



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent has taken the initiative to develop a Trails Master Plan. The plan builds upon past and current trail development efforts, and is intended as the framework to guide the development and operation of trails in the municipality in the short, medium and long term. It defines a strategy for developing a municipal-wide trail network that links communities, neighbourhoods, parks, schools, shopping areas, destination areas and open spaces. It identifies short and long-term trail network priorities; identifies potential partners; makes recommendations regarding trail design, signage and construction; outlines policies to support the implementation of the plan and estimates the cost of the plan over 20 years.

A Study Steering Committee was formed to guide the study and included representatives from a number of trail stakeholder groups, municipal staff and trail planning and design specialists. A team of trail planning specialists that included MMM Group and TransActive Solutions was retained to assist the Steering Committee and municipal staff in the development of this plan.

1.1 TRAILS IN CHATHAM-KENT

A number Chatham-Kent's residents have been actively involved in the development and promotion of trails for several years. They organized themselves into the Chatham-Kent Trails Council, which evolved out of various trail committees in communities throughout Chatham-Kent. Recently Chatham-Kent Municipal Council awarded the Chatham-Kent Trails Council \$17,500 for the construction of Trans Canada Trail between the Bothwell Oil Museum and the Tecumseh Monument.

The Ontario Trails Council (OTC) is a not for profit organization that promotes the development, preservation, management and use of recreational trails in Ontario. In Ontario, Trillium Trail Network (TTN) is the name of the larger connected system of trails. The TTN represents an opportunity for trails to link between regions and communities in Ontario, and consists of OTC member trails registering their trail as a network member. The Chatham-Kent Trails Council is an affiliate of the Trillium Trails Network.

Chatham-Kent has many local communities with both paved and unpaved trails for walking. The municipality is also blessed with trails in provincial parks. Rondeau Provincial Park, for example, has six hiking trails that attract thousands of visitors each year. The Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan provides an opportunity to build on the existing trails and create a stronger, cohesive network for residents and visitors alike to enjoy.

A "Trail" in the context of the Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan is defined as: A designated route that connects one point to another. Trails have different characteristics according to their location, intended use(s) and purpose.

Though it may be preferred to have the entire trail network off-road, it is recognized that this will be difficult or impossible to achieve in some locations over the short, medium or even long term. Therefore, trails will be off-road wherever possible and on-road links will be relied upon where the potential for off-road routes does not exist.

"Trails" in the context of the Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan also refer primarily to routes for "Active Recreation". This plan acknowledges the parallel initiative currently being undertaken within Chatham-Kent to develop and



promote routes and programs for “Active Transportation”. Furthermore, this plan recognizes that the two initiatives are complementary, and recommends that the two initiatives be seamlessly integrated where complementarity exists.

1.1.1 Policy Context

A number of municipal policies and plans are directly relevant to the Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan, including the municipality’s Official Plan, Transportation Master Plan and Recreation Master Plan.

Official Plan - Chatham-Kent’s Official Plan received Ministry approval in December 2008. It contains a number of policies that support the development of trails for Active Recreation and Active Transportation. Details regarding Official Plan policy and trails are found in Chapter 6 of this report.

The **Community Strategic Plan** envisions Chatham-Kent as a safe and healthy community, and promotes healthy lifestyles. Recreational trails and pedestrian linkages contribute to the development of healthy communities. The Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan is directly related to the development of healthy communities, and supported by the Municipality’s Official Plan.

Transportation Master Plan – Chatham-Kent’s Transportation Master Plan (TMP) was adopted in January 2008. This comprehensive short and long-term transportation strategy will aid the Municipality in attaining its vision for future growth. The transportation requirements of pedestrians and cyclists are addressed at a general level in the Transportation Master Plan. The current Active Transportation agenda grew out of the TMP. The Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan integrates work completed in the TMP, and further details trail network needs for pedestrians and cyclists.

Recreation Master Plan – Chatham-Kent is currently undertaking the development of a Master Plan for Parks and Recreation. This Plan looks ahead some twenty years to determine the community’s needs and priorities related to parks, recreation programs, open space and facilities for community residents. The Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan is directly related to the forthcoming Recreation Master Plan.

There are also policies at the provincial level that have an impact on trails in Chatham-Kent. The Ministry of Health Promotion has a number of initiatives related to trails:

1. A review of legislation affecting trails in Ontario was undertaken by the Ministry of Health. The Draft Report was vetted by the Ontario Trails Council, the Directors’ Working Group on Trails and the Inter-ministerial Working Group for the Review of Legislation and comments were considered in the development of the Final Report.
2. The Ministry of Health Promotion is responsible for the Trails for Life (TFL) Grant Program, which distributes \$440,000 annually to selected applicants. The Ministry also oversees the Communities in Action Fund (CIAF), which operates a \$7.5 million fund with approximately \$2 million dedicated for provincial projects and \$5.5 million for projects with a regional or local scope. CIAF funds a range of activities that address healthy eating and active living including trail initiatives.
3. In October 2005, the Ministry of Health Promotion launched the Ontario Trails Strategy (OTS), along with \$3.5 million over five years for implementation. The OTS was developed by a wide spectrum of interests

including many government ministries and stakeholders through 23 external consultation sessions and a Minister's Advisory Committee. The OTS outlined five strategic directions for trails:

- Improving collaboration among stakeholders;
- Enhancing the sustainability of Ontario's trails;
- Enhancing the trail experience;
- Educating Ontarians about trails; and
- Fostering better health and a strong economy through trails.

Through the OTS and other initiatives affecting trails in Ontario, the Ministry of Health Promotion participates in land-use/built environment inter-ministerial working groups with the Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Disability Directorate, Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, and the Ministry of Natural Resources.

1.2 WHAT IS A MASTER PLAN?

Master Plans are long-range plans that integrate infrastructure requirements for existing and future land use with environmental assessment principles. These plans examine the entire infrastructure system as a group of related projects, or an overall system, in order to strategically plan out the future needs of the Municipality.

1.3 THE STUDY PROCESS

The approach to the Trails Master Plan was to meet the specific objectives established in the Terms of Reference and reflect the planning initiatives of the Municipality.

The study approach that led to the development of the Chatham Kent Trails Master Plan included the following:

Build on what has already been done

A significant amount of background trail master planning work had been undertaken in Chatham-Kent prior to the initiation of the Chatham Kent Trails Master Plan. Several years ago, a "grass-roots" trail initiative began in the municipality among those individuals and groups that had an interest in trail development. Local trail user groups have undertaken public consultation in recent years, and out of this important body of work came an inventory of existing trails, the formation of the Chatham-Kent Trail Council, recognition of the significance of trails by municipal officials and Council, and the development of a route network concept which included over 500km of potential trail routes.

Work with Stakeholders and Interest Groups

An integral component of the approach of the Chatham Kent Trails Master Plan relied on a consultation process that began with the knowledge of the people who live and work in Chatham-Kent, and those who will have to implement the results of the study. The study engaged all participants in the study: public, private, political and technical. Actively engaging stakeholders and the public to foster an understanding and commitment to the project was a vital element of the approach. The public outreach strategy began with an announcement/advertisement of the master



plan process, followed by the initiation of a web-based trail user survey. Public Open Houses in the municipality helped the study team reach a wide cross-section of the population.

Understand the Geography and Diversity of Chatham-Kent

Chatham-Kent is a large and diverse municipality, with urban centres separated by expanses of rural lands. The master plan provided a unified approach to trail development, while allowing for the unique aspects of the communities that make up the municipality to come through in the Chatham Kent Trails Master Plan.

Develop a Trail Designer's Toolbox

A key deliverable of the Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan was the comprehensive set of trail design guidelines and standards. It was important to relay how trails should look and how they should be built. This applies not only to the trails themselves, but also to the other components of a trail system including signage and messaging to trail users, drainage, amenities, staging areas and trail access points, access control and road crossings to name a few.

A Hierarchy of Trails

Not all trails will be developed for all trail users in all areas of the municipality. An important component of the master plan is a guideline for a hierarchy of trails intended for different mixes of user groups in a variety of urban and rural settings across Chatham-Kent.

Creating Connections to the Trans Canada Trail

The Trans Canada Trail route has been designated and registered in the municipality. It forms an important spine to the trail network across the municipality and connects many of the urban centres. The Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan recognizes the need for connections to this spine.

An Effective Implementation Plan

The implementation plan established annual priorities for trail development.

Dovetail with other Work

The approach took into account the objectives set out in the Community Strategic Plan, particularly the objectives of health, economy and environment. Other long-range planning initiatives were considered in the development of the Trails Master Plan, including the Official Plan and the Transportation Master Plan. The Transportation Master Plan considered on-road cycling. Although the Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan focused primarily on the off-road routes, some connections were proposed using on-road routes. Trails are an important aspect of municipal recreation master plans and the Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan has considered the importance and integration of recreational aspects. The Master Plan was developed in a manner so that it can be easily integrated with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Develop an Administrative Strategy

Although the municipality currently has an administrative structure through the Active Communities Steering Committee to deal with the delivery of a trail system, the Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan includes details for an alternative or "back-up" approach should the need arise. This alternative approach is based on an environmental scan of various administrative models currently in use, and was tailored to reflect Chatham-Kent's vast geography in such a way to ensure that local groups are properly represented yet enabled to maintain their local presence, and

also to ensure that trails remain in the forefront of the municipal agenda. The administrative hierarchy may also provide maximum ability and flexibility to access funding for trails at a variety of levels from municipal allocations, land development, as well as provincial, federal and corporate funding.

Promoting Trails

Trails in Chatham-Kent are not just about developing a network of routes. An important aspect to a good trail system is how the owner develops the “soft” side of the program related to trails and trail use. In Chatham-Kent, tourism and economic benefits of trails are important, and health promotion is critical. The Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan includes recommendations to promote the trails in Chatham-Kent. In particular, it emphasizes the value of Active Transportation in a healthy community.

Monitoring, Maintenance and Risk Management

The municipality’s responsibility for trails does not end with the completion of trail construction. An important part of risk management is ongoing monitoring (inspection) and maintenance, to keep trails in top condition and optimize user safety. All elements of the trail system have an expected life span that can only be reached if they are monitored and cleaned/refinished/repaired/upgraded according to a schedule. A suggested monitoring and maintenance program has been prepared which can be further tailored to meet the needs of the Municipality.

Needs and expectations of various users have been balanced. Municipal resources and programs were investigated and revisions were made thoughtfully. This approach was based on the need to integrate the existing trail networks within the former municipal and county governments that comprise the Municipality of Chatham-Kent.

1.4 ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

The Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan has been designed to be a living document that is flexible and capable of evolving over time. It is intended to maintain and enhance existing programs and infrastructure, while guiding the development and implementation of new trail facilities and programs.

The Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan Study Report includes the following chapters, which detail each of these key principles. The objectives and recommendations provide direction as to how each milestone of the plan can be established.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study.

Chapter 2 outlines the need for a Trails Master Plan and provides information on the transportation, health, environmental and economic benefits of trail use.

Chapter 3 addresses the public consultation activities undertaken throughout the study process.

Chapter 4 addresses the trail network.

Chapter 5 provides information on trail design.

Chapter 6 provides the Implementation strategy. This chapter also discusses promotion and education and provides information on risk management.



Chapter 7 is a summary of recommendations from the entire Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan.