

Report

Date	February 19, 2025	File:
Subject	Active Transportation Fund Grant Application for Sherman Road Cycling Improvements	

PURPOSE

To inform Council about an external grant opportunity and to seek endorsement to submit an application for proposed cycling safety improvements along Sherman Road from Somenos Road to Canada Avenue.

BACKGROUND

The Federal Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities of Canada recently announced a grant opportunity titled Active Transportation Fund (ATF) to cost-share walking and cycling-related capital and planning projects in municipalities throughout Canada. The grant will fund up to 60% of the eligible costs of a project that provides a safer cycling corridor for our growing community. Projects will be selected through a highly competitive screening process. The deadline for applications is February 26, 2025. The notification of results is anticipated towards the end of 2025.

The recently adopted Master Transportation Plan (MTP) has identified several “quick build” opportunities to close gaps in the municipal cycling network. Sherman Road from Somenos Road to Canada Avenue is one such route where a cycling facility would provide a continuous cycling route that is safer and provides alternative options to travel for road users of all ages and abilities (AAA). Protected bike lanes can be achieved through cost-effective measures such as bollards, lane markings, concrete curbs, etc., without requiring significant road widening.

DISCUSSION

Grant Opportunity

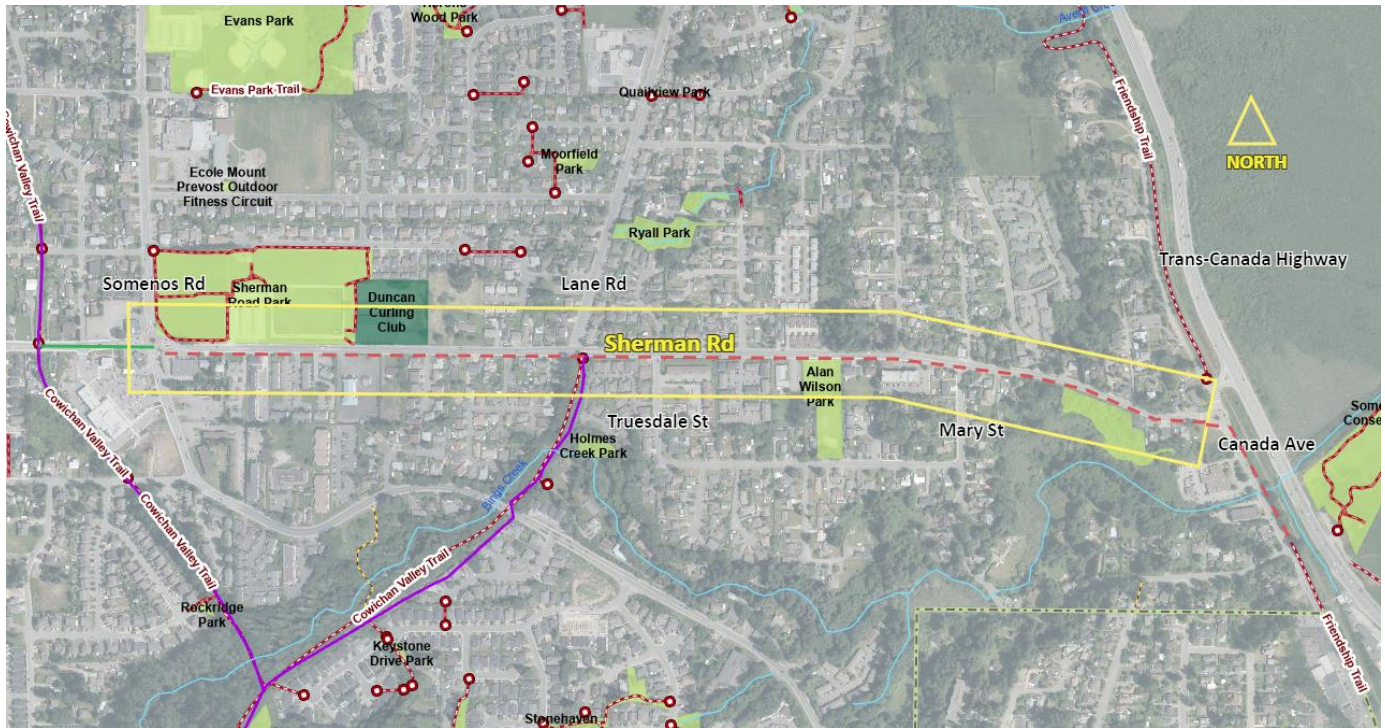
The federal government recently announced this ATF grant intake for 2025 as part of their ongoing commitment to promote walking and cycling as an alternative and affordable means of moving people in municipalities. The funder's typical expectation is that active transportation infrastructure will provide an alternative and affordable mode of transportation, especially for shorter-distance travel in the urban core areas, and lead to a healthier community and access to recreational trails. The grant will fund up to 60% of the eligible costs of active transportation projects that support community growth and housing supply. The ATF team will select successful projects through a competitive process.

Proposed Sherman Road Project

As recommended in the recently updated MTP, staff are now working to assess the potential implementation of several “quick build” active transportation projects. One such project is to create protected, two-way bike lanes along Sherman Road from Somenos Road to Canada Avenue.

Figure 1 shows the general location of this project. The proposed facility will close a 1.7 km gap in the cycling network and connect the proposed active transportation facilities to be constructed along Canada Avenue with the Cowichan Valley Trail to the Friendship Trail. In 2024, a conceptual design with planning-level cost estimates was prepared for the proposed cycling infrastructure. This makes the Sherman Road project a good candidate for the stated grant application, as the required supporting information is readily available to meet the deadline for applications on February 26, 2025.

Figure 1: Proposed Sherman Road Cycling Improvements Location Map



The proposed cycling facility includes a two-way, street-level, protected cycling facility on the south side of Sherman Road. This can be achieved by narrowing existing wide vehicle lanes and using cost-effective measures such as concrete curbs, bollards, lane markings and signage to provide a physical barrier between the bike and vehicle lanes. Expensive road widening or reconstruction will be mostly avoided. This concept, however, will limit on-street parking opportunities, retaining street parking only at the higher-demand locations. This will not result in any fundamental change to current roadway functionality or traffic operations.

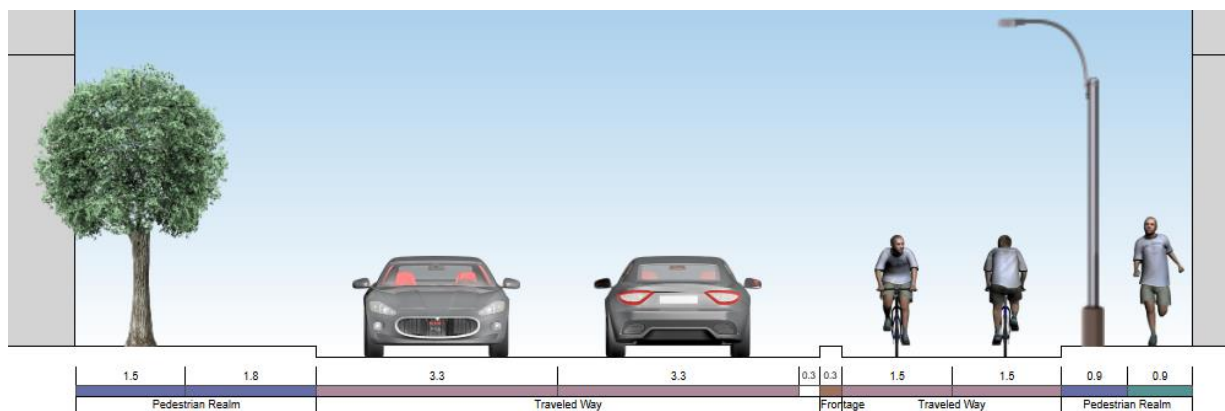
Design Implications and Community Consultation

The MTP identified the subject Sherman Road project as a priority cycling improvement. The community was engaged during the development of the MTP and provided feedback on various MTP recommendations. Many features proposed in this project were highlighted by residents, including the proposed “quick build” technique for a faster and more cost-effective implementation of the recommended cycling network. The project prioritization and community feedback received from surveys and open house events have been incorporated into the final MTP.

Figure 2 shows a typical cross-section of the proposed AAA cycling facility on Sherman Road. The existing wide travel lanes will need to be narrowed to achieve this. This will preserve the functionality of the roadway and provide the added benefit of traffic calming as narrower travel lanes, particularly when coupled with active transportation works, are effective in deterring speeding. A recent speed study on Sherman Road measured the 85th percentile operating speed at 59.5 km/h compared to the posted speed limit of 50 km/h. With an 85th percentile operating speed that is approximately 10 km/h over the posted speed limit, this corridor would benefit from the installation of the proposed active transportation works. Pedestrian crossing improvements will also be considered where appropriate. This includes shorter crosswalks to reduce exposure to vehicles and potential pedestrian-activated flashing beacons where warranted.

If the grant application is successful (notification anticipated in the fall of 2025), the project will advance to detailed design in late 2025 and construction in 2026. This timeline will provide the opportunity to obtain further information from the detailed design and share it with various stakeholders and affected residents in project-specific public consultation events.

Figure 2: Proposed Sherman Road Protected Cycling Facility (looking east)



OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** That Council:

- (1) supports the application for the Active Transportation Fund grant to fund up to 60% of the cost of a 1.7 km long, protected cycling facility along Sherman Road from Canada Avenue to the Somenos Road/ Cowichan Lake Road/ Sherman Road roundabout, with the remaining 40% of the cost to be borne by North Cowichan.
 - (1) authorizes the Director, Engineering to apply for the Active Transportation Fund grant opportunity from the Federal Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities of Canada on behalf of North Cowichan.
 - (2) directs staff to update the five-year capital plan as necessary, depending on the outcome of the grant application.
- The MTP recommends a “quick build” method of achieving a protected, two-way cycling facility on Sherman Road from Somenos Road to Canada Avenue. The key features include -
 - (a) The AAA cycling infrastructure is eligible to receive the recently announced grant and compete well with similar projects likely to be submitted by other municipal cohorts.

- (b) The “quick build” technique will allow North Cowichan to speed up the process of enhancing our cycling network. If successful, the grant will further lessen pressure on taxation-based general reserves.
 - (c) The estimated project cost is \$1,960,000, of which up to 60% may be funded by the subject grant if successful, and the remaining 40% will need to be funded by the North Cowichan.
 - (d) The proposed conceptual design preserves the functionality of Sherman Road without any fundamental changes to the current operations.
 - (e) The design will seek to retain street parking at the higher demand locations, and affected residents will be consulted once more details about the design and the outcome of the grant application are known.
2. THAT Council does not support an application for Active Transportation Fund to build a protected cycling facility along Sherman Road from Canada Avenue to the Somenos Road/ Cowichan Lake Road/ Sherman Road roundabout.
- If Council does not wish to support the recommendation, the implications will be:
 - (a) The Sherman Road active transportation project may need to be deferred until sufficient funds are available in the general reserves to cover the entire project cost.
 - (b) Due to ongoing cost escalations, the design and construction cost may be higher in the future, and the project will place a heavier burden on general reserves.
 - (c) The Sherman Road project may be deferred, allowing other roads and transportation priorities to advance. Such priorities include - rehabilitation of roadways, sidewalks, bridges, streetlights, retaining walls, etc.

IMPLICATIONS

The Sherman Road project is included in the current five-year capital plan. The project is currently scheduled for design in 2025 and construction in 2026. This schedule is in keeping with the timeline expected in the grant conditions.

The implementation, including detailed design and construction, will require approximately \$1,960,000, excluding GST. This accounts for potential cost escalation between now and 2026. The subject grant, if successful, will fund up to 60% of the total cost, i.e. \$1,176,000. The remaining 40%, which equates to \$784,000, will need to be funded from the annual capital budget in future years, which is anticipated to be in 2026. Sufficient funds are currently budgeted in the capital program to fund the municipal portion of this project.

The proposed protected cycling infrastructure will require specialized, narrow-track equipment for sweeping and snow plowing and a corresponding labour budget to maintain the desired operational level of service. The use of pre-cast concrete curbs will preclude the use of standard street sweepers and snowplows. Depending on the extent of landscaping, which will be determined based on the funding outcome, water bagging may also be needed during summer for the first two to three years of the new trees. Green conflict zone markings will also need a replacement budget for a five-year service life, which will cost significantly more than regular road line repainting.

The proposed modifications to Sherman Road will modify the existing street parking layout and prohibit parking adjacent to the playground. At the detailed design stage, options to retain parking to the east of Lane Road will be explored. Parking opportunities will be unaffected on other streets in the area. Residents will be consulted to discuss details and encouraged to utilize on-site parking. On-street public parking will need to be shared on a first-come, first-serve basis.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- (1) supports the application for the Active Transportation Fund grant to fund up to 60% of the cost of a 1.7 km long, protected cycling facility along Sherman Road from Canada Avenue to the Somenos Road/ Cowichan Lake Road/ Sherman Road roundabout, with the remaining 40% of the cost to be borne by North Cowichan.
- (2) authorizes the Director, Engineering to apply for the Active Transportation Fund grant opportunity from the Federal Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities of Canada on behalf of North Cowichan.
- (3) directs staff to update the five-year capital plan as necessary, depending on the outcome of the grant application.

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