

Neighbourhood transportation–recreation corridor: Riverdale

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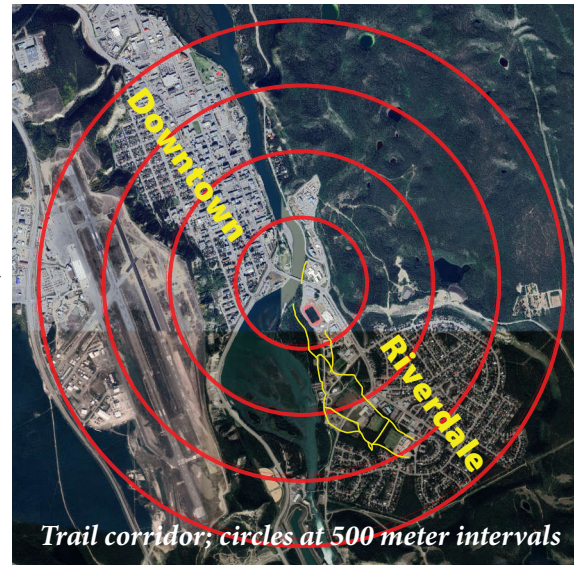
“We need creative approaches to address barriers that limit opportunities to be active.”

Renewed Yukon active living strategy

How to help with Riverdale’s rush hour? It’s only about 4 km, an hour’s walk, from the south end of Riverdale to the corner of Second and Fourth (similar to walking the Millennium Trail). Most walking–biking commutes would be less. An area trail plan could replace the many little trails crossing the industrial-feeling open land and forest around Riverdale’s six schools, with a crushed gravel trail network combining existing trails (public-rights-of-way, greenbelts, powerlines) as a corridor through the woods!

However, active transportation seems focussed on bike routes and pedestrian-style travel like sidewalks and paved paths, not on incorporating recreational uses such as going for a walk. A route like the Millennium Trail is so nice, it’s a destination in itself, a Whitehorse Center asset, especially by Downtown.

A broad-focus area trail plan could also deal with having no neighbourhood-level trail network. For example, getting to the top of the escarpment requires going on trails that are, at times, only usable by confident and active users, or going on the edges of roads. This affects Riverdale and Downtown residents.



Selkirk Elementary School Active Travel Plan, December, 2022¹

This recent study looked at the needs of grades 1-7 kids at Selkirk. Public comments were mostly road and vehicle-proximity issues, then lighting, then safety such as fear of animals, strangers, cold, getting lost, bullies. Comments around natural green corridor trails weren’t addressed. There’s a Streets for Kids, but not a Nature for Kids.

Mapping pedestrian-style active transportation in Riverdale is good. The rolling route and cross-Riverdale bike lane using Teslin Rd. fits the 2018 Bike Network Plan. The campus concept is interesting, but utility roads, parking lots and road networks seemed the real focus.

Generally, neighbourhood trails weren’t addressed, such as existing trails in southern Riverdale, public rights-of ways, utility line easements, walkways, public zoned lands. The two recommendation maps (right) have a lot of travel beside roads, school utility corridors and parking lots, which doesn’t fit many people’s desires, needs.

Note that for walkers, there’s a difference between young kids peddling bikes to school and bike commuters, focused on getting to and from work as fast and efficiently as possible. This will become more problematic with e-bikes and e-scooters.

To get more people out of their vehicles, there needs to be a change. This is much bigger than a Selkirk school issue. Why aren’t more people walking, biking, kicksledding? Why are people more willing to sit in a traffic jam than bike or ride? Is a half hour walk just too far? Are we losing the desire to walk? Or, is it that people don’t like sidewalks beside roads? Is being in the open with bitter winter winds too much? Is winter too unpredictable with ice and snow issues?

Why are we planning parking lots and utility roads before a major all-season, seductive corridor trail network? Is there an overall plan?



Building nature into the plan

Surprisingly, as one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the city, Riverdale doesn't have a neighbourhood-level trail network. Using the green spaces (a mix of PR, PS, PG, PE lands) surrounding the six Riverdale schools to create one will not only benefit Selkirk Elementary School, but also the other 5 schools, area residents and visitors to Riverdale. Getting past the schools and churches can be seen as an obstacle, or as an opportunity to be outdoors in nature, away from traffic fumes and noise. As most of the land is public or community, having a formal community trail pass through should be quite desirable. The informal trail network already exists.

The main corridor trail would branch to signed connector trails leading to the many inner-neighbourhood trails and walkways. The map below suggests options; actual routes should involve trail users. Routing this network as much as possible within treed, anti-wind spaces would be smart for a winter city! For instance, many use the existing trail in the greenbelt woods (zoned PG) beside the running track than use the paved roadway by the running track fence. — tracks in the windswept snow vs packed trail in the woods!

The major trail corridor should be wide enough to separate bikes from other users. Bikes want protection from cars on roads — in places, walkers need protection from bikes. Maintenance in winter is a vital aspect. More people using a smaller set of main trails will keep it packed in winter. This will make it more reliably useable for commuting. Using fluorescent wands in the more open windswept sections will allow easy trail finding for the inevitable first users after a snow event. Kicksleds need a surface that is only gritted as needed, walkers need a surface that is never slippery. If fat tire grooming was a bit wider, kicksleds would work better. The bike trail part could be groomed to be wide enough for kicksleds and left ungritted.

Crushed gravel trails can be much cheaper to build and easier on joints than pavement. Lighting needs to be tasteful, lighting the path, not the sky. Keeping the trail natural feeling will invite people to go for walks. In addition to prizes such as the Millennium Trail, the Upper and Lower Escarpment trails, and the Hospital trails, the neighbourhood network itself will become a destination.

The campus plan should focus on creating a formal, inviting, treed community park, integrating small, least-intrusive utility roads and parking lots with the greenbelt corridor trail, something fitting a location beside the Millennium Trail and sports field, and used by both Downtown and Riverdale residents as part of their daily active recreation lives.

Peter Long



Legend

- 1: FH Collins Secondary School
- 2: Centre scolaire secondaire communautaire Paul-Émile-Mercier
- 3: Selkirk Elementary School
- 4: Christ the King Elementary School
- 5: St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Secondary School
- 6: Grey Mountain Elementary School
- 7: Teen Parent Centre
- 8: Gadzoosdaa Student Residence

Red circles are commercial centers

Faded blue circles are education-focused places

Public rights-of-way

Wide crushed gravel paths

Walking-focused sidewalks

PG, PE, PR, PU and PS are formal Zoning designations

Revision a, Feb 20

- Walking north on the millennium trail into a swift wind, I realized that one could scoot into the trees just after the new little bridge and join a path going behind electrical substation. Still a straight line and path serves 2 audiences.
- I also realized that in places along the trail in the woods that a long-term vision and tree planting could make the area nicer, add fire break, and most importantly, block more wind!
- Could Riverdale become a kicksledding paradise? Groom a basic walkable/kicksleddable trail groomed by grooving the snow on about a 3-4 foot wide path — using the Lower Riverdale Trail and a few of the access routes to start and see how it works.
- Name the patches of outside forest. Are neighbourhood areas named?