

A winter landscape featuring a wide, partially frozen river in the foreground. The banks are covered in snow, with bare trees and evergreens. In the background, there are snow-covered hills and a cluster of buildings, including a prominent green industrial-style building with a parking sign. The sky is overcast and grey.

**Proposal to build a  
pedestrian bridge  
between downtown and  
the hospital**

**DRAFT**

A pedestrian bridge between the Hospital and downtown would be both a recreational and community development asset.

Downtown faces many challenges. For Whitehorse to grow responsibly and sustainably, downtown must become more densely populated. And with our sparsely populated, spread-out city with its challenging public transportation, most people drive, often in single occupancy vehicles, all wanting to get downtown fast and have easy, cheap parking on arrival.

### **Attractive, liveable, vibrant downtown**

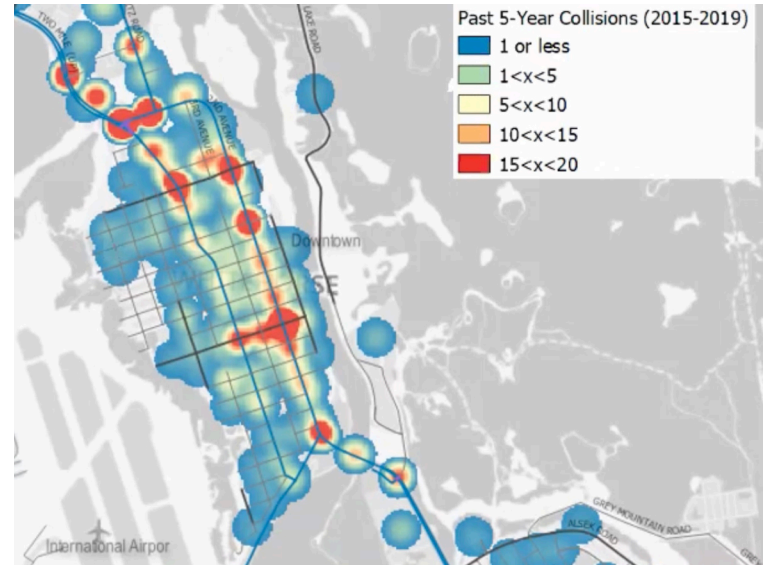
Focusing on density, having a walkable downtown is key. People can live downtown without using cars but we need to address walking with safer crossings and winter's unmaintained sidewalks and icy street crossing. I shouldn't need to argue that walking is good.

Looking at a recent Transportation Plan presentation brings up the issue that Second Avenue at Main, at Shipyards, at the bridge are high accident locations (above graphic). This doesn't encourage a walkable downtown when access to the waterfront has a barrier that intimidates walkability .

Ideally, living in a *Wilderness City*, downtown residents should be able to easily walk into the woods from our homes, without driving. However, the large Chadburn Lake Regional Park just across the river has no daily presence for downtown recreation except as a scenic view.

The lack of a highway underpass at the north end of the airport continues to be a mystery. The south end of the airport, an area set for large future development, needs an area trail plan.

The pandemic has made life difficult for Whitehorse as well as the rest of the world. Businesses have closed, prime retail spaces are under utilized, staff is hard to come by and the vitality of the downtown is challenged,



even on a Saturday afternoon. Housing is scarce, especially rental and people live outside of downtown and use a car. Employees want new ways of working such as mixed office and home. A vibrant downtown with high natural recreational access will be a strong attractant to today's trend to web-based work that can be done anywhere.

### **Vehicles and downtown**

In the south end of downtown, Riverdale continues a long-standing push for a second vehicle bridge (where it would go?). The dam has long served as an emergency crossing, generally not used except for the odd event (Mother's Day walk/run).

As future growth happens above the airport, more people will want to drive downtown — however, traveling between clay cliff and river, Robert Service Way has only 2 lanes between Yukon Energy and downtown. Making this 4-lane would be difficult and purposeless.

In the north end of downtown, it's more complex as the above-the-airport traffic has the 4-lane Two Mile Hill merging with ever increasing traffic from Range Road and the Alaska Highway. As well, there will be a push to make Mountainview four lanes to help residents of the rapidly filling Whistle Bend get downtown. There's talk of a big connector to the Alaska Highway through McIntyre Creek Regional Park, although that won't help traffic get downtown faster.

What to do with all this traffic downtown once it all gets here? There is a Transportation Plan/parking study every few years. Should 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> be a 1-way ring road? Do we just need more free parking lots, preferably around Main Street and around government buildings?

With the growing 4-lane Alaska Highway, a vibrant downtown is in danger of becoming a thing of the past. What will convince the thousands of driving tourists to turn off the highway and go downtown? Will northbound traffic take the second downtown option to the big box area in Marwell, places with lots of parking and even free camping?

### **Expanding Whitehorse's urban footprint**

Construction of a second Yukon River bridge would substantially change the potential spillover effects and pressures of urbanization on the other natural values including unimpeded wildlife movement. The majority of past recreational use has been concentrated in the Long Lake area now part of Chadburn Regional Park.

A pedestrian bridge between downtown and the hospital would be a strong piece of community development structure. Making it an iconic bridge, both in name and looks, is a great opportunity for our community.

I'll use Google Earth as the story telling tool and starting back a few years to set the scene for why this bridge.

Peter Long, [Whitehorsewalks.com](http://Whitehorsewalks.com)

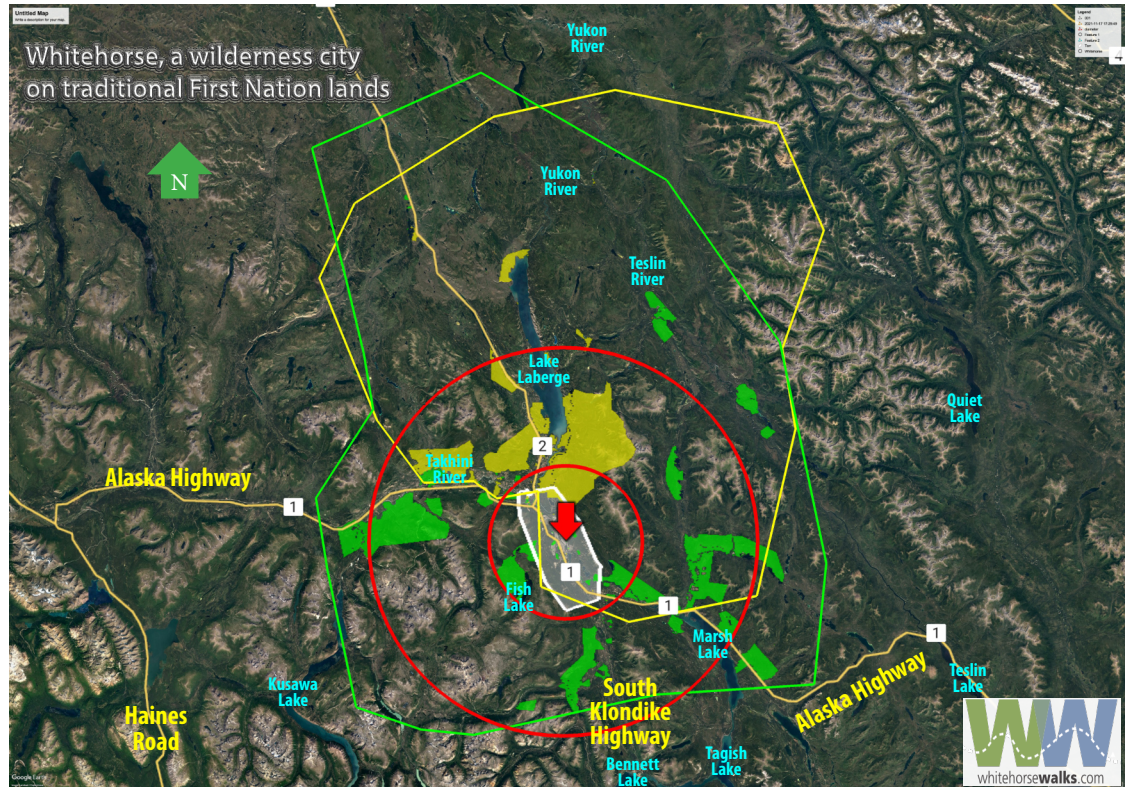
Over thousands of years, as glacial ice melted and glacial lakes drained, people have lived in the area we now call the southern Yukon.

Whitehorse is in the traditional territories of the Ta'an Kwach'an Council (yellow border and polygons) and Kwanlin Dün First Nation (green border and polygons).

Whitehorse is in the Yukon Southern Lakes Ecoregion, an area of broad valleys and large lakes. In the rain shadow of the St. Elias Mountains, this ecoregion has a dry, cool climate. It also has the highest mammalian diversity in the Yukon, with 50 of the Yukon's 60 known species.

The Yukon River watershed comprises 54% of the Yukon 260,000 km<sup>2</sup>. It includes large Lakes such as Teslin, Marsh, Tagish, Bennett, Laberge, and many tributary rivers.

Whitehorse is the white polygon in the middle of the little red circle. The outer red circle has a



diameter of 100 km. The inner red circle has a diameter of 40 km.

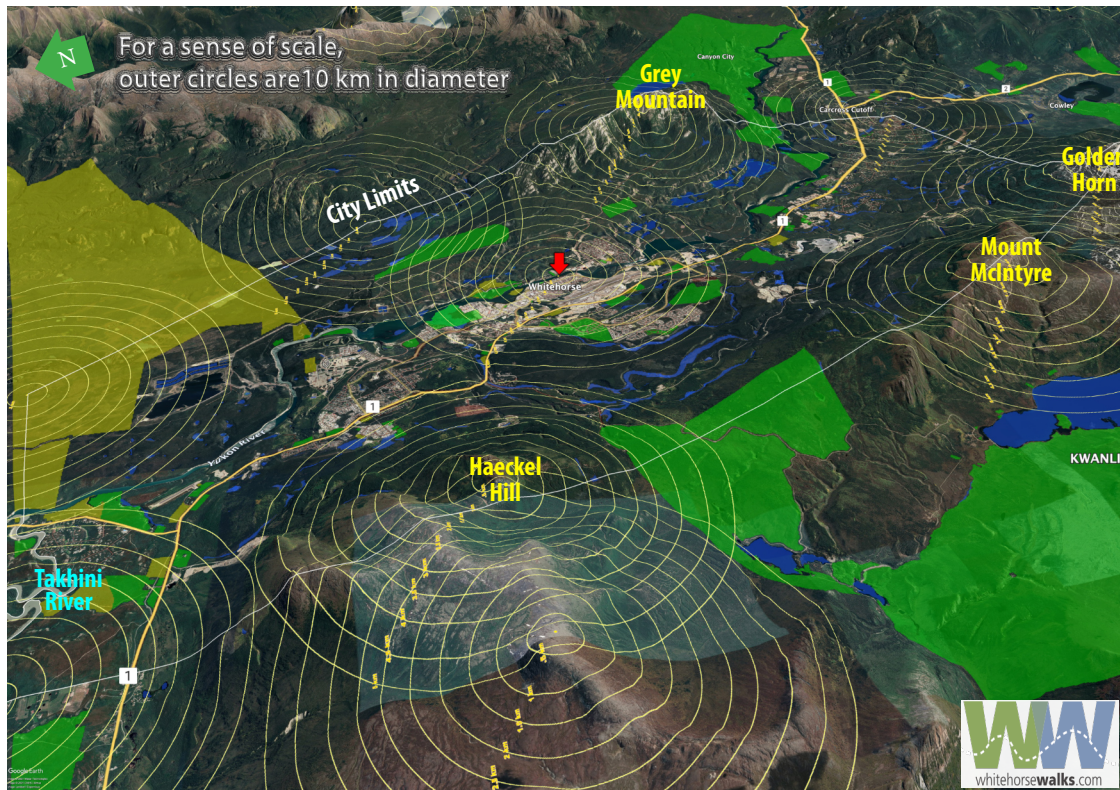
The red arrow is where I propose we build a pedestrian bridge

between downtown and the hospital.

Clearly the First Nation roles in the development and interpreting

initiatives as a result of this bridge could be significant.

Boundary markers for the city are a mix of mountain tops and rivers. Concentric circles are spaced .5 km apart.



Environmentally sensitive land (turquoise) includes cliffs, steep slopes, wetlands, ponds, lakes, creeks, and of course, the Yukon River.

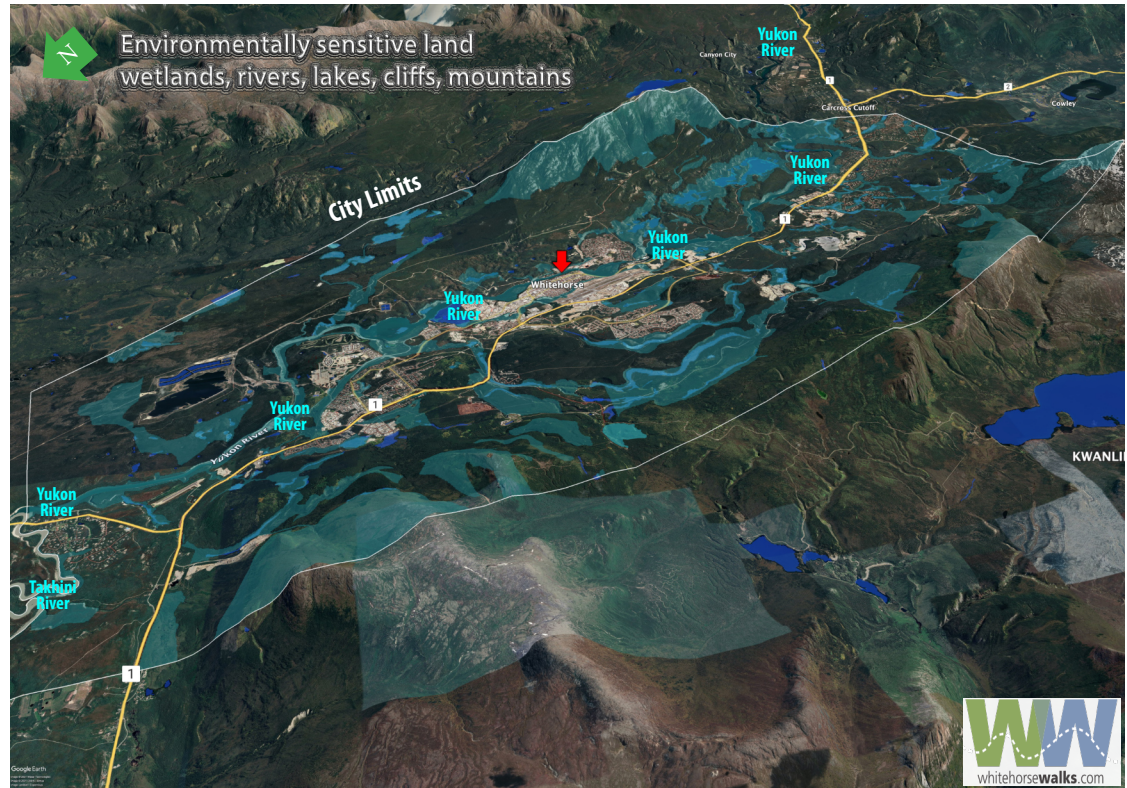
The 3,190-km Yukon River has four vehicle bridges, two pedestrian bridges, one run-of-river hydroelectric dam and one flow-regulating dam.

The river divides Whitehorse into an east side and a west side.

As is obvious from the earlier traditional territories map, First Nations have long occupied the Whitehorse area.

During the gold rush, the formal community of Whitehorse started as a settlement along the west side of the river in what is today's downtown waterfront.

(Map colouration in these maps was adapted to 2012, 2015 Zoning Bylaw processes.)



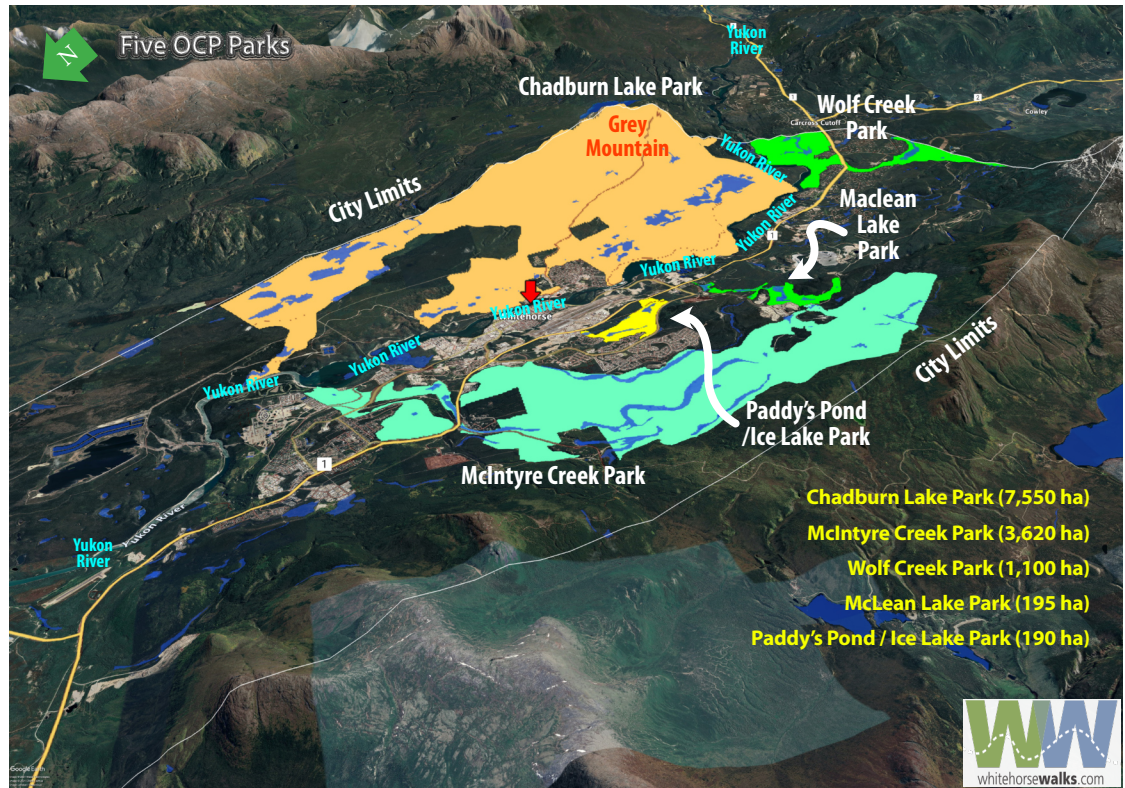
The 2010 OCP created five Regional Parks to include many things we value as a community: natural features, recreation facilities, trails, and Environmentally Sensitive Areas. Four are on the west side of the Yukon River. Chadburn Lake Park, the only one on the east side of the river, covers the north-western slopes of Grey Mountain.

A new park 'front' entrance and many new different users mean integration with the existing Chadburn Lake Park plan will be important.

With the focus on the hospital and it's many opportunities, and the .

The trail network on Grey Mountain is significant and should be shareable by bikes and walkers. Build switchbacks where needed to allow 2-way traffic safely. In addition to walking, running and biking, there should be a family friendly stacked trail plan with skiing, kick sledding and snowshoeing.

The bridge will be used as a starting point in races going to the top of Grey Mountain, but it's also within the capabilities of many to walk to the top, along the ridge, down to the river and back along the river. Integration with both Yukon River



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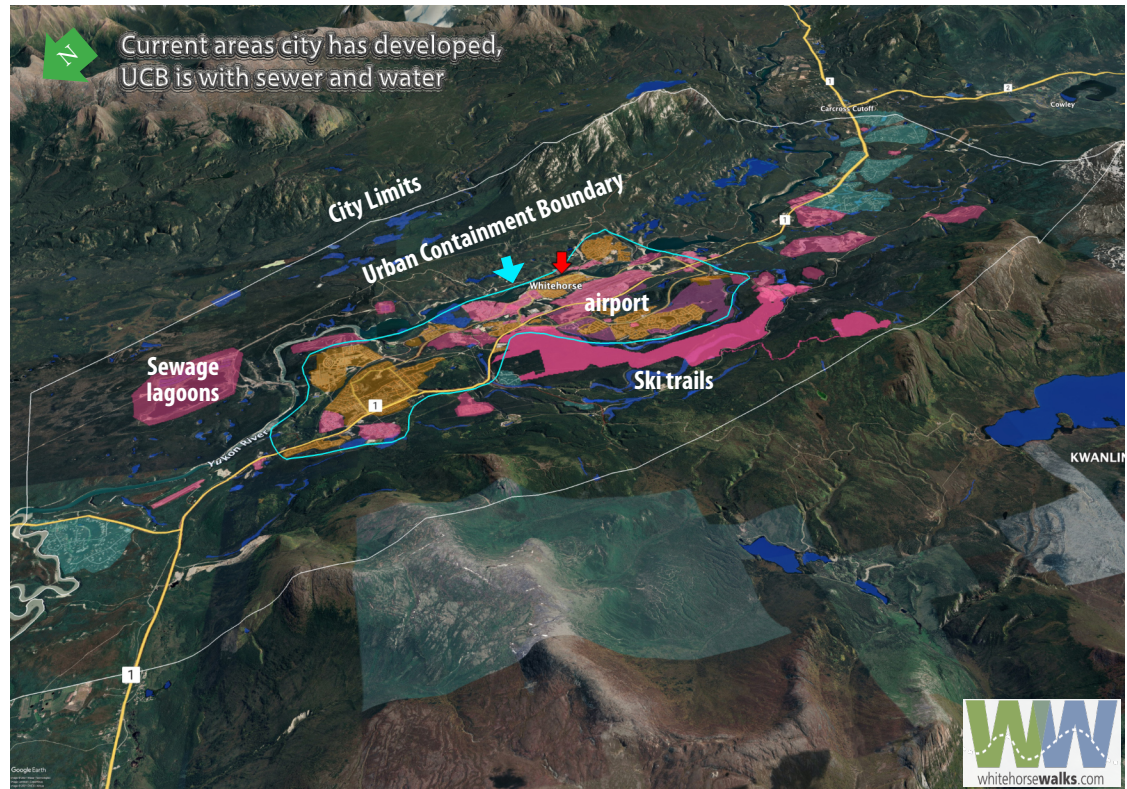
Integration with both Yukon River

Trails will be another asset to a bridge here.

From its early days along the river below the escarpments, Whitehorse has grown by spreading out on flatter, drier pieces of land. This was reflected in subdivisions closer to the city center such as Riverdale, Porter Creek and Hillcrest.

There have always been people who wanted a more rural lifestyle, a cabin in the woods or by a lake. In the transition to a controlled land system, this became squatting. The alternative became acreage in country residential subdivisions such as Wolf Creek, Mary Lake and MacPherson, and occasionally cottage lots in out-of-town areas.

As the city continued to grow, the 2010 OCP Whitehorse designated an Urban Containment Boundary (UCB) shown as the cyan line. This is the limit of the water and sewage systems, and also the garbage pick-up system. It's also the current limit of the bus system (at one point in the past there was bus service to rural subdivisions).



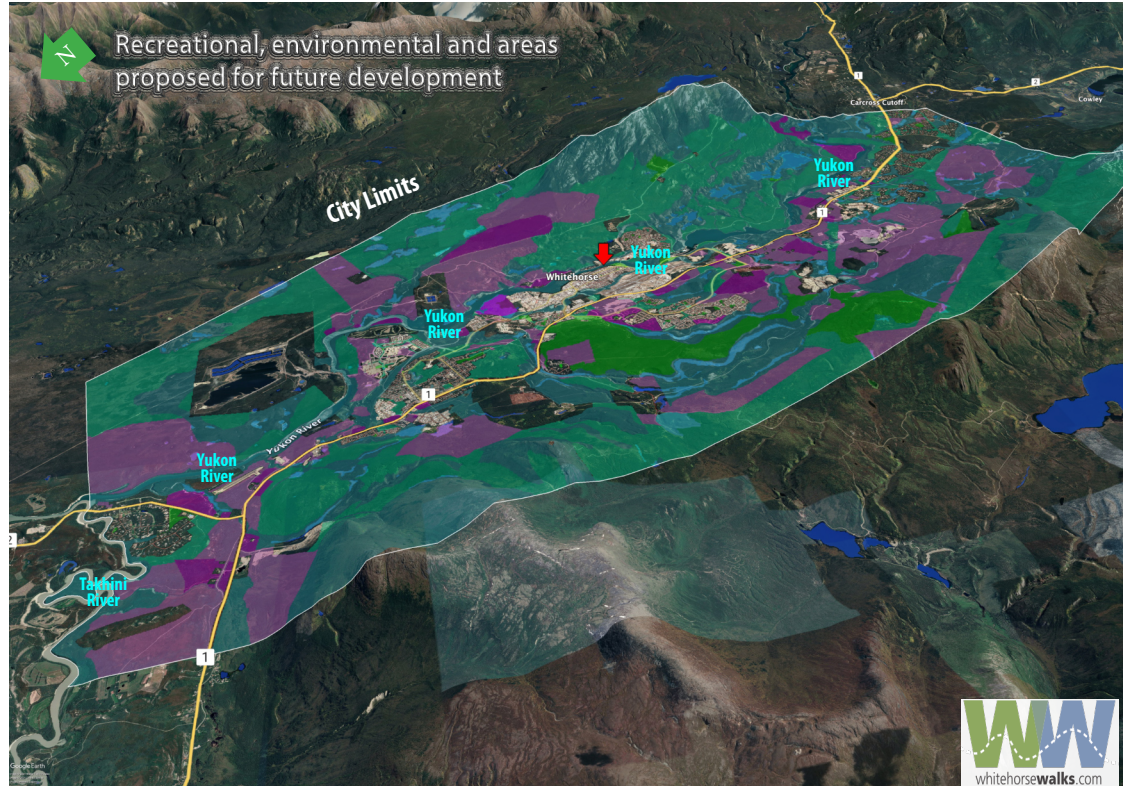
Turquoise shows rural residential subdivisions, often with larger properties. Inside the UCB, brownish shows urban

neighbourhoods. Reddish are public industrial and darker red are ski trail areas.



Putting this all together, first observe the green and turquoise spaces (recreational land and environmentally sensitive land).

The other significant areas to note are those areas designated for future growth (dark purple is First Nation, lighter is city.) This does not preclude them from being developed/designated as park, green space, recreation...

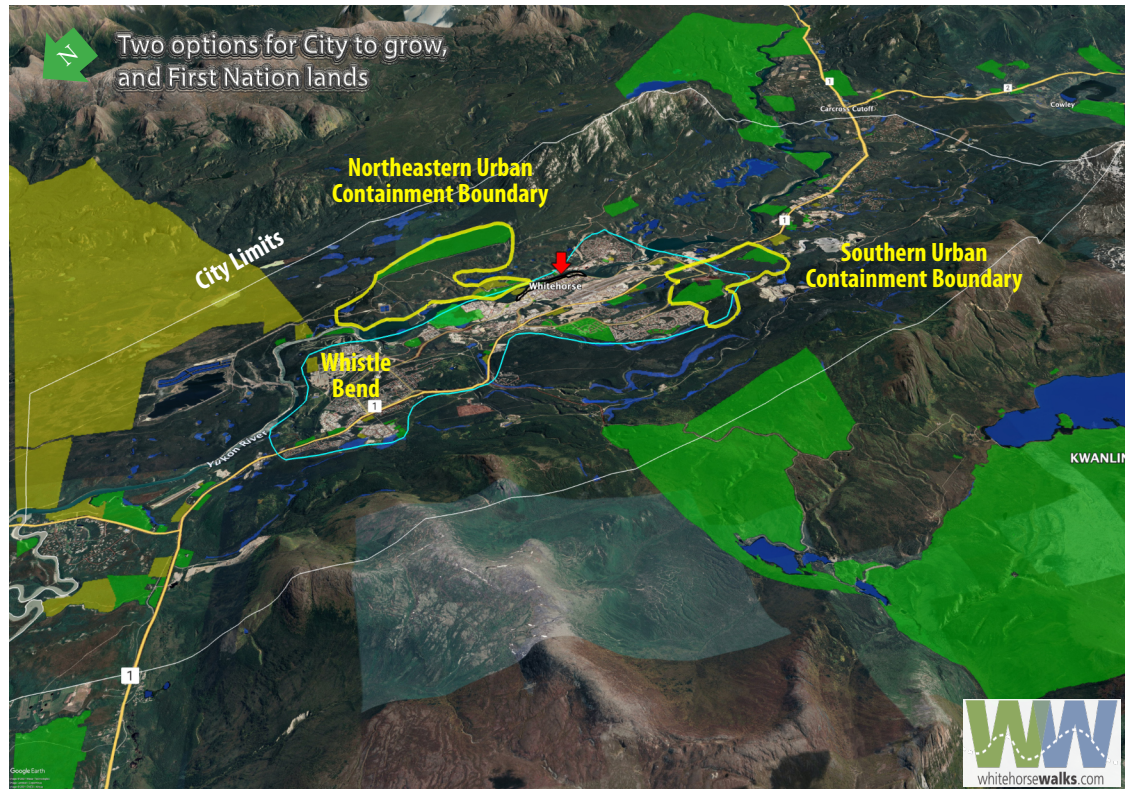


Earlier growth was in easier-to-use pieces of land. Do you remember wondering who would live in new subdivisions above the airport? These have long been full and Whistle Bend is filling fast.

Will we continue to spread out like a drop of oil on water? In 2016, the city looked at how to provide room for its growing population. They examined two areas for expanding the UCB.

One area, the Southern Urban Containment Boundary (SUCB), is south of Copper Ridge on the south-western side of the Yukon River. One clear advantage is that as this SUCB area fills, it make city services, like buses, more feasible to residents in the south end of town. It also opens up possible densification in existing rural neighbourhoods.

The second area, the Northeastern Urban Containment Boundary (NUCB), is north of Long Lake on the north-eastern side of the Yukon River. To be feasible, it needs a vehicle bridge.



Before we examine the NUCB, we should think of the recent COP 26 conference and the problems in addressing a warming world.

Dependance on unfettered growth of a car-based city is part of how we add to the problem. What will it mean to the future for

both our kids' kids and the nature part of Whitehorse if we choose to spread city development across the river?

The east-side-of-the-river NUCB study recommended at least two bridges: a vehicle bridge + sidewalks (yellow, 3 options), and a pedestrian bridge (pink, 2 options).

Emergency measures (a second bridge for fire, disaster, ...) and Whistlebend recreation growth, both point to the need for a larger pedestrian/emergency bridge. I suggest the (red) area north of Whistle Bend.

Building in the NUCB area will open the flood-gates on east side of the river development. With climate change and an already existing vehicle-centric city, is this what we want?

The study projects that 18,964 more people can be housed. Whitehorse has grown to 33,893 in June/2021 from 25,085 in 2016. The housing shortage is acute.

An obvious question is if Whitehorse continues to have more people wanting to live here, then where do we put them?



We read “Countries should commit to conserving at least 30% of the planet’s land and oceans by 2030.” Are they talking to

Yukoners? Is this in the COP 26 resolutions, our 2040 OCP?

The 2040 OCP update has a paper *Accommodating Future Residential*

*Demand in Whitehorse* that recommends leaving the NCUB area alone until some time in the future. There’s hope!

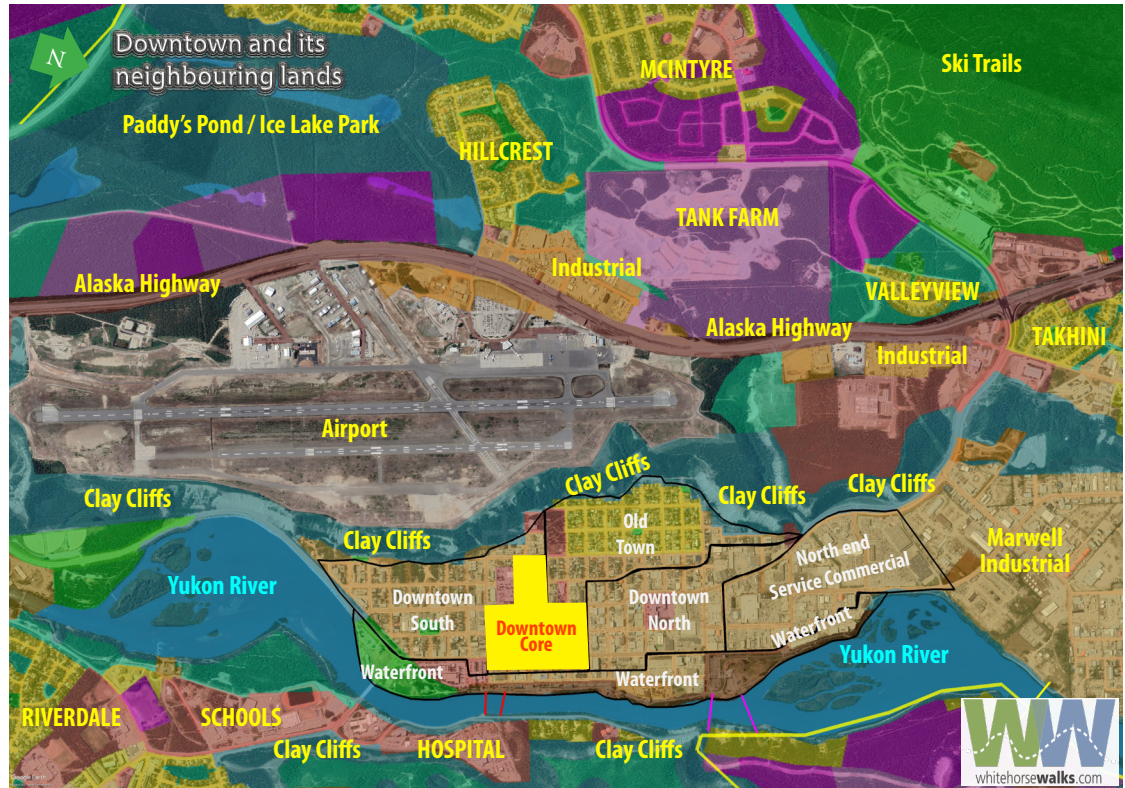
For a sustainable city, an obvious goal is to keep a vibrant walkable downtown with denser residential components.

For this, the Downtown Core, the area around Main Street, has to be healthy. Life without vehicles must be practical.

Many live in the residential parts of downtown (Old Town and Downtown South). More recently, larger condominiums have been built in the Downtown South, Waterfront and Downtown North.

Recreational walking is mostly on paved paths and sidewalks — downtown is bounded on the west by clay cliffs, the airport, a 4-lane Alaska Highway, to the north by North End Service Commercial and Marwell Industrial areas, and to the south and east by the Yukon River. As daily walking becomes repetitive, for variety people will drive to walk in nature, or worse, not walk at all.

An important factor is that winter walking can be subject to bitter cold winds with little shelter.



So, how can we entice more people to live downtown?

A new pedestrian bridge from downtown would be a great

community asset. It would provide recreational access to nature in the forested park across the river. We call ourselves 'The

Wilderness City', so let's address downtown's nature deficit (and get out of the wind!)

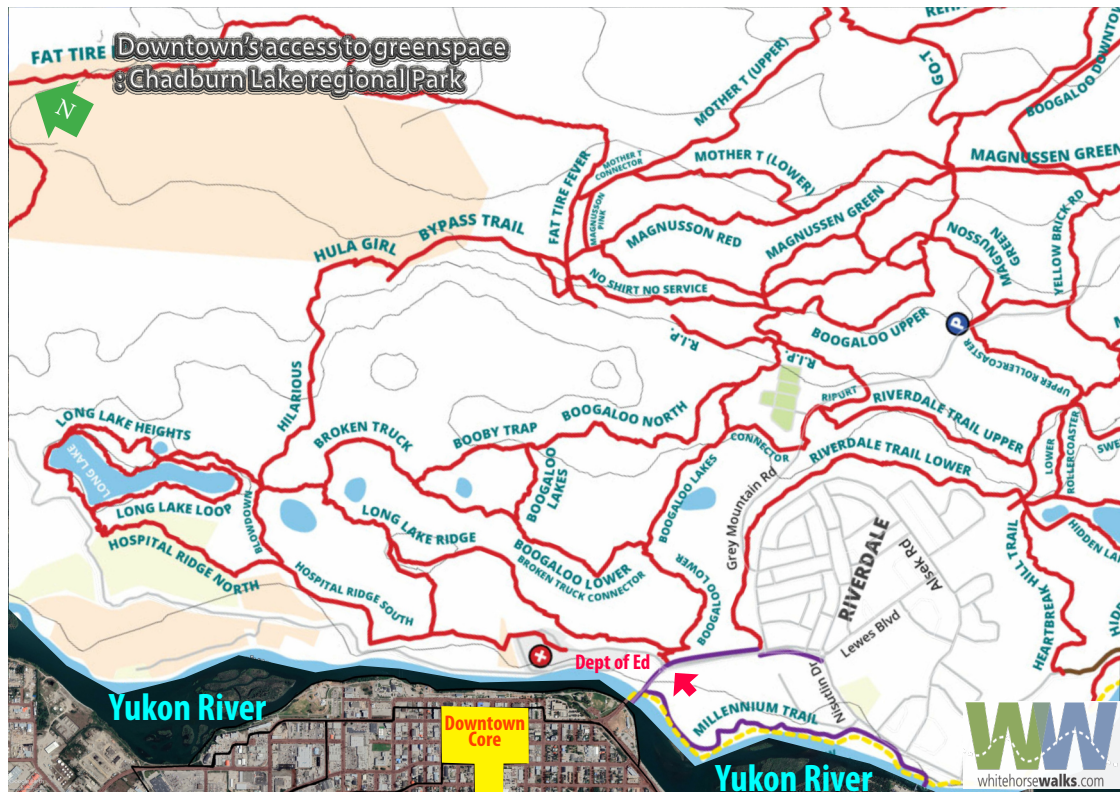
Chadburn Lake Park is a hilly forest with many old roads and trails with tremendous views over downtown and the greater river valley. It features the Yukon River, Long Lake, and glacial clay cliffs, pothole lakes and eskers.

This recent map of city trails shows an area about 4 x 6 km. Trails go far past the area shown!

The area is ripe for interpretation. What was it like for people over the millennia? Imagine a walk that talked about what it was like as the ice sheets melted and the big glacial lakes drained, leaving today's landscape.

Traditionally, getting lost here was the way to learn the trails! But to encourage more people to be active, there needs to be way-markers, trail repairs, 'easier routes' and walkable connectors.

There are lots of loop walks, many less difficult than one would think considering the landscape. Knee and hip friendly walks can entice more people to get out, in spite of level of fitness, age or infirmity.



Access is important. Currently, the main trailhead (red arrow) is opposite the Department of Ed building. Unfortunately, at times,

it can be unusable in winter. Likely people drive to other area trailheads. It would be interesting to see the current ratio of trail use

between Downtown, Riverdale, and hospital-focused users. Currently I'd guess most area users start from Riverdale.

A pedestrian bridge near the VRC, from downtown to the hospital, will change downtown vibrancy — active living, walking to a hike, time in nature, walks in the woods out of the wind...

Downtown residents would gain access to a wide variety of trails. Many commuters don't have time to fit in exercise after work — they could add in physical activity to their work days by going for noontime walks, runs, bikes.

Walking to the hospital becomes easier than driving. Obviously bridge connections must be wheelchair accessible.

Hospital area workers could easily walk downtown to shops and restaurants. Active Riverdale folk could avoid the scourge of Second Avenue and the Riverdale bridge.

With more people around, downtown businesses would gain from increased vitality such as after-supper hiking, after-hiking suppers, live music events, shopping.



Walking across the river to well-marked scenic trails — think engaged tourists and stay-another-day campaigns.

Without a bridge to the hospital (red arrow), the NUCB pedestrian bridge ideas (pink arrow) not only won't add to the vibrancy of a

downtown core, they could lessen downtown vibrancy. This is not to say other pedestrian bridges won't be needed someday.

The hospital is right across the river from downtown.

In Sept, 2014, the hospital reported ... has 522 employees; over 230 patients a day with 32,000 visits/year to emergency room; outpatient services are increasing – diagnostics, labs, visiting specialists.

People here, workers and visitors, often end up needing a break, getting fresh air, having time in nature to reflect. Staff, including doctors and nurses work long hours and crazy shifts. Since we want them happy and relaxed, highlighting nice, quick, safe walks seems reasonable. They can be under strict timelines and have busy brains—well-marked loops are essential. Specialists and contract staff living in the Crocus Ridge residence also use the trails.

There could be a Healing Forest, with a reflexive, meditative walk or a healing hike, or a walk designed around being visually impaired. Some communities have Mood Walks (see Canadian



Mental Health Association). Make brochures available at the hospital and the Visitor Reception Centre.

Currently few city natural trails

are wheelchair friendly. Perhaps there could be at least one here — somewhere flattish with views!

Is there a way this bridge and local

setting could also help address reconciliation, respect for nature, the river? Let's look at an iconic bridge, maybe using wood.

## References

[Kwanlin](#), “Water Running Through a Narrow Place”

[First Nations gather to reframe land use as land relationships](#) *Land use planning needs to re-frame western models so traditional knowledge is at the centre*

[Ecoregions of the Yukon Territory](#)

[Roger Bacon Bridge](#)

[Placer River Trail Bridge](#)

[Chadburn Lake Park Management Plan](#)

[Regional Parks Plan](#)

[Accommodating Future Residential Demand in Whitehorse](#)

[OCP 2040](#)

[Northeastern Urban Containment Boundary Pre-Feasibility Study, Final Report](#)

[Southern Urban Containment Boundary Prefeasibility Study, Final Report](#)

[Zoning Bylaw](#)

[Yukon populations](#)

Health and Social Values

[Awe Walks’ Boost Emotional Well-Being](#)

[Stay connected, and get outside: A counsellor's advice to get through another pandemic winter](#)

[The hidden climate costs of America’s free parking spaces](#)

[Mobilizing Justice](#)

[‘You won't have a vibrant downtown if you don't have people living there,’ he said.](#)

[“When I came here in 1978, downtown was the last place you wanted to live. Even in the last few years it’s been the last place you wanted to live, but I think it’s becoming more attractive.](#)

[“It’s being revitalized, slowly but surely, starting in the Main Street area and spreading outward.”](#)



This will need to have broad community support, like the Rotary Centennial Bridge.

- Tentacles of support
  - ... consider a first nation project, engineering design, with interpreted loops, healing parkettes at hospital
  - ... a service club such as Rotary Club
  - ... Downtown Residents and Riverdale Community associations, cycling organizations, Happy Hikers
  - ... COW Transportation Engineering, Planning, Sustainable growth, Parks and Recreation, Chadburn Lake Park process
  - ... YG Climate Change objectives, Wildlife viewing
  - ... private concerns such as Kicksled Revolution, Main Street Yukon, Chambers of commerce
  - ... downtown development and green climate strategy
- rebuilding downtown economy after pandemic and significant workplace changes
- realizing a major nature-based recreation destination accessible via active transportation for downtown
- signalling a desire for a more walkable downtown neighbourhood, minimizing car travel for short trips
- recognizing the needs of health care workers especially physical activities accessible on short break/meal timelines
- a tourism plum with numerous walkable activities, adding to concept of a vibrant downtown, stay-another-day

- a core active transportation connection reflecting more than just going to work or shopping
  - ... Long Lake, Hospital, Grey Mountain trails, especially the Dream Trail
  - ... Yukon River Trail north past city limits, connecting Range Point, Whistle Bend, Macpherson along river
  - ... Yukon River Trail south past city limits, connecting Miles Canyon, Marwell, Wolf Creek Park, Golden Horn, along river
- Future active transportation crossing the Yukon River at Whistle Bend, for in any City expansion past Long Lake
- engineering Capstone report on base-level feasibility in the works
- Gateway city for the Hike Canada En Marche (HECM) cross-Canada hiking trail could be a great plum, a signature trail as a non-motorized alternative to the Trans Canada Trail.
  - ... HECM Vision: To promote the development and use of a Canada-wide system of trails open to the public that offer both Canadians and visitors access to the natural beauty and cultural heritage of the
- a bridge would actually accomplish something, be more than the proverbial report on a shelf.