

STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: July 23, 2024 **REPORT:** 24-079
FROM: Climate and Environment **FILE:** 8330-20
SUBJECT: 2024 WHISTLER ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the General Manager of Climate Action, Planning, and Development Services be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council adopt the 2024 Whistler Active Transportation Strategy, attached as Appendix A to Administrative Report No. 24-079.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to share the 2024 Whistler Active Transportation Strategy (ATS) which maps out the direction of active transportation in Whistler, aligns priorities with existing plans and commitments, and has the goal of guiding Whistler’s resource planning and investments in policies, plans, partnerships, infrastructure, and programming so that residents and visitors of all ages and abilities can move beyond the car.

Information Report Administrative Report

DISCUSSION

Background

In December 2020, Council adopted [Whistler’s 2020 Climate Action Big Moves Strategy](#) (Big Moves Strategy) and new greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction target of reducing Whistler’s GHG emissions by 50 per cent below 2007 levels. Personal vehicle transport is Whistler’s largest source of emissions, accounting consistently for over 50 per cent of Whistler’s community wide GHG emissions and is the main challenge to achieving our climate targets. Getting people out of their cars and moving towards low carbon transportation is a key opportunity highlighted in the Big Moves Strategy through the Big Move 1 goal that 50 per cent of all trips within Whistler are by active transport or public transit.

Active transportation is addressed in numerous existing Whistler planning documents including the Official Community Plan (OCP), [Whistler Transportation Action Plan 2018–2028](#) (TAP), and the [Big Moves Climate Action Implementation Plan](#) (CAIP). The ATS consolidates all active transportation goals, objectives, policies, and priorities of these high-level plans and is also bolstered by community and stakeholder engagement, best practice research and new federal and provincial policies and programs. As such, the ATS provides a single comprehensive view of active transportation that will make it easier for the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) to prioritize and strategically plan

investments in policies, partnerships, infrastructure and programming so that residents and visitors of all ages and abilities can move beyond the car, such as walking or cycling, throughout our community. This shift away from motor vehicles can generate numerous benefits for individual health, our community, and the environment and will help us achieve our climate targets.

Analysis

The overarching aim of the ATS is to encourage active transportation in our community. The ATS outlines a strategic path forward to prioritize actions, initiatives and programs, including foundational activities to ensure the RMOW can monitor and evaluate progress, access grant funding, and evolve alongside technology and policies.

Whistler's active transportation goal as defined by the Big Moves Strategy (that by 2030, half of all trips in Whistler are made by walking, cycling or transit) can be achieved by pursuing five objectives as outlined below. These objectives reflect what research, technical analysis, review of existing plans, community engagement, and collaboration with the Active Transportation Sub-Committee (ATSC) of the Transportation Advisory Group identified as necessary elements to increase active transportation in Whistler. To ensure the ATS leverages the work already completed in other strategic documents and matches the ambition they established, each objective is contextualized by a set of outcomes. These outcomes align with those found in Whistler's OCP, TAP and CAIP, and were developed based on work with the ATSC and outcomes of the community engagement.

Objective 1: Establish a comprehensive year-round active transportation network.

By 2030, Whistler envisions a community where half of all trips in Whistler are made by walking, cycling and transit. This means enhancing and improving Whistler's network of routes, so residents and visitors choose to 'move beyond the car' - whether it's to commute to work, get groceries, catch a shuttle, pick up kids from school, attend an event, visit friends or even travel to the resort.

To achieve this vision, Whistler needs a fully developed year-round network of convenient, connected, easily accessed pathways, pedestrian facilities, crossings, and bicycle routes. In developing the network, Whistler will not only increase the usefulness of the network, but it will also raise awareness of walking and cycling as viable modes of transportation among the wider population. A comprehensive active transportation network will both enable and accelerate the shift toward low-carbon transportation as the default way to get around Whistler.

Establishing a comprehensive active transportation network will require:

- Advocating for active transportation accommodation on Highway 99;
- Adding bicycle lanes and routes on municipal streets;
- Adding pedestrian facilities (i.e., sidewalks);
- Designating and upgrading portions of existing and future multiuse trails (i.e., the Valley Trail);
- Improving pedestrian and cycling access to bus stops;
- Interconnectivity of each of these; and
- Improvements to road intersections and crossing safety.

Objective 2: Ensure people of all ages and abilities safely and enthusiastically use the active transportation network.

To make active transportation a primary choice for residents and visitors, Whistler's active transportation network must be safe and inviting for a wide and diverse range of people—everyone from a teenage dogwalker to the grandparent with a walker, from the child on training wheels to the experienced bike commuter. Bicycle facilities are especially important for creating an inviting network. Bike lanes designed to All Ages & Abilities criteria are shown to reduce crashes for all road users—not only cyclists. By prioritizing safety and accessibility of the active transportation network, Whistler will echo the commitment in the OCP to "Improve the physical environment for everyone using the

transportation system” (Objective 11.1.3) and the provincial’s active transportation strategy’s declaration that “British Columbia should have an integrated, safe and accessible active transportation system that works for everyone.”

Ensuring people of all ages and abilities can safely use the active transportation network will require:

- Integrating accessibility guidelines into all design decisions;
- Lighting facilities provided where required and practical;
- Mitigating potential conflicts between different modes of travel; and
- Upgrading and increasing the frequency of road crossings.

Objective 3: Provide essential infrastructure, amenities, and operational support for the network year-round.

Regular maintenance of active transportation facilities maintains safety and comfort for pedestrians and cyclists and preserves the municipality’s investment. Therefore, infrastructure and amenities that support the network will be planned, designed and prioritized to consider how they will be maintained and kept free of hazards in all the seasons including the cost implications of different solutions.

The provincial Active Transportation Strategy (“Move. Commute. Connect.”) articulates the province’s commitment to expanding funding for communities to make active transportation networks complete, convenient, and connected. The activities and outcomes in this objective prepare RMOW to access grants and funding to increase bike parking, signage and connections to transit and shuttle stops.

Projects and activities to achieve this objective will focus on:

- Convenient and secure bike parking stations and end-of-trip facilities;
- Wayfinding and signage;
- Connections to shuttle parking and transit; and,
- Maintenance practices in summer and winter.

Objective 4: Create awareness and motivation for people to use the active transportation network year-round.

As a tourism-based municipality, as much as 35 per cent of Whistler’s total workforce arrives from out of town every year. In addition to this, Whistler welcomes over three million unique visitors per year to enjoy world class skiing, cycling, hiking and sight-seeing. Whistler’s average daily visitation is approximately 20,000 unique visitors, supplementing our resident population of about 18,000. The transportation needs differ significantly across these demographics, whether they are day visitors, overnight guests, commuters, or permanent residents and we need to build a multi-faceted system that supports them all. Among all these groups, there are some who already walk and cycle and others who would be very receptive to active transportation but need relevant education and engagement to build active transportation habits.

Creating awareness and motivation for people to use the network year-round will require:

- Incentives;
- Raising awareness and public engagement;
- Increased access to and awareness of new and existing e-bike share programs; and,
- Leadership.

Not all this programming needs to be standalone. Engagement messages can be incorporated into wayfinding and other signage already needed to support the network. Maps that identify commuting facilities can be integrated into recreation-focused products.

Objective 5: Expand the network’s capacity to meet 2030 goals and beyond

Both the federal and provincial governments have signaled, through their policy and planning

documents, a continued investment in active transportation as a core opportunity to reduce emissions and build resilient, livable communities. Active transportation is also a strategic priority for Whistler, therefore it is critical that Whistler proactively prepares and plans today for a growing demand for active transportation facilities. This will minimize the risk of costly retrofitting or infrastructure upgrades in the future. By anticipating future needs and opportunities, the ATS can be a flexible document that adapts to changing circumstances and new opportunities.

Implementation and Monitoring

The ATS was developed and refined to allow RMOW to prioritize the list of implementation activities associated with each Objective. These activities are outlined in detail in the ATS document in Appendix A. The activity table is a living document and as such allows for flexibility to adapt as necessary to leverage emerging opportunities or accommodate technological or contextual changes.

Many of the implementation activities are the responsibility of one or more RMOW departments. Others are the primary responsibility of other organizations or entities. For example, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) has authority and jurisdiction for all work impacting Highway 99. Therefore, a core ongoing activity related to Objective 1 is advocacy and collaboration with MOTI and this work is equally important to Objective 5. Similarly, some activities have shared responsibility to be successful. For example, to achieve the outcomes of Objectives 3 and 4, the RMOW will need support from private companies and entities like School District 48 and BC Transit.

Underpinning all Objectives are three foundational tasks:

1. Create a framework to guide decision making and prioritize activities;
2. Establish or consolidate baseline metrics to guide monitoring, evaluation; and,
3. Reporting and communicate active transportation priorities across RMOW departments and with upper levels of government.

These tasks will allow RMOW staff to identify, prioritize and implement activities, access granting opportunities and effectively collaborate with internal and external stakeholders.

A monitoring program is essential to ensure that the ATS is implemented as intended and to determine whether the strategy is contributing to the increasing active transportation usage in Whistler. A monitoring program will also enable municipal staff to justify continued expenditures and allocation of resources for active transportation facilities and programs.

Six measures of success with nine performance indicators have been identified to monitor progress towards achieving the five objectives and overall goal to have 50 per cent of all trips within Whistler by active transportation and transit. The data being used will range from Census data and the Community Life Survey to manual counts of mode share data (see Appendix A for full list of indicators).

Early Success and Actions Underway

The ATS was developed to prioritize implementation, which includes making decisions related to staff resourcing, policies, programming, and capital investment. Given the importance of active transportation, the foundational tasks and several implementation activities have already started or are underway, such as:

- **Transportation Planner Position**

Appropriate and dedicated staff resources are required to implement the ATS, make progress towards achieving the five objectives, and to realize the vision that residents and visitors of all ages and abilities can move beyond the car. As such, a new transportation planner position has

been created whose key responsibilities will include the implementation of the ATS in close collaboration with the RMOW Transportation Demand Management Coordinator.

- **Bike Lane Demonstration Project**

The Village Gate Boulevard Bikeway Demonstration Project is underway. This protected bike lane runs from the Firehall driveway to the bus shelter on Village Gate Boulevard, through the summer until Labour Day. This project supports bike transport on one of Whistler's busiest thoroughfares.

- **Bike Valet service expansion**

Free bike and gear storage with the Whistler Bike Valet returned to select locations in Whistler this summer. In July, Whistler received an expansion to service hours, thanks to a grant from the BC Cycling Coalition, funded by the MOTI. In addition to service hour expansion, new fencing increases the capacity. This expanded service is geared to village employees, making it easier to commute by bike.

- **Secure bike parking**

In July the RMOW launched a three-year trial program for smart, secure bike parking. The RMOW partnered with Urban Racks to install Bikeeep racks in three locations around Whistler including Whistler Olympic Plaza, Meadow Park Sports Centre and Village Square. These racks are operated through an app, providing secure and convenient bike parking. The racks also provide the ability to charge e-bikes while parked.

- **Even more Evolve E-Bikes**

Shared e-bikes returned to Whistler for spring/summer 2024 in April, for year two of the BCAA pilot project, providing an affordable option for short trips within the municipality. In May, in partnership with Whistler Blackcomb, Evolve E-Bikes launched in eight new parking zones including Creekside, Blackcomb Staff Housing, Brio Staff Housing, Westside Staff Housing and the Vail Office.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

Active transportation is addressed in the following three existing Whistler planning documents: the OCP, TAP and the CAIP. By consolidating the active transportation goals, policies, and priorities of these high-level Whistler plans, the RMOW can focus on implementation, efficiency and collaboration.

The CAIP was [adopted by council on August 2, 2022](#) with Big Move 1 being to move beyond the car with the goal that by 2030, 50 per cent of all trips within Whistler are by transit or active transportation. The 2024 Whistler ATS directly supports this goal.

TAP was [adopted by council on October 2, 2018](#) and outlines active transportation as one of the five key strategic focus areas. All relevant strategies and actions from the TAP are included and consolidated in the 2024 Whistler ATS, in particular:

Goal 4 of the TAP: Support the increased use of preferred modes of transportation for all travel purposes to reduce dependence on private motor vehicles.

Objective 4.1: Give priority to walking, cycling, transit and other preferred modes over the single-occupant vehicle and private automobile.

2023-2026 Strategic Plan

The 2023-2026 Strategic Plan outlines the high-level direction of the RMOW to help shape community progress during this term of Council. The Strategic Plan contains four priority areas with various associated initiatives that support them. This section identifies how this report links to the Strategic Plan. Committees of Council help Council and staff advancing their strategic priorities for the term.

Strategic Priorities

Housing

Expedite the delivery of and longer-term planning for employee housing

Climate Action

Mobilize municipal resources toward the implementation of the Big Moves Climate Action Plan

Community Engagement

Strive to connect locals to each other and to the RMOW

Smart Tourism

Preserve and protect Whistler's unique culture, natural assets and infrastructure

Not Applicable

Aligns with core municipal work that falls outside the strategic priorities but improves, maintains, updates and/or protects existing and essential community infrastructure or programs

Community Vision and Official Community Plan

The OCP is the RMOW's most important guiding document that sets the community vision and long-term community direction. This section identifies how this report applies to the OCP.

Whistler's vision is to be a place where the community thrives, nature is protected, and guests are inspired. This ongoing work aims to reduce GHG emissions, remove the barriers for the community and guests to shift to lower carbon transportation, and help to achieve Whistler's climate goals. Therefore, this work is in alignment with Whistler's vision.

The 2024 Whistler ATS speaks to multiple goals, objectives and policies within Whistler's OCP.

10.2. Goal - Substantially reduce GHG emissions from vehicles and transportation

11.3. Goal - Minimize GHG emissions created by the transportation system

Policy 11.1.3.1: Active transportation is the RMOW's highest transportation priority.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

Implementation of the actions identified in the ATS will be part of general transportation planning and the Big Move implementation planning and budgeting processes. Implementation actions currently underway are included in the current 2024 municipal budget and partially funded out of the Community Transportation Initiative Fund through the Day Lot Facility Operating Agreement.

LÍŁWAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the LÍŁwat People, known in their language as *L'il'wat7úl* and the Squamish People, known in their language as the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* to: create an enduring relationship; establish collaborative processes for planning on unceded territories, as currently managed by the provincial government; ; achieve mutual objectives; and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy. This section identifies areas where RMOW activities intersect with these relationships.

The final ATS will be shared with the Squamish Nation and Lílwat Nation. In addition, the Squamish Nation and Lílwat Nation have been invited to have representation at the Climate Action and Environment Select Committee where relevant ATS implementation priorities, activities, actions and projects will be discussed.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

Inform Consult Involve Collaborate Empower

The ATS was developed collaboratively with the ATSC of the RMOW Council-appointed Transportation Advisory Group (TAG). The ATSC met several times and was instrumental in ensuring the strategy reflects current barriers and challenges, gaps in the network and facilities and opportunities to enable active transportation.

In collaboration with the ATSC, the RMOW distributed two online surveys (one for high school students and one for the general community) to better understand:

1. General barriers to using active forms of transportation in Whistler.
2. Specific routes and facilities that are barriers or require improvements.
3. Seasonal barriers and improvement needs (i.e., Winter and snow/water-based challenges).
4. Performance of the current network.

The targeted high school survey was open in June and July of 2021. A total of 258 high school students responded and 485 Whistler community members self-selected to respond to the online community survey which represents a response rate of 3.5 per cent based on the total permanent population of Whistler (13,763). While the results cannot be reported as being reflective of the opinions of the entire community, the information gathered through the surveys provided valuable insights that informed the objectives and actions in the ATS.

A final draft of the ATS was presented to the ATSC in June 2024. An opportunity for TAG members to ask questions and provide feedback and comments was provided during the meeting. All feedback was incorporated in the final strategy.

REFERENCES

Appendix A – 2024 Whistler Active Transportation Strategy

SUMMARY

The ATS, attached as Appendix A, has been completed. This strategy maps out the direction of active transportation in Whistler, aligns priorities with existing plans and commitments, and aims to support the Climate Action Big Move 1 goal that by 2030, 50 per cent of trips within Whistler will be by walking, cycling or transit. This will be achieved by pursuing five objectives:

1. Establish a comprehensive year-round active transportation network.

2. Ensure people of all ages and abilities safely and enthusiastically use the active transportation network.
3. Provide essential infrastructure, amenities, and operational support for the network year-round.
4. Create awareness and motivation for people to use the active transportation network year-round.
5. Expand the network's capacity to meet 2030 goals and beyond.

In addition, implementation of the ATS outlines a strategic path forward to prioritize actions, initiatives, and programs, including foundational activities to ensure the RMOW can monitor and evaluate progress, access grant funding, and evolve alongside technology and policies so that residents and visitors of all ages and abilities can move beyond the car—walking, cycling, and using other types of active transportation throughout our community.

SIGN-OFFS

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