

## A response to the Alaska Highway Corridor project

Submitted by Peter Long, pjl@ Whitehorsewalks.com, May 2015

### Building a walking culture

Considering that almost everyone walks and that walking is generally acknowledged as one of the best exercises, physically, socially and mentally, it's interesting that there should be a need for a special walking viewpoint. But, think of walkers here:

*Since the governance mechanisms of a 3.0 society give power to organized interest groups, they systematically disadvantage all groups that cannot organize as easily because they are too large (e.g., consumers, taxpayers, citizens) or because they do not yet have a voice (future generations).*

*Leading from the Emerging Future:  
From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies*

Taking a walking viewpoint in planning processes is part of maintaining my [whitehorseWalks.com](http://whitehorsewalks.com) website where I promote walking, in part through creating better walking infrastructure. With the highway's 20–30-year vision for vehicles, my goal is to make sure recreational walking is in that vision.

*Healthy communities don't happen by accident. How our buildings, parks, transportation networks are designed, and other elements of the so-called "built environment" [are implemented] can have a profound effect on encouraging or discouraging physical activity.*

*Built Environment refers to all human-made surroundings - the spaces where we live, work and play. The built environment includes tangible structures, such as buildings, streets, parks, businesses, schools, road systems, transportation networks, and other infrastructure.*

*BEAT Built Environment and planning for Active Transportation*

### Pedestrians and highway crossings

I understand that the functional plan is just a sketch, but when I asked a question of the project team around crossing the highway at the Salvation Army by the airport, I received this answer:

*Pedestrian crossing of the highway is not proposed at this location. Pedestrian crossing points will be at*

*either Hillcrest Drive or Two Mile Hill. Access to these locations will be facilitated by the continuation of the trail system each side of the highway*

2.5 km between crossings, and 3.3 km to the South Access pedestrian crossing point! >7000 people live above the airport, 1/4 Whitehorse's population. I was informed that there are specific methods used to determine need for pedestrian crossings.

Understanding that I'm not a transportation specialist, and that highway construction is heavily regulated, I nevertheless looked at 2 project manuals to understand a bit of how one determines potential pedestrian activities. I found:

- *Identify existing and potential (>100m from existing) pedestrian crossing control locations. Longer distances between crossings tend to encourage illegal crossings*
- *Identify non-residential walking trip generators (within 1 km of highway)... based on an average walking time of 20 minutes, which is reasonable for most pedestrians*
- *Define residential zone boundary lines (no greater than 1 km) (Residential zones are created to group all households that will likely access the highway from the same roadway or pathway.)*
- *Reject Origin-Destination (OD) pairs with a distance greater than 1 km, unless the practitioner has reason to consider the generators as an OD pair. (OD) pairs exist between generators (including residential zones) that would likely attract or produce trips between each other and are within the 1 km maximum desired walking distance.*

*Pedestrian System Connectivity Assessment Guide*

I also looked at ways people could more safely cross the highway. From another project manual:

*If the minimum pedestrian and vehicular volumes are not met, assess whether this site provides system connectivity for pedestrians or whether it is on a desire line. In other words, despite the low level of observed demand, would the installation of a pedestrian crossing control device at this location encourage the overall continuity and connectivity of the pedestrian network?*

### Treatment Selection

*...research indicates that raised medians or refuge islands are associated with a lower pedestrian collision rate at multilane sites. This is not the case for medians that are painted but not raised.*

*Raised refuge islands: These are useful tools in situations where pedestrians need to be accommodated across multi-lane roads. These devices are also efficient when pedestrians cannot be accommodated at an intersection and there is a need to provide a mid-block crossing. By placing raised refuge along multi-lane roadways, pedestrians are channelled to better locations, such as where motorists have a better expectation to find pedestrians.*

*Raised refuge islands are particularly beneficial on multi-lane roads where the traffic volumes exceed approximately 10,000 vehicles per day and a traffic signal is not warranted. Raised refuge may be implemented in locations where there is sufficient pedestrian crossing demand and pedestrians show a pattern of difficulty in crossing. The minimum width of these devices is 2 metres.*

*Yukon Supplement to the Pedestrian Crossing Control Guide*

### A look at walking

Just why would people want to cross a major 4-lane highway running through the centre of our city? Here's some of my walker's thoughts on walking!

#### Active transportation or recreational walking?

- **Both are active living:** Active transportation walks are for a purpose like going to work or to a store or for a visit, vs. Recreational walks which can be for sanity or for air or peace or even to walk the dog.
- **Destinations:** Walking for active transportation is not common outside of central neighbourhoods. Few neighbourhoods have a store or business community, and distances to downtown are long.
- **Biking and walking:** Active transportation is often bike-focussed due to distance to downtown and many local non-winter bike users.
- **Paved paths:** Active transportation paves routes — great for strollers, wheelchairs, fragile walkers.

## City's walking realities

- **Of trails, the City says:** "700+ km, mostly unplanned, but order is slowly emerging from the "chaos". Neighbourhood stewardship will lead to better walking, and get more people out walking.
- **5 OCP Parks:** The 2010 OCP designated 5 major city parks that will be a strong core of our community. Trails, neighbourhood access and crossing the highway will be part of these parks.
- **Grass is always greener on the other side:** Neighbourhoods require access to greenspaces, including places across the highway from them.
- **Spread out city:** Often there's hundreds of metres between intersections; many are over 1 km apart.
- **New signalized intersections:** Rural neighbourhoods will be nowhere near a set of traffic lights with a pedestrian crossing.

## Recreational walkers' realities

- **Recreational walking very varied:** Examples are .5–1 hour neighbourhood walks; 1–3 hour morning, afternoon walk/hikes; or day-long 5–6 hour hikes.
- **Walks to destinations:** Walks in nature, to places with views, forests, creeks, ponds, hills, alpine...
- **Choice:** A variety of experiences, such as hiking in different parts of the city, different terrains; can be dependent on weather, conditions like icy trails; on presence of wildlife like bears or moose and calf.
- **Midnight sun:** Long hours of summer daylight allows much later walks and hikes.
- **Daily activity:** Walkers walk in almost any weather.
- **Dog walks:** Dogs like 2-5 walks a day, every day.
- **Paved paths:** Natural trails are easier on feet and joints; the body twists and turns on windy trails.
- **Walking along roads:** People often choose walking in nature than to walking on trails and sidewalks alongside busy roads.
- **Walkers want to feel safe:** More people on trails will lessen fears such as for bears, or for women feeling safe; walkers often walk with friends. Roadside trails can make some feel less afraid.

- **Safe crossings:** Walkers tend to cross the highway where they feel safest, using the most direct path. It can be safer to cross mid-block than at intersections with a lot of turning traffic.
- **Knowing the trails:** Good maps and signage are important; effective waymarking is essential.

## Future walking improvements

Statistics Canada: 'Health Trends - Leisure-time physical activity, moderately active or active' has Yukoners topping the list from 2010-2013.

A sustainable city strives for fairness in resource allocation. Better walking infrastructure is an important way of providing recreational resources for non-sport users. Some of these improvements will affect pedestrian highway crossings:

- **Active living:** All neighbourhoods should have a varied network of 1–7 km local trails. These may need to join across the highway.
- **Schools:** Each should have stewardship over fun walking trails as a basis of experiential learning.
- **Yukon River Corridor Trail:** There's many places where a trail runs along the Yukon River. Linking these trails into a full Yukon River Trail is a goal. This will be a very popular destination.
- **Ball diamond stairs:** A staircase across from Yukon Energy will add a new importance to the Airport Perimeter Trail for Downtown, Riverdale and above-the-airport neighbourhoods.
- **Whistle Bend bridge:** A bridge near Whistle Bend will alleviate conflicts between motorized and non-motorized factions. Crestview residents will love to walk on the east shore of the river.

## Walking tourism is a niche market for the city

*Organizations should diversify their offerings and create new products that appeal to new demographics and meet the needs of travellers from a range of cultural and geographic backgrounds.*

*Canada's Federal Tourism Strategy, Welcoming the World*

Walking tourism is a win-win, stay-another-day community economic development strategy.

Europeans love walking; seniors have curiosity, desire for fitness activities and discretionary money.

Our trails, in a beautiful river valley nestled in the mountains, quality walking infrastructure (both physical and social programming) designed to encourage residents to walk, will attract tourists looking for healthy, self-guided walking holidays.

## WhitehorseWalks.com city trail map

Our wilderness city is large and complex, with mountains, lakes, wetlands, forests, cliffs, rivers—things that making walking great.

Planning can be constrained by being focussed on a specific area or topic. We end up with a patchwork of solutions, missing opportunities or effects just outside the edges or scope of the plan.

To help show walking opportunities, I've been compiling a large, city-wide trail map. By showing the whole area within the city limits, it's easier to understand the possibilities in the bigger picture.

The map uses Google Earth imagery as a base; the imagery can be offset from the trail marking; trail accuracy is approximate. There are many more trails than are shown on the map. Trails are everywhere and braided trails make showing trails hard and getting lost easy.

Some of information on this map comes from the city website, such as its trail booklet, data for streams, wetlands and watersheds, lists of playgrounds, rinks and other facilities; some information is from various local maps and websites; some come from GPSed sets of local trails; and a lot comes from hiking with a GPS. Some mapping is from documents such as the city's zoning bylaw, on-line mapping and planning documents such as active transportation routes and the OCP. Some comes from streetview.

Think of this map as a prototype, a work in progress. It's rough and not complete but does give a sense of the city in relation to where people might live and where they may walk.

# Alaska Highway Corridor Plan

The legend on this page covers the basic map. I've also made a map poster showing specific walking issues around the Highway Corridor Plan overlaid the trail map (see graphic below). My aim is to make highway designers aware that recreational walking has been overlooked.

I numbered the highway intersections using the number of the drawing title used in the project's *Volume 2-Final drawings, Functional Plan for Whitehorse Corridor, Alaska Highway*.

I also attached a companion document I created, *Highway Intersections*, showing what is planned at each of the intersections.

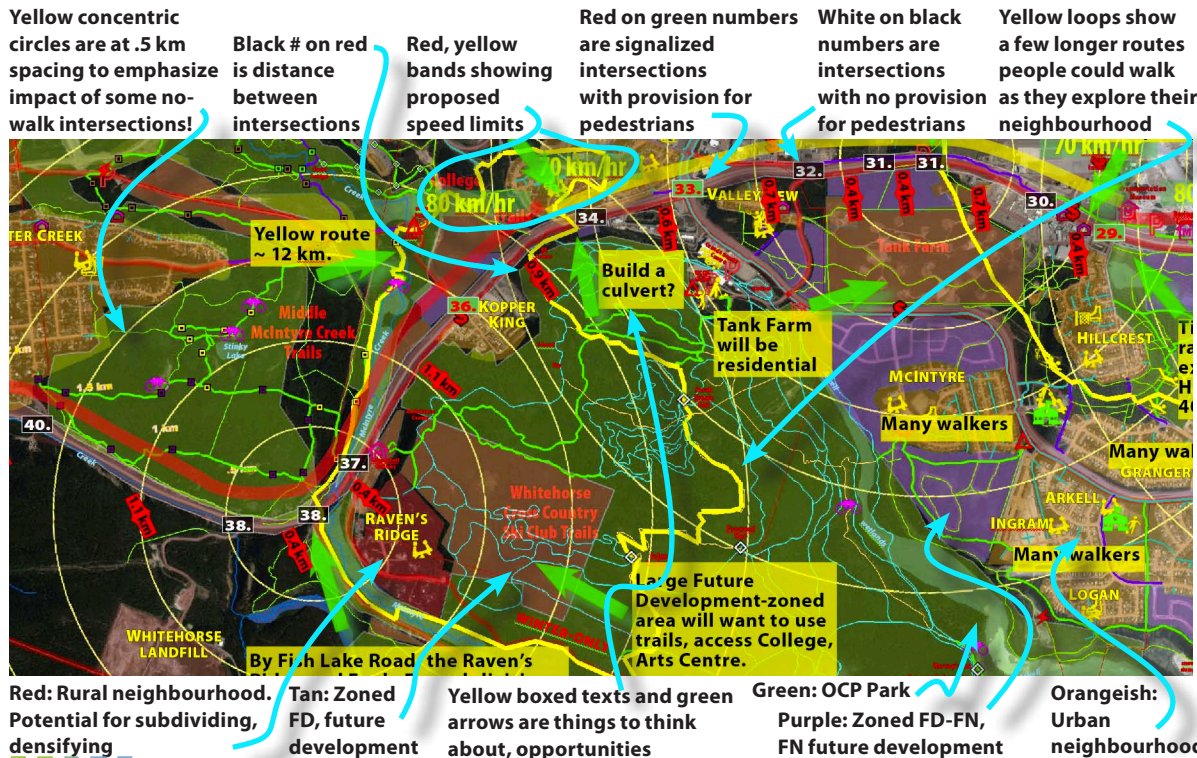
Modern road planning give much importance to community walkability. Many say this corridor plan is overkill. I say that while this is a highway, it's also the central street in our city and should benefit residents. It shouldn't be an impermeable barrier to walkers.

It comes down to the importance the Yukon Government gives to walking and healthy living. I'd hope that governments will not require people to get in their vehicles and drive across the highway, just to go for a walk.

I'm not an engineer, nor a politician, but one solution would be making this an actual divided highway with a raised refuge island throughout, in effect, future-proofing things. Engineers are creative and forward thinking and able to rise to a challenge and may well see other options.

I do expect that we'll see a new, revised draft that recognizes the importance of pedestrians and recreational walking.

Note that the map is best viewed as a PDF on a computer or smartphone. Use the PDF zoom tool to get in close. The map is large so to print it, use a large format, poster-style printer. The map is a separate attachment.



## Legend: Lines

- Wide yellow line is City of Whitehorse boundary
- Thin red lines are power lines
- Thin blue lines and blue areas are streams and wetlands
- Medium black line is White Pass & Yukon Route rail line
- Thick red lines are the motorized routes authorized by City atv and snowmobile by-laws
- Cyan/turquoise lines are winter ski club trails requiring a paid WCCSC pass. When crossing, don't step in the tracks. Trail names are in cyan/turquoise. Free public use at other times of year.
- Thin orange lines are official city trails; however, they are only usable by ski club pass holders for snowshoeing or skiing in winter. Free public use at other times of year.
- Chadburn Lake ski trails are free, community-use, red, blue, green and yellow. Avoid walking in tracks.
- Thick bluish-green lines are paved city trails or sidewalks. Most sidewalks are not marked.
- Medium thick bluish-green lines are public right-of-ways in neighbourhoods.
- Purple lines are trails to be developed or paved by the city. These purple trails are not necessarily routes at present; rather they are for the city and community groups to plan possible future paths and sidewalks.
- Thick and thin green lines are public trails, both official city and others. Thick lines are sometimes official city trails; mostly I use them to highlight distance marking or loop trails. Trail names are in yellow.

## Legend: Icons

- Green: school
- Red:
  - electrical installation
  - mountaintop, high hill
  - city utility (pump houses, reservoirs)
  - float plane docks
  - accommodations
  - commercial
  - parking
  - RV parks
- Pink: (community)
  - performance space, theatre
  - community centre
  - scenic viewpoints; a place of awe!
  - museum
  - visitor information
- Yellow: (recreational)
  - playground
  - outdoor exercise station (purple proposed)
  - beach volleyball
  - rink
  - frisbee golf
  - tennis court
  - tobogganing spot
  - broomball
  - kayaking spots
  - soccer field
  - ball diamond
  - swimming pool, wading pool
  - off-leash dog park
  - basketball court
  - rock climbing
- (Many icons courtesy icons8.com, www.flaticon.com)