



# WHISTLER

## REPORT | ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT TO COUNCIL

**PRESENTED:** October 20, 2020

**REPORT:** 20-106

**FROM:** INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

**FILE:** 586.1

**SUBJECT:** HIGHWAY 99 CAPACITY AND SAFETY REVIEW REPORT

### COMMENT/RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**That** the recommendations of the General Manager of Infrastructure Services be endorsed.

### RECOMMENDATION

**That** Council receive the Highway 99 Capacity and Safety Review (Alpha Lake Road / Cheakamus Lake Road to Lorimer Road) – Final Report for information; and

**That** Council direct staff to work with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to develop feasibility reviews for short to medium term projects identified in the Final Report.

### REFERENCES

Appendix “A” – Highway 99 Capacity and Safety Review, Whistler (Alpha Lake Road Cheakamus Lake Road to Lorimer Road) Final Report.

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this Report is to provide Council with the Highway 99 Capacity and Safety Review, Whistler (Alpha Lake Road Cheakamus Lake Road to Lorimer Road) Final Report (the “Final Report”) completed by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI), and have Council direct staff to proceed with preliminary planning for highway improvements identified in the Final Report.

### DISCUSSION

#### **Background**

As traffic volumes have increased in the past few years due to both visitor and local vehicles using Highway 99 within Whistler, periods of congestion on the highway have become more common. The RMOW, with guidance from the Transportation Advisory Group (TAG), has made significant changes to parking rules and made several improvements to transit in the past three years, but infrastructure changes to Highway 99 have also been identified as part of the solution to reducing traffic congestion. The RMOW requested that MoTI undertake a capacity and safety review of Highway 99 within Whistler, especially in the section between Function Junction and Whistler Village where most of the traffic congestion problems occur.

In 2018, MoTI hired McElhanney Ltd. to undertake the study. This study reviewed many aspects of highway use within Whistler, reviewed the local road connections to the highway, identified the existing traffic volumes and constraints, and developed short, medium, and long-term options for highway improvements. The options were evaluated for cost and effectiveness using MoTI standard evaluation practices.

During a review of the draft report, RMOW staff observed that the data collection and analysis focused on the worst case scenario, winter Friday evening northbound traffic and Sunday afternoon southbound traffic. The emerging summer traffic issues within Whistler were not analysed separately from the winter issues as the data collected on the MoTI maintained traffic counts didn't show a significant difference from winter to summer and therefore the study assumed that once the worst case scenario (winter Fridays northbound and Sunday afternoons southbound) was relieved, the summer issues would also be relieved. As a result, the short and medium-term recommendations were costly expansions to the highway, adding a dedicated lane for southbound motor vehicle traffic from the Village to Function Junction.

RMOW staff worked with MoTI staff and the consultant team sharing local traffic information which had not been included in the report, potential intersection improvements that had not been identified, and additional short and medium term actions identified by TAG. RMOW staff also provided the description and recent data from the TAG transportation action monitoring reports illustrating the direct link that the use of transit has on improved highway capacity. Discussions with MoTI staff and their consultant over a period of a few months resulted in the addition of Chapter 6 – Local Operational Issues and the Preface to the Final Report that sets the context for the conclusion and recommendations of the Final Report.

The Final Report now includes these three additional paragraphs in the Conclusions and Recommendations:

*“Based on the meetings with the RMOW and MoTI, the internal traffic circulation was reviewed and the local traffic and transit operation issues and opportunities were discussed and summarized in this report. By comparing count stations at Brio with the one near Squamish, it was found that both the northbound and southbound traffic volumes were higher at Brio. This confirms that there are many internal trips within Whistler. With a limited parallel road system, there is a heavy reliance on Highway 99 for local internal trips. Mixing internal trips, tourism traffic, recreation trips and regional trips created traffic congestion on this extremely constrained corridor, especially during the summer and winter seasons.*

*Further internal parallel connectivity along with localized intersection improvements need to be studied to determine the most feasible solutions. An improved bus network including bus queue jumpers would help improve transit travel time and promote transit ridership; thus, removing more vehicles from the highway. It is recommended that MoTI work with RMOW and further review the local operational issues identified in Section 6 and determine which issues require further studies to confirm these concerns and develop possible mitigation strategies.*

*It is also recommended that all the corridor pavement marking should be completed in early spring (before June 1 if possible) to improve visibility and safety.”*

### **Next Steps**

RMOW staff are currently in discussions with MoTI staff to start feasibility reviews of localized capacity and pedestrian safety upgrades at the following four key locations:

- 1) Highway 99 at Whistler Road (through to Whistler Creekside)
- 2) Highway 99 and Meadow Lane
- 3) Highway 99 and Autumn Drive/Emerald Drive
- 4) Highway 99 and Route 10-Valley Express bus stops.

It is anticipated that survey information for some or all these key locations can be gathered in the fall of 2020 to expedite preliminary design work in 2021, required as part of the feasibility reviews.

## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

### Official Community Plan

#### Community Vision

- We protect the land – the forests, the lakes and the rivers, and all that they sustain.
- We value our relationships and work together as partners and community members.

These two statements in our Community Vision relate to the Highway 99 Capacity and Safety Review. The first statement “we protect the land” needs to be kept in mind when considering expanding our infrastructure, including a third lane on Highway 99 as proposed in the long-term options portion of the study. The RMOW does value our relationship with MoTI as the highway link to Whistler is important for everything we do in our community.

#### Goals, Objectives and Policies

Several goals, objectives and policies in Whistler’s OCP are directly relevant to the short, medium, and long-term options described in the Highway Capacity and Safety review. It will be important to keep these policies in mind when reviewing any proposed infrastructure upgrades to ensure that the changes to the highway infrastructure are made in accordance with these policies.

##### 4.1. Goal

**Land use and development are effectively managed to maintain Whistler’s unique sense of place, protect Whistler’s natural environment, provide a high quality of life for residents and provide exceptional experiences for our visitors.**

###### 4.1.1. Objective

**Reinforce and enhance Whistler’s mountain community character.**

###### 4.1.1.3. Policy

Maintain residential *accommodation*, visitor *accommodation*, commercial, light industrial, institutional and community facilities development within the area shown in Schedule A, designated as the WUDCA, and apply the following policies:

- (c) protect unique natural features, scenic views and scenic corridors including mountain slopes, ridgelines, lakefronts, the highway corridor (20 metre buffer) and significant rock outcroppings;

##### 11.1. Goal

**Provide a quality travel experience for all visitors, *employees* and residents, and promote a culture of safety and accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.**

###### 11.1.1. Objective

**Maintain and improve safety on Highway 99 to and from Whistler, and on all roads within Whistler.**

###### 11.1.1.1. Policy

Collaborate with the provincial government to maintain and enhance the safety and reliability of Highway 99 in all areas, including effective snow clearing and removal, access management, *active transportation*, land use, pollution (noise and environmental) and environmental impacts.

#### 11.1.2. Objective

**Continually improve the accessibility of the transportation system.**

##### 11.1.2.2. Policy

Recognizing that Highway 99 is considered a Controlled Access Highway by the Province and a key piece of roadway infrastructure within Whistler, work with the provincial government to improve access to Highway 99 from the local road network, including at unsignalized intersections, in a way that minimizes delays and congestion.

#### 11.1.3. Objective

**Improve the physical environment for everyone using the transportation system.**

##### 11.1.3.1. Policy

Prioritize the preferred modes of transportation in the following order to achieve a balanced transportation system:

- (a) walking;
- (b) cycling;
- (c) mass transit (local transit, highway coaches, smaller shuttle buses) and the movement of goods;
- (d) publicly accessible transportation (ridesharing, shared vehicles, etc.);
- (e) private automobile (high occupancy motor vehicles and leading low-environmental-impact technologies); and
- (f) private automobile (single occupancy motor vehicles, traditional technology).

##### 11.1.3.4. Policy

Collaborate with the provincial government to enhance the character of Highway 99, so that the approach to Whistler is as vibrant and unique as Whistler itself.

#### 11.4.1. Objective

**Give priority to walking, cycling, transit and other preferred modes over the single occupant vehicle and private automobile.**

##### 11.4.1.1. Policy

Work with the provincial government to encourage and support preferred modes of transportation in the Highway 99 corridor.

#### 11.4.2. Objective

**Make public transit affordable, convenient, safe and enjoyable throughout the year.**

##### 11.4.2.2. Policy

Work with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and BC Transit to create opportunities to prioritize transit vehicles over general-purpose traffic.

### **Other Relevant Policies**

Sea to Sky Transit Future Plan - Transit priority on the highway is included in the Transit Future Plan and is one of the short to medium term actions identified in the Preface to the Capacity and Safety Review.

## **BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS**

Budget to begin survey work for the priority intersection improvements already exists in the 2020 capital budget.

The preliminary budget for Project T075 Highway Intersection Upgrades includes \$105,000 in 2021 for feasibility reviews of three intersection upgrades (Whistler Road, the Emerald Estates south entrance, and the Alpine Meadows north entrance).

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION**

Many of the items listed in Chapter 6 of the Highway 99 Capacity and Safety Review were identified in the community engagement related to the development of the OCP and the Sea to Sky Transit Future Plan. Should the feasibility reviews of the four locations develop into detailed designs, more formal community consultation will be included in the project design process.

## **SUMMARY**

With input from RMOW staff, the Highway 99 Capacity and Safety Review, Whistler (Alpha Lake Road / Cheakamus Lake Road to Lorimer Road) – Final Report was prepared by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure. This report includes short, medium, and long-term potential upgrades to Highway 99 through Whistler. It is recommended that Council direct staff to work with MoTI to develop feasibility reviews for short to medium term projects identified in the Final Report.

Respectfully submitted,

Emma Dal Santo  
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