

Greenway Trials in Windsor, Ontario

Lori Newton, Executive Director, Bike Windsor Essex, info@bikewindsorsex.com

Background

Greenways are linear open spaces, including habitats and trails, that link parks, nature areas, cultural features, or historic sites with each other, for recreation and conservation purposes. Based on experience throughout North America, greenways promote outdoor recreation, catalyze economic development, increase adjacent property values, celebrate historical and cultural assets, promote conservation and environmental education, and improve quality of life. Greenways can provide an exceptional outdoor recreational experience that reconnects children and families to natural resources, and that builds a stewardship ethic. It should not be surprising that greenways are an enormous source of community pride.

Windsor has a long history of greenways dating back to the 1960s. Windsor's Department of Parks and Recreation maintains 12 km² of green space, 180 parks, and 64 km of trails. Beginning in the 1960s, Windsor started creating a shared-usage trail network, initially called the "Windsor Loop," that circumnavigates around the entire city and connects to neighboring communities (Table 1). The longest greenway trail in this network is the Roy A. Battagello River Walk (built in the late 1960s, and upgraded/widened several times), stretching from west of the Ambassador Bridge to the historical Hiram Walker Distillery, a distance of about 8 km.

Table 1. History of greenway trails in Windsor and Essex County.

Time Period	Greenway Activities
1960s	Initial phase of the Roy A. Battagello River Walk constructed, stretching from west of the Ambassador Bridge to the historical Hiram Walker Distillery, a distance of about 8 km
1970s	Ganatchio Trail is a 5.3-km greenway constructed in 1971 through the Villages of Riverside, Little River, Greenway, Tecumseh
1980s	Devonwood Bike Trail (built mostly between the mid- and late 1980s)
1990s	First phase of Little River Extension of the Ganatchio Trail built in 1996 The Chrysler Canada Greenway is a 42 km-long rail trail constructed in 1997 in Essex County, stretching from Oldcastle to Leamington.
2000s	Second phase of Little River Extension of the Ganatchio Trail built in 2007
2010s	Right Honourable Herb Gray Parkway, 17-km network of bike and walking trails, officially opened in 2016 Cypher Systems Group Greenway is a 22-km (13.7-mile) rail trail that was completed in 2017, connecting Essex to Amherstburg

This trail also connects to other trails leading to key natural areas and city parks, including Ojibway Park and Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve, Malden Park, Spring Garden Area of Natural Scientific Interest, and others. Other key extensions of this greenway trail network include the Ganatchio Trail (built in 1971), its Little River Extension (built in 1996), the Devonwood Bike Trail (built between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s), and the Right Honourable Herb Gray Parkway, a 17-km network of bike and walking trails completed as part of a provincial project that improved traffic flow from the Ambassador Bridge to Highway 401 (opened in 2016).

Also completed as part of the County Wide Active Transportation System were the 50-km Chrysler Canada Greenway and the 22-km Cypher Systems Group Greenway completed in 1997 and 2017, respectively. However, much more needs to be done to connect all of these trails as part of an integrated trail network.

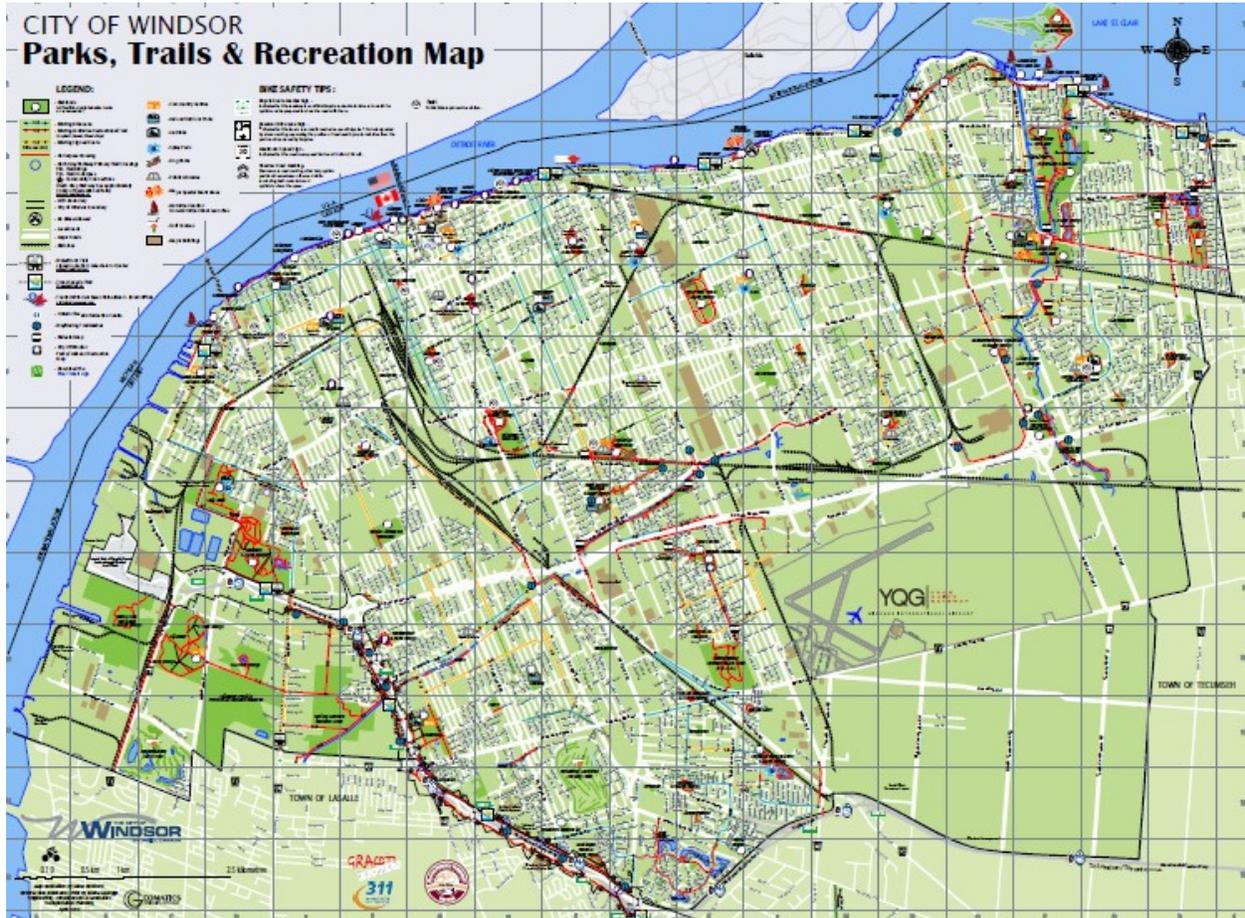
Master Plan

As set out in its Official Plan, the City of Windsor is committed to sustainability in all its forms and recognizes the importance of active transportation to enhance both community health and safety, as well as quality of life. The City is also committed to contributing to the reduction of air pollution by increasing opportunities for active modes of transportation, including walking, cycling and transit. The City's 20-year Strategic Vision further commits the City of Windsor to promoting active transportation as healthy and environmentally friendly modes of transportation.

The City has a history of recognizing the significance active transportation plays in shaping a sustainable, healthy, and robust community. The adoption of the recommendations made in the Bicycle Use Development Study in 1991 led to the construction of the marquee waterfront pathway network. The active transportation vision then took another step forward with the creation of the Bicycle Use Master Plan (BUMP) in 2001; however, the plan's recommendations were generally aspirational, with less than 5% of them being implemented over the subsequent 20 years. The BUMP shifted the view of bicycles for recreation to include commuter cycling, and led to expanding the City's on and off-road cycling network for both commuting and recreation. In 2019 the City recognized a need for a broader focus beyond cycling to other forms of active transportation. A new Active Transportation Master Plan (ATMP) called Walk Wheel Windsor (City of Windsor, 2019) was developed with a focus on community sustainability and meeting the City's Community Energy Plan goals.

The ATMP outlines a network that connects key existing trails and pathways, such as the recently completed Herb Gray Parkway Trail, and the downtown Waterfront Trail (Figure 1). Connecting these high-quality pathways to a developed on-street network will allow commuters, recreational users, and others to have safe, convenient, attractive and fun options to travel by walking, cycling, or transit. The ATMP will guide Windsor's progress and investments in active transportation over the next 20 years.

Figure 1. Parks, trails, and recreation map for Windsor, Ontario.



Future Directions

As part of the ATMP process, a vision, goals, and targets were developed to shape the overall future direction of the Plan and to serve as a basis from which actions, improvements and investments are identified and prioritized. The ATMP vision is as follows:

By 2041, Windsor is a leader in active transportation. Walking, cycling, and transit are safe, convenient, and enjoyable mobility options for all residents and visitors, regardless of age, ability, trip purpose, or time of year. Active transportation connects Windsor's local and regional communities, contributing to a resilient, equitable, and healthy city with a high quality of life for Windsor residents.

The five goals established in the Plan include:

- Develop a complete active transportation network that connects all neighbourhoods
- Improve the safety and accessibility of vulnerable road users

- Support effective land-use planning to build an environment that makes walking, cycling, and transit convenient and enjoyable
- Ensure that the active transportation network is equitable and accessible for all residents
- Foster a culture for active transportation

Targets have been established in the Plan to support the goals, be able to measure progress, and increase accountability. These include doubling the proportion of trips made by walking, cycling, and transit by 2031 and achieving 25% of all trips in Windsor made using sustainable transportation by 2041 (Table 2).

Table 2. Targets established in the Active Transportation Master Plan for the proportion of trips made by walking, cycling, and transit in Windsor.

Date	Percentage of Trips by Walking, Cycling, and Transit
Current (2019)	10%
2031	20%
2041	25%

Strategies and Actions

Greenways are important community assets and recreational cycling has many benefits; however, improvements to encourage commuter cycling and cycling as transportation will have significantly greater impacts on improving both environmental and health issues. The ATMP identifies five overarching themes: connecting communities, places for people, innovation and integration, culture shift, and quality of life. For each theme, the Plan includes several strategies and more detailed actions to improve active transportation. The implementation of these strategies and actions will help Windsor work towards achieving the vision, goals, and targets of the ATMP. The ATMP also includes an implementation and monitoring plan to prioritize investments and actions over the short, medium, and long-term and to monitor progress in achieving the Plan’s goals.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that the City of Windsor become more proactive in providing safe, accessible, alternative transportation infrastructure (including signalized cycling crossings, striped bicycle lanes and bicycle/pedestrian crossings, and bicycle counters to measure success) within the city that encourages people to choose to bicycle or walk for distances less than 5 km. In 2016 and 2017 surveys, 85% of Windsor residents indicated that they would cycle more if there was safe, connected cycling infrastructure.
- It is recommended that the City of Windsor allocate and sustain adequate funding for greenway trail maintenance.

- It is recommended that the City of Windsor fill its Active Transportation Coordinator position identified in its Active Transportation Master Plan.
- It is recommended that the City of Windsor adopt specific targets for walking and cycling, separate from transit, to prioritize true active transportation.
- It is recommended that the City of Windsor work closely with cycling advocates to provide safer streets for vulnerable road users consistent with its vision and Active Transportation Master Plan.

References

City of Windsor, 2019. Walk Wheel Windsor: Active Transportation Plan. Windsor, Ontario, Canada.