

December 31, 2021

Please include this paper as part of my whitehorsewalks.com submission to the Transportation Master Plan update.

It's important that Transportation at the city planning level not just be about cars, and not just focussed on bicycles. Active transportation is encouraging people to have a more active lifestyle so that they don't just take the car to go to the store, or to a friend's house, or for an outing in the woods. There needs to be a strong well promoted network of off-road trails that people use to vary their routines. The Airport Perimeter Trail is part of this network.

This winter with the trail not usable due to slumping right up to the fence, people not only don't walk to the south end of the airport, they don't walk as far knowing that they can't get through. Instead we should be lobbying to get the trail down the Airport Toe built to connect to the Millennium Trail and to the Yukon River Trail.

Peter Long

Walking is an extremely important activity and since our city, as most progressive cities, wishes to have a walkable city, it needs to stay on top of this concept. Active transportation by walking, which people do all the time, becomes more normal when people like to walk. This implies recreational walking is alive and well. People downtown want to be able to have longer walks outside of the downtown streets.

I want to bring up a walking issue that severely constrains walking for downtown and other city residents: the Airport Perimeter Trail. This has long been a popular trail, both for downtown and above-the-airport residents, as well as other city residents and visitors. Earlier this year slumping caused the trail to slide a bit in a spot that for years has been deteriorating. The city erected 'Trail Closed' signage. This is a well used area. It's an easy longer loop using the trail down by the motocross area. Closing this trail discourages walking.

Over the years the Airport planning process acknowledged the importance of this trail and all city public input planning processes have noted the importance of this trail. Below are photos from the Air North Fun Run a few years ago where they simply made a passage by moving two fence sections and rerouting the path on the inside of the fence. This could quite easily, and cheaply, be done again. It would need to be better fenced of course to meet security needs.

Instead of pursuing this simple, possibly temporary solution, we have the classic issue of walkers with no voice, between a rock and a hard place. The city says the fence is YG, and we'll have our engineers look at this next year, ...

the city does not have influence over this jurisdiction. Potential options to reroute this trail will be explored by city administration once results from the geo-hazard analysis of the escarpment area are obtained. Safety is the priority and currently no opportunities have been identified as suitable locations for a bypass passage considering the unpredictable condition of this steep escarpment.

At the same time, YG says

not currently considering adjusting the Erik Nielsen International Airport fence perimeter to facilitate the unofficial trail

As a walking advocate, I would like to say, that as a community, we should be able to walk here, as we've always been able.





So I'm submitting this to the city's on-going Transportation Master Plan update process. It feels that relations between two of our many levels of government should be happening at the level of just pick up the phone and solve a problem. Government folk need to put on their I-live-here-too hats. (Exactly the same thing is happening at the other end of the airport where YG is building a new 4-lane section, without an obviously needed underpass).

So, 'not an official trail' and 'it's the other guy's problem.' Quick overview: I believe that the city has no option to fix the trail until YG addresses their obligation to have a fence placement such that people can use a trail outside the fence. That except for the trail and the fence, there should be no infrastructure close to the edge; this would include the airport's dirt perimeter road. Further, geo-hazard people will say that slumping here will continue so the fence has to move. Unfortunately, this could take years to get to a climate-aware solution.



Meanwhile, we have Covid and the need for people to have outlets in nature. Public health says we should walk more for

both physical and mental health. It's a perfect family activity. I'm sure that when the glacial waters melted and people started walking above the river valley they walked above the escarpment here — the views over the valley and the river are stupendous.

To have more people walking means governments should be providing encouragement. We have a YG Clean Futures plan that says we need to be greener, a city OCP that says we need to build denser, a Downtown Plan that says make downtown more attractive for people to live here. In most surveys, citizens say their favorite thing about Whitehorse is nature, trails.

So, let's look quickly at some recent history to show the situation as it plays out. From the early days there was a path up the escarpment. As Whitehorse grew, and air travel arrived in the Yukon, the area on the escarpment became busier. When the Alaska Highway project happened, growth included many buildings, all perched at this spot of the escarpment. There was an access road and a great view. But as often happens with simple trails converted to roads, the road fell. Eventually a report was commissioned on what to do.

Hamacher showed an early Bridle Path in his 2013 photograph, although the road was present in even earlier photos.

The 1959 NRC report [*The Whitehorse escarpment*](#) called for

A strong protective fence should then be erected along the crest of the escarpment for the full length of the affected area and at a suitable distance back from the edge as part of the measures which must be taken to ensure that there is no human interference whatsoever with the escarpment slope once rehabilitation work commences.



Figure 1. Whitehorse - June 11, 1913. Note "bridle path" on face of escarpment. (Photo taken by E.J. Hamacher; original print loaned by W.D. McBride, Whitehorse.)

Graphics from the NRC report

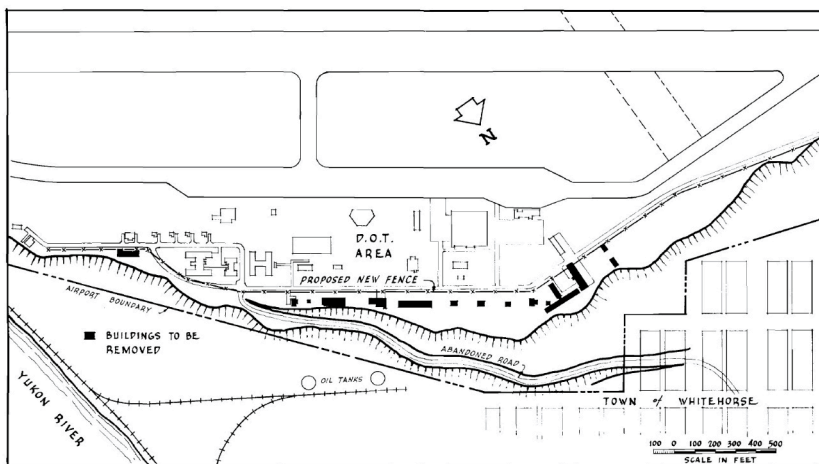


FIGURE 19 PLAN SHOWING LOCATION OF PROPOSED PROTECTIVE FENCE AND BUILDINGS TO BE MOVED

A key activity of the 1999 Whitehorse International Airport Development Plan called for 'implementation of an Airport Trails plan'

2.5.2 Trail Issues & Recommendations

The importance of protecting the trails along the top of the escarpment and around the airport perimeter was identified during consultations in 1998 on the planned runway extensions. The perimeter trail is well used year round.

From an airport development perspective, trail use, boundary fence placement and drainage are the main issues. Due to the extent of bank slippage that has occurred over the years, the well used perimeter trail and boundary fence are approaching the escarpment edge in some areas. This situation was aggravated in the past by poor surface drainage practices which directed run-off towards the escarpment edge. This has been corrected by reorienting site drainage away from the escarpment and by looking at ways to relocate either the fence or trail to ensure access continuity.

The most prominent concern raised was related to the importance of preserving the perimeter trails around the airport property. A number of respondents pointed out that both the top of the escarpment and north and south boundary trails are well used on a year round basis and are key components of the overall city-wide trail system. It was suggested the trails should be looked at as an asset and developed accordingly noting the potential to link both the airport and the nearby Transportation Museum and Beringia Centre to the downtown.

Responsibility for trail development and maintenance within the escarpment control zone rests with the City of Whitehorse Parks & Recreation Department under the Downtown Escarpment Land Use Policy. The responsibility of airport management is to ensure the security of the airport while accommodating this long-standing activity.

The following recommendations respond to public access concerns and airport security issues.

+ Provision for a 3-6m perimeter trail right-of-way around the entire airport should be included in the airport Land Use Plan.

+ Boundary fences along the escarpment edges should maintain a 6m setback between the top of slope and perimeter fence where required.

+ The City of Whitehorse should give priority to upgrading the north boundary/Pucket's Gulch and top-of-escarpment bank trails for all-season, non-motorized multi use.

* Trail maintenance outside the perimeter fence of the airport should remain a City of Whitehorse responsibility.



Robert Service Way Background Report

Despite its high levels of use, the airport escarpment trail is not designated an official City trail at present. The 1999 Airport Master Plan (LPS Aviation Inc.) recommended a perimeter trail around the airport. There are a few major site-specific erosion concerns and the airport fence may need to be moved to conform to Transport Canada's Aerodrome Standards and Recommended Practices.

The Robert Service Way planning study showed TRAILS as the single most important issue, with the airport escarpment trail (71%).

The airport perimeter trail is highly used and valued by Whitehorse residents, but sections of it are eroding badly and good connections to/from it are limited.

"This area has incredible recreational potential..."

2. Work with airport administration to address airport trail erosion and formalize trailhead signage and parking at the southern boundary;

4. Maintain minimum 30-metre development buffers from the top of escarpment and retain trail connectivity;

The airport perimeter trail, (essentially a dirt road) is also well used and showcases some of the best views in the city.

5. Work with airport administration to address erosion of the airport perimeter trail, designate it, establish a formal trailhead and parking area at fence, and build a staircase in Downtown South to create a new connection.

6. Build a sustainably graded singletrack trail to connect the escarpment and RSW crosswalks.

Whitehorse Trail Plan 2020

Action #16: Develop and market key trail loops of varying lengths and difficulty connecting to points of interest: Airport Loop

From Yukon's flight path: 2020-2030 Aviation system investment strategy

The City and Government of Yukon have agreed that there shall be no development within 30 metres of the edge of the cliffs/bluffs, with the exception of the perimeter pedestrian trail."