

Report

Date December 19, 2023
Subject Draft Master Transportation Plan (Phase 3)

File: 5180-20

PURPOSE

To present the draft Master Transportation Plan to the Committee of the Whole for feedback and direction on the next steps before presenting it to Council for adoption.

BACKGROUND

The Master Transportation Project, initiated at the outset of 2021, began with its first phase, which entailed gathering information and background data. This initial phase was followed by the second phase, focusing on network analysis and the development of the plan. Currently, the project is in its third phase, involving drafting the transportation plan. As detailed in this report, the plan remains at the draft stage of Phase 3.

The data collection process prioritized major transportation routes, from collector to arterial roads. Minor roads received consideration primarily when they played a critical role beyond merely facilitating access to residential and commercial areas. This strategic focus aligns with the high-level vision characteristic of a comprehensive master transportation plan. The first phase also included diverse engagement strategies, encompassing an online survey, targeted interviews with key stakeholders, and proactive outreach to and involvement of local First Nations communities. The stakeholder group encompassed a wide array of participants, including other local government bodies, youth represented through the school district, business communities, and organizations for seniors. The North Cowichan website also played a role in enabling continuous public engagement throughout the planning stages.

Formal reports summarizing the outcomes and insights from both Phase 1 (June 2021) and Phase 2 (June 2022) were presented to Council. The Phase 2 report, additionally circulated to the Environmental Advisory Committee, yielded several key recommendations for Council's consideration. These recommendations included:

1. The enhancement of green corridors, focusing on aspects such as biodiversity, connectivity, canopy cover, and hedgerows, with particular attention to cross-sectional areas.
2. Mitigation of impacts on local watersheds by implementing stormwater management strategies like bioswales, rain gardens, permeable surfaces, and safeguarding groundwater resources.
3. A thorough assessment of right-of-ways, which encompasses the evaluation of the E&N corridor.
4. Recognition and preservation of the intrinsic value of scenic and historic routes.

A significant change was made to the growth projections, shifting from the targets set in the Official Community Plan (OCP) of 30 years to a broader build-out growth model. This adjustment was influenced by new information from recent census data and growing concerns about infrastructure, especially in the Berkey's Corner and Bell McKinnon areas.

DISCUSSION

The Master Transportation Plan (MTP) offers a high-level analysis of North Cowichan's road, pedestrian, cycling, and transit networks, along with examining parking and emergency mobility options. The report includes numerous recommended actions and strategies for each network. The plan aligns closely with the goals of the OCP and the Climate Action and Energy Plan, aiming to transition the community from being vehicle-centric to inclusive, as envisioned by Council. Council's vision for the MTP is described as follows:

"North Cowichan is a connected community where residents, employees, businesses, and visitors have various transportation options. Each mode of transport is backed by safe infrastructure, and vehicle travel in North Cowichan is electrified to minimize environmental impacts, reflecting the community's sustainability goals. With a diverse range of transportation choices, the network becomes resilient, supportive, and inclusive for all residents."

Ongoing engagement with First Nations is crucial for transportation planning. Staff have recognized the importance of safe mobility without over-reliance on personal vehicles. Municipal and provincial roads, critical for connecting neighbourhoods to core services, sometimes present safety challenges (e.g., Boys Road and Tzouhalem Road). Prioritizing projects with users in mind is likely to yield positive outcomes. However, engaging with all First Nations during the project's timeframe was impossible.

The modelling of vehicle traffic volumes is based on business as usual, meaning no shift from the distribution of vehicles to other forms of transportation. This deliberately conservative approach is necessary to protect right-of-way requirements for future generations. However, what will be needed and built will depend on future travel habits and needs, such as additional lanes, trees and seating. This underscores the need to update studies that check-in and measure changes in areas such as modal shift, traffic, and origin-destination trips over time and then adjust to suit.

In contrast to conventional network assessments where vehicle traffic is prioritized, this MTP focuses significantly on active transportation (pedestrian, cycling, emerging mobility), and many recommendations emphasize this aspect. The plan proposes changes to road cross-section elements for new roads and aims to retrofit existing roads to accommodate active transportation. There are over 40 recommendations in the plan, some with specific projects, covering various aspects of movement and safety, including new corridors.

The MTP review has identified the necessity to update several policies and bylaws, such as a truck route bylaw and a traffic calming policy. Furthermore, the MTP is a key background tool for updating the Development Cost Charge bylaw, capital plans, and other budgets, ensuring well-informed asset management and contributions to development and improvements.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to:
 - (1) Publish the draft Master Transportation Plan (MTP), prepared by Watt Consulting Group, on our social media platform in advance of an open house hosted by the Consultant in January;
 - (2) Forward the draft MTP to the Environmental Advisory Committee for feedback;
 - (3) Work with the consultant, Watt Consulting Group, to prepare a 'What We Heard' report during the first quarter of 2024, for Council's consideration before receiving the final MTP;
 - (4) Seek early engagement and consultation with:
 - (a) First Nations where projects may have a mutual and/or direct benefit, including alignment with Cowichan Tribes' Active Transportation Plan;
 - (b) Other government bodies where projects may impact the level of service or physical infrastructure within those jurisdictional boundaries; and,
 - (5) Prioritize the recommendations in the MTP:
 - (a) Related to bylaws, policies and budget updates within the existing engineering studies budget; and,
 - (b) To incorporate the recommendations into a multi-year capital plan and annual roads capital budget.

AND THAT the Master Transportation Plan, including revisions based upon feedback received, be brought forward to a future Council meeting for consideration of adoption.

- *This engagement is consistent with the terms of reference.*

2. THAT the Committee of the Whole recommend that Council accept the Master Transportation Plan prepared by Watt Consulting Group and direct staff to implement the recommendations in the Plan.
 - *This amounts to accepting the report without further commitment or direction. Staff would then need to receive specific direction for implementing any recommendations that are not part of the normal course of doing business.*
 - *This option is not recommended because it does not give strong evidence of Council support of the plan, nor does it provide direction to staff on implementation or any of the report recommendations.*

3. THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to work with the consultant, Watt Consulting Group, to include the following revisions to the draft Master Transportation Plan:

- (1) *[Council to identify areas to be revised]*

AND THAT the revised Master Transportation Plan be brought to a future Committee of the Whole meeting for consideration.

IMPLICATIONS

Adoption of the recommendation will enable staff to move forward with initiatives such as updating the Development Cost Charge Bylaw, subdivision servicing and engineering standards, as well as ensuring that maintenance and capital projects consider future growth and transportation needs. It will set the direction that Council wants to go with respect to changing the transportation patterns in North Cowichan.

The financial impact depends on the development pace and how Council wishes to spend taxpayers' money and/or pursue infrastructure grants. This becomes more apparent in a 10-year capital plan where the priority projects would be listed with more detailed reasoning than expected from a high-level MTP.

Social impacts are widespread. Local government investments in active transportation could influence the public's choices in how they move about, what they invest in (e.g., bicycles, scooters) and even in the choice of where to live. The recommendations are intended to balance the vision with improving safety and mobility without a complete breakdown of the conventional vehicle network. Council ultimately decides on the direction, as it could choose congestion to change patterns. This plan offers solutions to accommodate whichever direction our future takes. Council can monitor and adjust infrastructure investments to influence the direction of transportation demands continuously over time.

The MTP provides the basis for many objectives that staff will need to implement for this to be successful. Having a robust plan and distinct direction will give staff the starting point to research and propose works consistent with the plan, which will provide focus and goals to achieve.

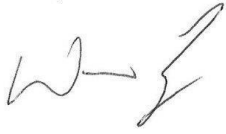
RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee of the Whole directs staff to:

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- (5) Prioritize the recommendations in the MTP:
 - (a) Related to bylaws, policies and budget updates within the existing engineering studies budget; and,
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AND THAT the Master Transportation Plan, including revisions based upon feedback received, be brought forward to a future Council meeting for consideration of adoption.

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Approved to be forwarded to Council:



Ted Swabey
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Attachment:

- (1) Master Transportation Plan December 2023
- (2) MTP Council Presentation