



2.0 THE NEED FOR A TRAILS MASTER PLAN

Residents throughout the communities of Chatham-Kent are demanding high quality recreation facilities close to home. In addition to traditional recreation facilities like swimming pools and sports fields, there is an expectation that Chatham-Kent should have a well designed and connected linear recreational trail system. There is also a growing proportion of the population that would like to travel on foot or by bicycle, or must travel by a mobility-assisted device. They too are looking for a linked linear system.

Several municipalities in Ontario have already developed trails master plans, and have been taking steps to implement their networks and supporting programs. Chatham-Kent has been doing the same, but with the disadvantage of not having an overall “Master Plan” in place to guide important decisions that will have long-term effects on the entire trail network.

The Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan described in the chapters that follow, provides that vision. It is a long-range planning document that will guide Municipal Staff, Council, Developers, Agencies and other key stakeholders through the design, implementation and management of a comprehensive multi-use trail system throughout the entire municipality.

The Chatham Kent Trail Master Plan will benefit the community in many ways:

- It provides a communication tool that can be shared among various municipal departments so that implementation of a trail network can be coordinated with other initiatives related to transportation, recreation, tourism, land use and economic growth throughout the municipality;
- It communicates Chatham-Kent’s commitment to public health and active living;
- It communicates Chatham-Kent’s intent with respect to an integrated trail system;
- It sends a message to potential residents and business owners that Chatham-Kent is a desirable place to live, work, and play;
- It provides the basis for communication tools that can be provided to residents with an interest in trails for recreation and utilitarian purposes;
- It provides a vehicle by which points of cultural interest can be connected and highlighted throughout the municipality; and
- It communicates and provides the means to support a municipal objective to reduce the dependence on the automobile and provide viable transportation alternatives that are environmentally friendly and sustainable.

Across North America, the popularity of trails has been steadily increasing, and this trend is expected to continue. Some recent trends in recreation, tourism and transportation contributing to this appeal include:

- Staying healthy through active recreational pursuits;
- A renewed interest in spending “quality time” with family and friends pursuing high quality recreational experiences;



- A strong interest in tourism and recreational activities that respect the natural and cultural environments and offer educational opportunities;
- An interest in “getaway” travel where the goal is to obtain a high quality recreational experience for good value; and
- An increased interest in alternative modes of transportation including walking and cycling, both of which are well served by integrated trail systems.

In response to these trends, municipalities, agencies and independent organizations are planning, designing, implementing and promoting trail systems to meet the demand. Municipal Economic Development Departments are beginning to understand the economic benefit that well-planned trails systems can bring to their communities. Increased tourist traffic, better quality of life for residents, and the additional amenity that can help attract new commercial and industrial business are just a few of the benefits that trails bring to communities.

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent is no exception. There is a desire among staff, politicians and residents to develop a community trail system that is as integral to the community as the road system itself. Planning at this level fosters a good understanding of Chatham-Kent’s expectations regarding new development and provides an excellent marketing tool for the developers of new communities.

2.1 KEEPING PACE WITH THE DEMAND FOR TRAILS

Across Ontario, recreation trail use is recognized as one of the top three recreational pursuits, having a 20% participation rate and estimated annual growth rate of 2.3% (Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, 2001). The demand for trail facilities across Ontario is very high. Trail and cycling clubs, conservation authorities, municipal and regional governments are all developing networks to encourage walking and trail use for recreation and transportation. At the provincial level, the Ontario Trails Council has developed the Trillium Trails Network that promotes the integration of community, city and municipal trail systems into a province-wide system. Also at the provincial level, several initiatives clearly indicate strong government support for trails. The Ontario Trails Strategy and the Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy by the Ministry of Health Promotion will have a positive impact on both urban and rural trails. At the national level the Trans Canada Trail is a 21,500-kilometre recreational trail winding its way through every province and territory, from the Atlantic to Pacific to Arctic Oceans. When completed, it will be the world’s longest recreational trail, linking close to 1000 communities and over 33 million Canadians. Today almost 70 percent (14,500 kilometres) is developed. Thousands of people are taking to the Trail to walk, hike, cycle, ski, horseback ride, canoe and snowmobile. The Trans Canada Trail provides resource support and funding opportunities for communities enroute.

2.2 VISION OF THE PLAN

The vision for the Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan is:

“A continuous network of trails connecting people and places of interest in the Municipality of Chatham-Kent.”

2.3 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The Goal of the Chatham-Kent Trails Master Plan is:

“To develop a cohesive municipal wide trail system that will connect people and places through a network that is off-road wherever possible and supported by on-road links where necessary.”

A number of objectives have been outlined to support the goal of the Master Plan. They are:

1. Assess the current status of trails, their location, use and level of development.
2. Identify existing and future opportunities to link trails.
3. Provide mapping of existing and proposed trails.
4. Recommend appropriate trail uses/user groups and establish trail design guidelines for different types of trails in different locations.
5. Prioritize and assess trail development potential, and formulate cost estimates for the development and maintenance of the trail system in a manner that is feasible, realistic and affordable.
6. Make policy and process recommendations regarding trail development and acquisition of land for current and future trail development.

2.4 THE BENEFITS OF TRAILS IN CHATHAM-KENT

Promoting walking and cycling through the development of an integrated trail network can provide positive health, environmental and economic impacts. Providing options that will encourage people to reduce the use of personal automobiles, and to walk and cycle more can cut health care costs, help enable Canada to meet Kyoto obligations, and can help create sustainable, more liveable communities. Over the last ten years, the concepts of community trail networks and Active Transportation have been gaining popularity because of health, environmental, and economic benefits.

2.4.1 Active Lifestyles-Healthy Citizens

Sedentary lifestyles have serious health consequences. Almost half of Canadians age 12 and over report being physically inactive and 26% of youth between the ages of 2 and 17 are overweight or obese (Statistics Canada 2005). In Canada, the prevalence of obesity has more than doubled in the last 20 years (Katzmarzyk & Mason, 2006). Obesity is associated with serious health conditions, including increased risks of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases (CVD). Walking and cycling are both popular recreational activities and a means of transportation that are efficient, affordable, and accessible and promote healthy lifestyles. Increasing frequency of walking and cycling and reducing reliance on cars can lower the risk of obesity, lower the risk of hospitalizations from asthma and address other health conditions such as heart disease and Type 2 diabetes caused by inactivity. The following are some specific examples:



- The ability to walk or cycle safely in neighbourhoods is integral to being physically active, maintaining a healthy body weight, and increasing social interaction (Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, 2006);
- Trails are considered to be the safest and most preferred location to walk, cycle and use other non-motorized forms of recreation (Go for Green, National Active Transportation Survey, 2005);
- Exercise and health are seen by Canadians as the main benefit to walking and cycling. Practicality, convenience and pleasure are also frequently cited benefits (Go For Green, National Active Transportation Survey, 2005);
- A 5% increase in the walkability of a residential neighbourhood was associated with 32 more minutes of physically active travel per day (Frank, 2006a);
- Individuals who have access to trails increase their recreational activity on average by 44% (Irish Trail Strategy, 2006);
- Policy changes at the local level have the potential to encourage increased physical activity over the long term by making active transportation an easier choice for residents (World Health Organization, 2006);
- One study has estimated that 40% of chronic illness could be prevented by regular physical activity and suggested that urban planning could offer opportunities for increased physical activity by creating walking and cycling alternatives, such as trails, to motorized transportation (Heart & Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia, 2004);
- Canada's 2005 Physical Activity Monitor found that the top three preferred physical activities among Canadian youth are walking (66%), jogging or running (56%), bicycling (49%) (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2005); and
- Mixed land uses, well-connected streets, trail and sidewalk networks that promote a supportive walking and cycling environment can help to increase resident's health by affecting their travel behaviour to include more active transportation modes (Frank, Kaveage & Litman, 2006).

2.4.2 A Greener Chatham-Kent

Canadians view environmental quality as an important factor influencing their personal health. The transportation sector is a major source of air pollution in Canada. Transport Canada (2006) identified that urban passenger travel created almost half of the greenhouse gas emission of Canada's transportation sector, which in turn produces about one quarter of Canada's total. Providing infrastructure that supports alternative modes of transportation, such as an integrated trail network for walking and cycling, can reduce vehicle traffic volumes. Reducing the amount of vehicle travel will reduce pollution emissions. Roadways can carry 7 to 12 times as many people per lane per hour by bicycle compared to that of motor vehicles in urban areas. Some specific examples include:

- Walking and cycling curb greenhouse gas emissions and global climate change and save valuable green space (National Active Transportation Roundtable, 2003);
- The ecological footprint is a measure of human demands on natural resources such as land, water and air, and is reduced when people choose to travel by walking and cycling. "The greatest contributing factor to a large ecological footprint is carbon intensive fuel supplies for transportation, electricity and heating" (Ontario College

of Family Physicians, 2005, p. 20). Cycling and walking have negligible effects on the size of the ecological footprint;

- The average Greenhouse Gas intensity for light duty vehicles was 295 grams CO₂ per km in 2005. Promoting trail use, especially walking and cycling, can produce significant greenhouse gas emission reductions, approximately 1KT of CO₂ for each 3,500 km of trail use;
- Compact communities with mixed land use serviced by trails will increase active transportation choices, decrease the need to drive to daily destinations and will decrease the vehicle emissions that contribute to air pollution (CMHC, 2006);
- On-road routes as a means of connecting off-road trails, can reduce road congestion and maintenance costs. These connections also allow for an increase in trails use for recreational as well as utilitarian purposes;
- On-road routes may contribute to increased safety for pedestrians by providing a paved shoulder for cyclists. Paved shoulders also prove to be more cost effective as opposed to adding new auto lanes;
- Cycling and walking cause little or no congestion and result in no greenhouse gas emissions. Opportunities to walk and cycle on trails are considered environmentally positive; and
- There is strong evidence that given complete networks of high-quality cycling routes, a significant number of people will cycle, as demonstrated in Davis, California and Boulder, Colorado. With 20% of trips by bicycle, these communities have the highest levels of bicycle usage in North America. This high level of cycling is facilitated by mature networks, which include bike lanes on almost all arterial roads and extensive off-road commuter bicycle paths. Residents can simply get on their bicycles with confidence knowing there will always be a safe route to their destination (British Columbia Cycling Coalition Budget Submission, 2007).

2.5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Trails across North America have created numerous benefits and opportunities for the communities that they pass through. Communities benefit from trail development through increases in business activity, and by providing services to an increasing number of trail users.

In order to identify tourism opportunities, and to recognize the types of businesses, services and amenities that users will demand, it is important to also acknowledge the preferences and characteristics of trail users. Gaining an understanding of these preferences and characteristics could assist in developing a tourism development strategy and plan that markets trail use in Chatham-Kent.

A 2004 comprehensive study completed by PriceWaterhouseCoopers investigated the economic benefits of developing trail systems as part of a study to project the economic benefits of developing the Trans Canada Trail in Ontario. Some of the information collected regarding economic benefits to other jurisdictions included the following:

- A study of the "T" Railway in Newfoundland (2002) found that the total annual economic impacts associated with this trail are estimated to be as high as \$17.4 million in new income generated, upwards of 850 new jobs and millions of dollars in additional taxation revenue for both the provincial and federal governments;
- A survey of users of the Georgian Trail in Collingwood, Ontario estimated that the direct expenditure associated with the trail users was \$5.2 million in 1999; and



- The Economic Impact Study for the Allegheny Trail Alliance (1999) found that trail business accounts for more than 10% of annual receipts for a third of business respondents in the region, and that approximately half of all businesses in the area have plans to expand their business as a result.

There is ample evidence that trails provide significant economic benefits for adjacent landowners and local businesses. Trails provide benefits to the local economy during both construction and operation. Trail construction results in direct benefits such as jobs, including the supply and installation of materials. Following construction, benefits emerge in the form of expenditures by trail users. A few examples include:

- Trails in New Brunswick employ around 1500 people for an average of six months per year;
- 70% of users of the Bruce Trail cite the trail as the main reason for visiting the area. They spend an average of about \$20.00 per user per visit within a 10 km corridor on either side of the trail;
- The Riverwalk is considered the anchor of the tourism industry in San Antonio, Texas and contributes \$1.2 billion annually to the local economy;
- In 1988, users of the Elroy-Sparta Trail in Wisconsin averaged expenditures of USD \$25.14 per day for trip-related expenses for a total of over \$1.2 million annually;
- More than 600,000 Americans took a bicycle vacation in 1985, and when travelling in a group, spent \$17 per day camping or \$50 per day staying in motels. Cyclists travelling alone spent an average of \$22 per day camping or \$60 per day staying in motels;
- In Ontario, the Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance estimated that at the end of a 10 year build-out period, 320 km of their system, constructed at a cost of \$5.4 million will generate approximately \$36 million in annual economic benefits in the communities through which it passes, and create or sustain over 1100 jobs; and
- In Surrey, British Columbia a 2001 study compared the impact to single-family property values over 20 years for properties that bordered a greenway or trail versus properties that did not. The study found that introducing a greenway in four Surrey neighbourhoods increased property values bordering the trail by 1% to 10%, and did not result in any measurable increase in crime (City of Surrey, 2001)

Trail systems can have varied levels of attraction for tourists. They can be travel destinations in themselves, encouraging visitors to extend their stay in the area or enhancing business and pleasure visits. By increasing the “level of tourist draw”, travellers can be expected to stay longer, resulting in an additional night’s lodging and meals, a major direct new benefit to local businesses.

2.5.1 The Role of Trails in Chatham-Kent’s Tourism Strategy

In addition to providing a highly valued amenity to residents of the Chatham-Kent, developing and marketing a trail system forms one part of a broader economic development strategy, as it markets trails as one of the many benefits available to new residents and businesses thinking about locating in Chatham-Kent, and further encourages tourism.

Tourism and recreation are important to the economic development and social fabric of Chatham-Kent. The Municipality is rich in cultural and recreational opportunities. An integrated and linked trail system will help connect cultural and recreational features and continue to attract tourists.

Assisting in the effort to draw in tourists is the Chatham-Kent portion of the Trans Canada Trail. There are 205 kilometres of trails designated through the municipality. The planned Tecumseh Parkway would also further promote tourism in the area, by providing a 70 km (approximately) long parkway with bicycle lanes along roads paralleling the Thames River, ultimately connecting with local trail networks. Chatham-Kent could also create and implement tourist events based on trail use. One such example is the Greater Niagara Circle Route, which draws thousands of participants to the Niagara Region to cycle on an annual basis.

Locally, Chatham-Kent's Economic Development Strategy Update (2007) identified tourism as one avenue for economic diversification in the municipality. Upcoming celebrations related to the War of 1812 along with significant black history are two unique attributes that give visitors a compelling reason to visit Chatham-Kent. Chatham-Kent also possesses some unique strengths related to agri-tourism, world-class fishing and birding.

The concept of **Ecotourism** has become very popular in recent years, and at present the ecotourism market is growing rapidly, perhaps more quickly than any other sector of the tourism industry. Ecotourists often seek out experiences that provide opportunities to learn about an area's natural and cultural history, and they generally stay longer and spend more money at their destinations than more traditional sightseeing tourists. Chatham-Kent is considering developing its ecotourism opportunities, and many if not all ecotourism activities are very well suited to take place on, around, or in association with trails.

At a more regional level Carolinian Canada Coalition is launching "Caring for Our Coast" in October 2009. The goal of this Lake Erie Community Stewardship Trail Project is to promote enjoyment, understanding and stewardship of the coast by engaging residents, communities and visitors in planning and using a Lake Erie Community Stewardship Trail Network. The development of the trail concept will rely on linking existing trails with potential new trails, and the involvement of trail users and trail groups in this project will be key to developing a concept and trail plan which will suit the needs of trail users, communities, and conservation efforts.

