

February 27, 2023

Whitehorse Centre Neighbourhood-level Trail Task Force

The 2017 NUCB study said: “Neighbourhood-level trail planning identifies highly valued and/or significant trails for formal City adoption. These trails are incorporated into the City’s Trails Maintenance Policy and maintained by the City and/or its partners.”

Northeastern Urban Containment Boundary Pre-Feasibility Study

The left map shows the areas covered by the first six Trail Task Forces (yellow arrows, names). Whitehorse Centre, the group of neighbourhoods in the middle, has not been addressed. The close-up right map shows these neighbourhoods as being either bordered by the escarpment, or are above on the edges.

Elementary School focused on sidewalks. Riverdale, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the city, has no inner trail network.

What are the implications of not having a Trail Task Force?

Most Downtown trails are paved paths. Winter maintenance is becoming quite good. However, we don’t want to have a denser Downtown where people must drive to use natural recreational trails. Most of our natural trails are above on the bluffs on both sides of the river, especially the Hospital bluffs.

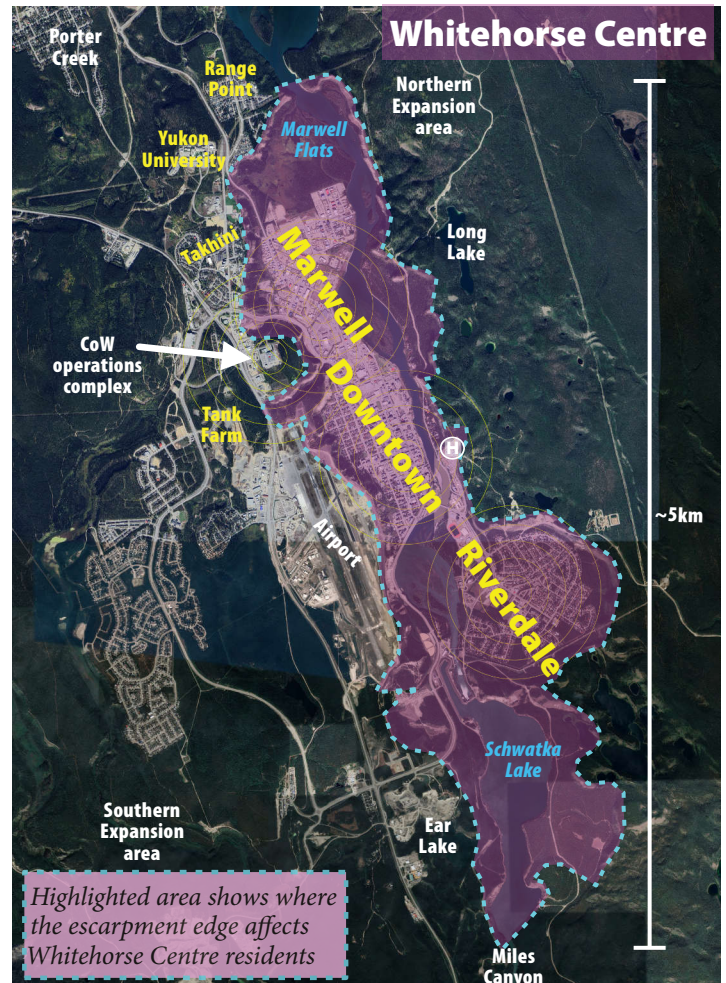
The closed airport perimeter trail, stuck between the airport fence and edge erosion, is waiting for paperwork to move the fence a few meters back from the edge as advised in the 1959 Escarpment Plan¹. Our old, well loved escarpment trail has been described as an unofficial trail — would need a special process to be called official, and thus able to be maintained.

Tank Farm planning options currently in process don’t offer a highway underpass for connections between Downtown, Above-the-Airport neighbourhoods and the CGC; a 20+year vision has this connection for walking, biking, kicksledding.

Why include Riverdale? The 2017 NUCB study also said “... trail planning on the east side of the Yukon River [is] complete”. It assumed the 2013 Yukon River East Trail Task Force dealt with neighbourhood needs for trails on the east side of the river.

In reality, the 2013 Yukon River East Trail Task Force mandate was “to determine which trails, areas, and/or access points on the east side of the Yukon River should be designated motorized multi-use.” The focus wasn’t on neighbourhood trail use/needs. For instance, the Downtown Residents Association was not on the 2013 Task Force, yet many/most of Downtown’s closest natural recreational trails are on the east side behind the hospital.

And still today, virtually all of Riverdale’s escarpment access routes have issues. A recent study on kids going to Selkirk



¹ <https://emrlibrary.gov.yk.ca/nrc/whitehorse-escarpment-1959.pdf> walking: whitehorsewalks.com
 plants: www.yukonviews.com/yukon/flowers

People want a recreational trail along the river — throughout the world, riverside trails are very popular. Marwell, Takhini, Yukon University, Range Point, Whistle Bend will all use this. Marwell's recreational trail focus is tough, although trails in the Marwell wetlands see a fair amount of winter use. Building a Yukon River Trail, a walking, biking destination, would help celebrate this ancient First Nation route between the lakes.

Overview of Downtown recreation trails (without driving first)

Whitehorse Centre's natural surface trails are dictated by the ice-age landscape: specifically the escarpment and the Yukon River.

WEST SIDE OF RIVER

- **Downtown:** paved, non-connected perimeter trail; forested escarpment with small trails, a switchback and stairs going up
- **Above:** (access via Black St. stairs, various trails up Puckett's Gulch; rough Airport Toe Trail in south) Still closed airport perimeter trail going south, so no access to trails off the Airport Perimeter Trail north is paved path to highway, traffic lights; small bit of forest above Baxter's Gulch; some forest behind new city complex with an escarpment edge trail that could become a crushed gravel accessible loop trail (also needs a trail down powerline to Two-mile Hill path and an access near the new Dairy Queen.)
- **North:** trail along the river and entering Marwell, fenced off until N of 60° rehabilitated; no natural trail along Marwell Creek, lower escarpment, or going up to Copper Trail along top

of Takhini escarpment; must walk beside Mountainview Drive (planned to become a 4-lane road) or beside 2-Mile Hill

- **South:** Yukon River Trail going out along Schwatka, past Ear Lake to Miles Canyon. **West,** there's no plan yet for crossing the new highway intersection and accessing Maclean Lake or Paddy's Pond/Ice Lake parks, nor the southern city expansion.

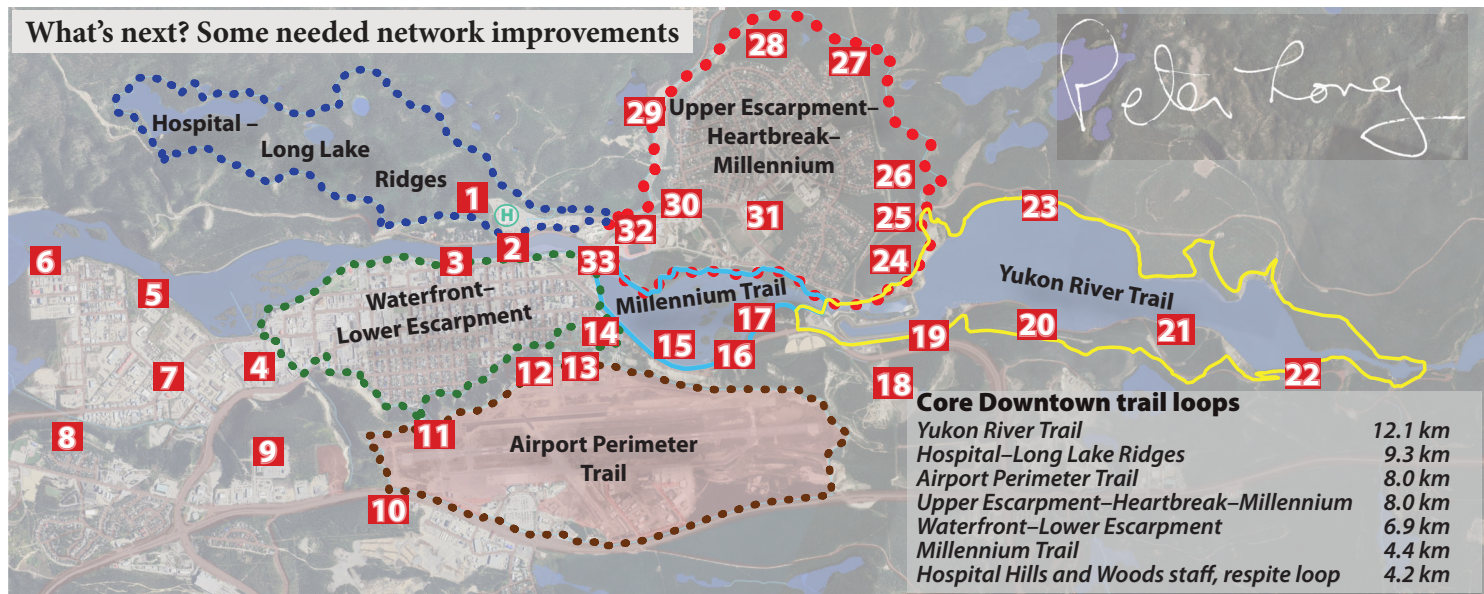
EAST SIDE OF THE RIVER

- **Going south:** (Access: Robert Campbell, Millennium, Robert E. Lowe bridges) Riverdale has paved Millennium Trail, Upper and Lower Escarpment trails; lower flats, interior trails as a kicksledding paradise? Yukon River Loop Trail, trails to Hidden, Chadden, Chadburn lakes. No trail yet to Marsh Lake!
- **Going east:** network of Magnussen, Grey Mountain trails
- **Going north:** Hospital, Long Lake trails; projected city expansion around Long Lake, Croucher Creek calls for a plan.

NETWORK IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

How does the overview pan out on the ground? Look at this list of suggested network improvements. Some have very little cost. Recognize that community improvements benefit tourists as well as locals, and provide visitors with reasons to stay longer and spend more, and recreate with an authentic experience.

A comprehensive Trail Plan is needed to give Whitehorse Centre residents a voice how this network of trails will play in their recreation and active transportation needs over the next decades. The list is long, but the alternative is more roads, more sprawl.



1. Create scenic Hospital Woods and Hills loop — focus on staff, respite
2. Build an iconic pedestrian bridge from VRC to Hospital
3. Explore Rails2Trails to make a better Downtown commuting bike route
4. Connect Waterfront Trail to Lower Escarpment Trail via Spook Creek
5. Join Downtown to Marwell on riverside trail as North of 60° site cleaned
6. Build Yukon River Trail to Range Point and Whistle Bend
7. Build a diagonal walkway across Marwell
8. Connect Takhini down bluffs to Marwell wetlands, along the river
9. Connect City complex to Waterfront, Airport trail; make accessible
10. Build a highway underpass, a critical piece of non-vehicle infrastructure
11. Fix old road going up Puckett's Gulch so it's better at top in winter
12. Build a landslide-proof descent from escarpment to Hanson/Hawkins
13. Move airport perimeter fence above Drury St and other trouble spots
14. Connect Lower Escarpment Trail to Waterfront and Millennium trails
15. Fix drainage so spring lakes don't form on Millennium Trail
16. Fix icing so trail open in winter; we want to walk on Bert Law Park
17. Make an accessible, crushed gravel trail around Bert Law Island Park
18. Build Airport Toe Trail down, through woods, cross to Millennium Tr.
19. Build Yukon River Trail thru woods by Yukon Energy; bypass road
20. Make a crushed gravel First Nation - Hepburn Tramway promenade
21. Brush section of Hepburn Tramway in woods by end of Schwatka Lake
22. Brush trail along the Hepburn Tramway above Miles Canyon
23. Replace rough party parking, campfires with accessible promenade
24. Make Dam Hill trail better at YE end + descent to Chadburn Lake Rd
25. Build a switchback trail from the viewpoint down to trails below
26. Make the route up Heartbreak Hill from road nicer, less slippery
27. The 3 trails descending from Peewee Hill/powerline hill have issues
28. Connector trails to Lower Escarpment trail are inadequate
29. Create a better method than walking on edge of Grey Mountain Road
30. Build a better trail up at Lewes/Alsek for start of Long Lake Ridge Trail
31. Connect Peewee Hill to Robert Campbell Bridge through inner trails
32. Fix Downtown's major trail access: intersection: Lewes, Hospital roads
33. Create an underpath on south end of bridge like one on north end

Local hospital trail network

Goal #2: Promote outdoor recreation for human health and wellness

“Upgrade and develop facilities, trails, and associated infrastructure where needed to accommodate neighborhood locations, and changing demographics and preferences while maintaining ecological integrity.”

Chadburn Lake Management Plan

The management plan focussed in part on developing recreation areas like Long and Chadburn lakes, Grey Mountain.

What’s needed now is neighbourhood use of park trails and amenities, without driving. Map circles show that, as a raven flies, Downtown is closer to the Hospital than most of Riverdale.

Walkability and a Trail Task Force

Trail walkers want: views, walk from home, easier route trails in places, ways to get out of the sometimes very bitter winter winds, variety, long and short options, all-season, well signed.

Most logical: build destination trails from the Hospital, build a pedestrian bridge from VRC to Hospital, attend to some of the network improvements mapped on the previous page.

But walking Downtown is not only about trails and paved paths, it’s also business needs, tourism, neighbourhood vitality. Think about:

- Sidewalks: maintain existing, fix tripping hazards; build new where missing, like Downtown north
- Signs: missing, confusing, hazardous such as at head height
- Snow clearing: alley/lane letdowns, empty lots, boarded-up buildings, green spaces; slippery intersections
- Intersections: respect for signals, need to press buttons, missing crosswalks, vehicles running red lights, ignoring crosswalks

How does a Trail Task Force deal with various plans such as the Trail Plan, Trail Maintenance Plan, Bike Network Plan, Transportation Master plan, Active Transportation? Whitehorse Centre is complex and our neighbourhood realities, looking at Downtown and Riverdale, don’t quite fit their rules. How to deal with fragmentation of responsibility for our walkability? We do want to encourage more people to live downtown.

MOBILITY EQUITY

Many use trails — walking, biking, kicksledding, snowshoeing — because we love being healthy, being outdoors in nature.

However, some — for instance seniors, disabled, un- or under-employed, low wage workers — need activities that are low/no cost, that they can get to from their homes, with no membership fees, no day passes, no equipment, no schedules, no line-ups, ... Vehicles, even some of today’s bikes, can stress budgets.

Downtown south has an increasing amount of social housing, people who are often watching expenses. It’s close to businesses who need lots of service workers. There’s families with kids.

Think about encouraging people to change transportation habits, or to engage in inexpensive family activities. Make it fun, have a trails passport. A friend talked about living Downtown as kids



and their mother walking them out to Miles Canyon on the route of the abandoned 1898 Hepburn Tramway.

Natural surface trail recreation calls for mobility equity. We have big budgets for items like roads, highways, bridges, studies, plans, parking, active transportation. Recreation budgets fund or help fund CGC, programming, arenas, ski chalets, ski hills, broomball court, golf courses, skateboard park, pool, sports, parks, baseball diamonds, playgrounds, landscaping, but relatively little on trails.

TRAIL STEWARDSHIP

Generally there’s no group that looks after general trail needs. (KSA and CMBC work on trails as their organizations prioritize.) How do unorganized public trail users get trail needs addressed?

Walking is such a diverse activity, mostly with no easy concept of being an organization, especially one that could reasonably look after city trails with a trail stewardship vision. It really seems to be a government responsibility. Is there a person/department in the City/YG with this on their plate, with a budget? What is the City budget (operations, capital, personnel costs) for trails compared to other recreation types and transportation methods?

There’s potential for a key trail stewardship role by First Nations.

There should be a program that trains trail workers, leaders and designers, so trail users can reasonably expect progress on these network needs. A good trail is a lovely thing to use. We need innovative solutions: for example, woven strips, like ones on airport fence and on Yukon Energy’s fence near the bridge, block the wind, help block snow drifts. Trails need to be sustainably built to balance the needs of users with ground conditions. Good cross-slope trails make a huge difference on hills. Let’s build some accessible, nature trails: Bert Law Park, or at the Hospital.