

Tank Farm OCP Amendment Effects on Walking by Peter Long, April 20, 2020



Active transportation as a mode of travel has many benefits. It provides for low cost travel, helps maintain a healthy lifestyle, and is environmentally friendly.

To take advantage of the benefits of active transportation the proper infrastructure needs to be in place to provide a safe and enjoyable experience, especially in areas where there is vehicular traffic. In addition, facilities, services, and destinations must be within a reasonable distance.

Providing complete communities, as well as a network of sidewalks and trails that connects neighbourhoods, destinations and activity centres is an important step in promoting active transportation.

12.1.3: Active transportation links, including trails, pedestrian corridors, and bicycle lanes shall be integrated into subdivision or neighbourhood level planning.

Links to the City's active transportation network, where possible, shall be identified as part of any development proposal in order to create a more walkable community.

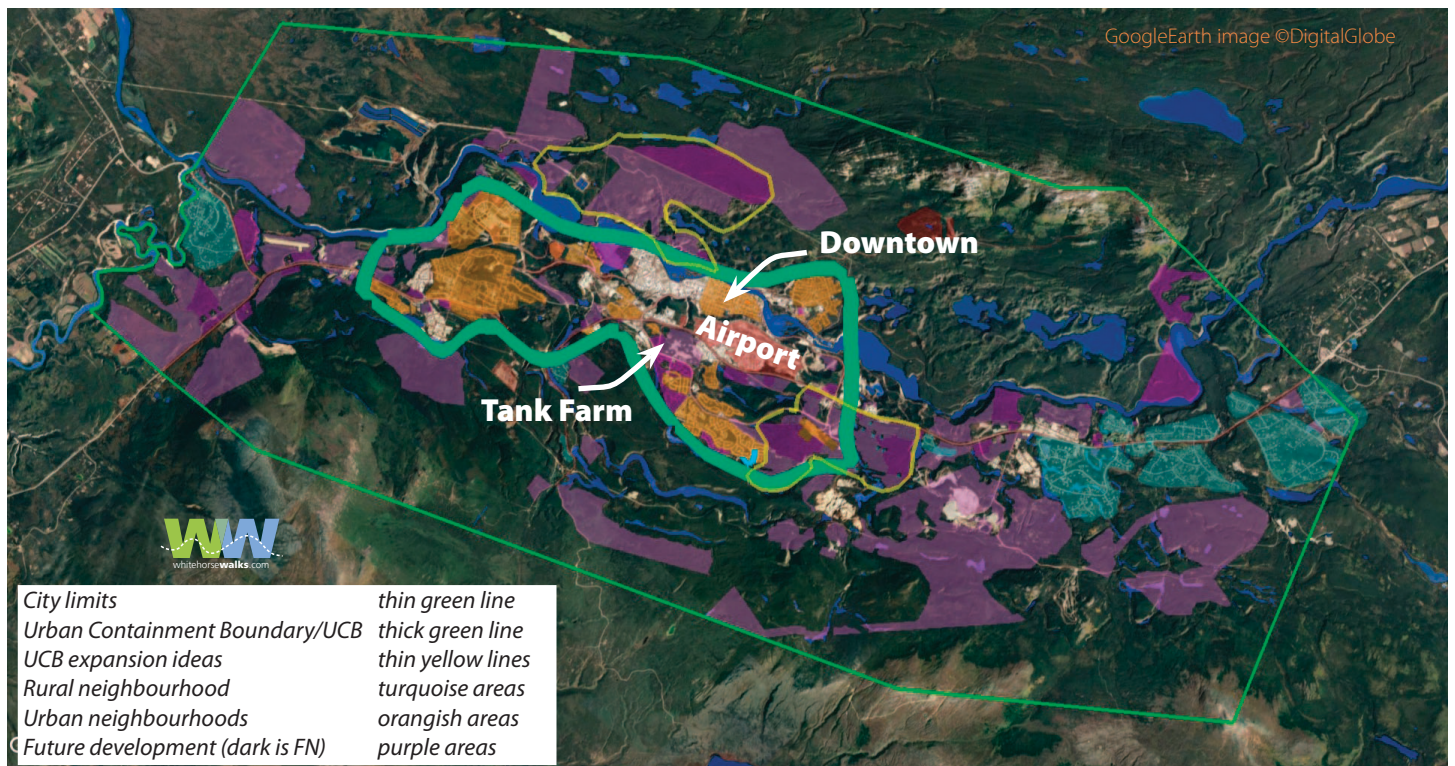
12.1.4: To support bicycling and other non-mechanized modes of transport as alternative transportation methods within and between the downtown and residential areas, the development and integration of continuous and safe cycling infrastructure into existing and proposed road improvements may be considered.

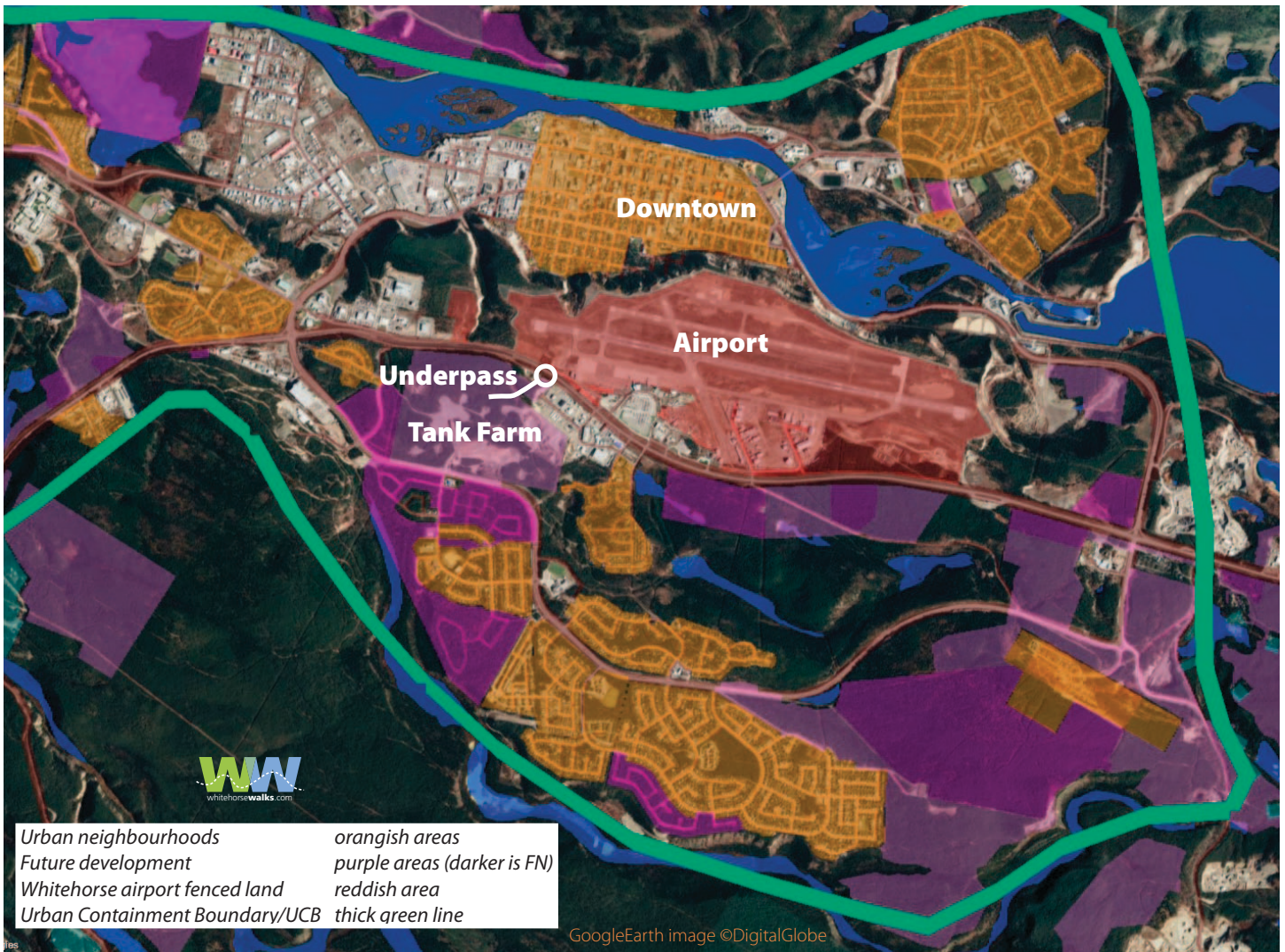
18.2.2: Every effort shall be made to maintain or enhance current recreational trails in the Whitehorse area. Blocking of established trails is to be avoided, and a contiguous trail system that links neighbourhoods and activity areas together shall receive priority.

2010 OCP, 12.1 Active Transportation

Whitehorse has a lot of problems with transportation. In addition to cliffs, rivers and lakes, our city has the Alaska Highway running through its heart, dividing residents from destinations. Being a spread-out town with small pockets of people in each subdivision, bus service is challenging to provide. Many people end up driving to get places, in particular to get downtown.

For subdivisions outside the UCB, and for neighbourhoods in the northern half of the UCB such as Crestview, Whistle Bend and Porter Creek, they'll drive, few will walk or cycle for active transportation to downtown. But look at how much future development lands (purple) are outside the UCB. Unless we want downtown to be a giant parking lot, we need to focus on creating a denser city core with stronger active transportation!





Why look at the UCB for the Tank Farm OCP amendment? Many in the southern part of the UCB (above-the-airport, Riverdale, Takhini) drive if going downtown to work and for recreation. In addition to wanting cheap or free parking within minutes of their destinations, it means roads accessing downtown have to be made bigger to accommodate demand (Riverdale wants another bridge). Some think that 2nd and 4th avenues urgently need to become high capacity, high speed. Downtown will become less attractive, less walkable, business less successful.

Clearly future growth in this central, above-the-airport part of the city cannot come with the expectation of building more and more downtown parking, and designing even bigger roads. We want a central walkable downtown core, with vitality, restaurants, entertainment, shopping. What to do? The answer is denser downtown residential growth; a stronger core transit system; and a vision for active transportation that encourages those living outside downtown, in particular in above-the-airport neighbourhoods, to drive less.

Looking at active transportation for the above-the-airport area there's the highway, the airport and the clay cliffs blocking access to downtown. The Yukon Government is preparing to make the Alaska Highway through this area into a complex multilane road. Two lanes, four lanes, six lanes, traffic lights, turning lanes, one-way access off and on the highways,.... Requests to have an underpass are being refused on the grounds that spending \$2,000,000 dollars on this could be a waste because people may not use it. We have a clash of urban design vs traffic planners, a short-term view of what Whitehorse will look like in 20+ years. We need recognition of fairness between roads and highways for cars and trucks, and an off-road network for active living, active transportation. On the next page is a draft of a walking network.



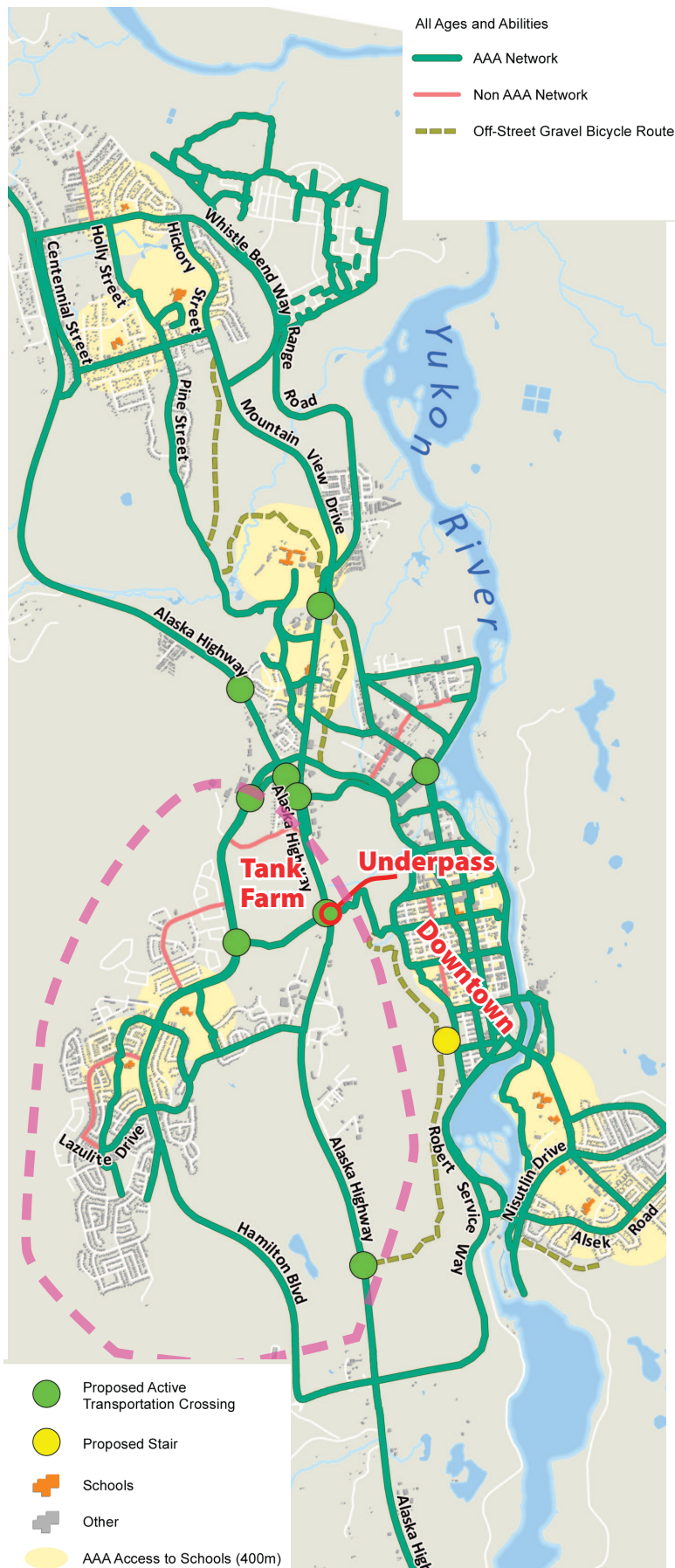
This walking network (above) is a work in progress to show how much of a network is already in existence. In discussion with neighbours, one comment stuck with me “Now if the City would only catch up to the possibilities of what they already have at hand.”

What can the city actually do to help out in this network? It should ensure that as the Tank Farm process moves along through the years, the City doesn't find itself blocked from making good moves. In particular, it needs to ensure that there is a viable active transportation/recreation corridor that allows people living above the airport — including Tank Farm, Ta'an and KDFN lands — to not only safely walk downtown, but that also encourages more people to do so.

The proponent talks about building a highly walkable residential neighbourhood. They have a vested interest in an underpass and a strong active transportation/recreation network, both in and around the Tank Farm.

Next, let's look at the City's All Ages and Abilities, 2018 Bike Network Plan (map, next page). It involves 6 pages of needed improvements: 80+ items, roughly averaging \$900,000 each for a total of \$76,000,000. A number of these improvements include separated bike paths.

Note that most of the bike network sticks to roadways. Walkers think differently. We want natural surroundings and views — more time in nature, in greenspaces. We're often health conscious and where possible we try to walk away from the side of roads. It's quieter and the air is cleaner. Another generalization, we're slower moving and like short cuts, especially for times we need to get places faster.



Of course many cyclists like routes us walkers like, especially when riding for recreational purposes..

Focussing on the Tank Farm OCP amendment, the Bike Network Plan shows a key crossing at the north end of the airport. This would require coming through the Tank Farm’s Industrial area – Wasson Place– Burns Road area. It also needs this active transportation/recreation corridor.

Discussions around highway improvements were strongly focussed that crossing the highway was a Hillcrest issue, that perhaps Hillcrest needed to understand that the Alaska Highway was a very important major road servicing the territories, BC and Alaska and that a few traffic lights were the solution to crossing the road. This is a distraction. This isn’t only Hillcrest’s issue.

Looking at the broader above-the-airport area (pink dashed line), it’s obvious that most people would want to cross at the north end of the airport and that an underpass would be a fast, safe way of crossing the highway.

Walking alongside the highway on the piece of trail beside the hanger presents an uninviting active transportation route. Huge puddles, both on the trail and alongside the highway, chunks of ice from plows, slush, garbage, ice, all discourage walking in this winter city. An underpass would cure this.

Highways say that the new traffic light crossings on the highway will be like Hamilton Blvd. at the Canada Games Centre. However, the Hamilton Blvd. crossing is doable, in spite of short timing for walkers crossing, because there is a safety island between the center lanes. The highway crossings, likely with short walk cycles, have no centre safety island, and will be much busier and more complex with their 7 lanes of traffic and faster traffic!

Built with an eye to safety and attractiveness to entice use, Highways’ \$2,000,000 for an underpass would appear to create a valuable piece of active transportation infrastructure. Crossing the highway could be done at whatever speed a walker or a child would need without stopping traffic. However, it must be done right — wide, open, safe for women, well lit, placed to minimize ramps.

7.1 Clear City-wide connectors are an essential part of a user-friendly alternative transportation system which, by making such alternatives easy and time effective, further encourages healthy lifestyles.

There is a need to connect neighbourhoods to each other and to facilities which serve more than one neighbourhood,

2007 Trail Plan

It looks like, at present, our active transportation/recreation corridor would run in the PG land behind Sunset North, pass through the tank farm area, arriving at the Highway at an underpass.

Unless there's a better plan, the PG-zoned piece of land behind Burns Road and Wasson Place would seem to be what the active transportation/recreation corridor uses (map on right).

While the airport is a big part of a barrier to going downtown on trails, we're very fortunate in that the area around the airport is also a good recreation destination. There's great views of birds, the valley, the river, cliffs, mountains, downtown and the daily activity of an international airport. This gem of an area will become more heavily used as the population increases above the airport. It's also used by those living in Takhini, Downtown and Riverdale. Part of its popularity is because it's very open.

How can the City approve this Tank Farm amendment without looking at the larger picture? We are being asked to comment on a planning approach before we're told how this amendment will affect this whole area.

There's only one short stretch of highway near the end of the airport where an underpass can be built. Remember, we're building for future users, not just for today's users.

- How does the proponent plan on accessing the Alaska Highway from the residential part of the Tank Farm, both for vehicles and active transportation?
- What future plans does the City have for roads in this area as developments continue for thousands of future residents? For instance a direct connection through the Tank Farm to get to the airport.
- How can First Nations create modern residential developments on their land parcels if people can't walk safely to the airport and to downtown?
- What walkable active transportation corridor is planned that makes accessing trails around the airport and to downtown a desirable activity?
- What is the City doing to convince the Yukon Government that having no underpass undermines the City's stated desire to have fewer trips to downtown made by single occupancy vehicles?
- What opportunities are there in optimizing an underpass as the Salvation Army gets moved out of its current location?

This push to get the OCP changed quickly does us all a disservice. At this point, the best step forward is to amend the OCP designation to become a quarry, not an industrial area, allowing the proponent to do the next stage in site preparation.

When done, the proponent can come back and apply to change the designation from quarry to industrial. Then they can show how the road and active transportation networks will work in the whole Tank Farm area. Similarly, Highways should wait on this last, third section of highway widening and come back with an acceptable plan for an underpass. At the same time, the city should work with the neighbourhoods and come up with an active transportation network that gets more of us walking and biking downtown, minimizing trips in single occupancy vehicles.

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