daily activities as well as recreation is certainly a challenge and will require a comprehensive approach of both physical changes to the environment and social changes in how streets and public spaces are used.

Walking needs to be viable from people's front doors and not just something you do after driving to a park or trailhead. To develop at least a local walking habit, people will need to know how close things are and that it is comfortable to walk there. Information, maps, local business promotions can all foster a greater understanding of how walkable Whitehorse is.

When roads have been dominated by motor vehicle traffic it can take time for communities to learn how to use them differently. People need to be invited back into their public realm and to be given opportunities to enjoy it. The city plays a key role in changing people's perceptions of the potential for their public space. And it might need to take some risks along the way.

Local maps, information boards and online maps are also important sources of inspiration for people to choose to walk. Some best practice mapping that tells people how close everything is, highlights good walking streets and pedestrian links, and where they can enjoy a cup of coffee or use the washroom (not just park their car). Use these tools to promote walking rather than just illustrate the street layout.



### Recommendations

- 8.1 Identify some key local centres, such as Riverdale and develop local walking maps and campaigns supported by the businesses and other services. Reward people who walk to the local shops and businesses with incentives, discounts, and a nice place to sit down. Highlight how close the shops are by putting 5, 10 and 15 minute walking time circles on the maps. Include locations of bus stop, benches and bike racks and lockers.
- 8.2 Hold events to invite people into public space and learn how to enjoy it, at their local neighbourhood centres, schools, churches, parks, car parks. Provide space for cafes and stalls to spill onto the street, run led walks so people can learn just how easy walking is and how close places can be.
- 8.3 Continue to promote walking through the winter months by holding walking events and activities, such as serving mulled wine or hot breakfasts, lighting particular routes and conducting led walks or walking school buses along them.



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- 8.4 Provide creative and entertaining ways to engage people to use their local facilities – explore temporary and permanent art installations around town and include the locations on promotional materials and maps.
- 8.5 Work collaboratively with the Department of Education to ensure that the culture of walking is being embraced with Youth – provide locations for school groups to walk to for school outings, integrate transportation to the school with local improvements, conduct walking audits on the main school routes and develop action plans to address deficiencies.

