



Figure 1. Train Whistle Park, Beausejour

Successfully Integrating Active Transportation into Small Town Plans: The Town of Beausejour Active Transportation Master Plan

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1.0 Introduction

There is a common misconception that active transportation (AT) is only achievable or beneficial in larger urban centres (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, n.d.). “The belief is that low-density communities such as small cities, towns and rural areas will never sustain more than a few walkers and bike riders” (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, n.d., p. 5). This is simply not the case, in fact, in Beausejour, 13.5% of commuters to work use modes of active transportation, compared to 7.7% in Winnipeg (Statistics Canada, 2016). Though, there can be challenges to overcome for AT in small towns, the benefits ensure it to be a worthwhile endeavour for planners to pursue. The *Town of Beausejour Active Transportation Master Plan* can be considered a success story in planning for active transportation in small towns.

“Due to huge increases in vehicle-miles traveled in recent decades, and land-use patterns that ignore walkers and bike riders, there is a pressing need for action to make sure residents can continue to enjoy the benefits of active transportation” (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, n.d., p. 7)

2.0 Background and Context

2.1 Active Transportation

Active transportation (AT) can be defined as any type of human-propelled or human-powered transportation and can be on land or water, at any time of the year (Province of Manitoba, n.d.) AT can include running, walking, cycling, hiking, skating, paddling, snowshoeing, skateboarding, rollerblading, or the use of a standard wheelchair (Province of Manitoba, n.d.) The major benefits of AT are an increase in mobility options, the promotion of active lifestyles, opportunities for social interactions, community livability, opportunities for tourism and the local economy, a reduction in congestion, traffic noise, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and AT can also improve the longevity of road infrastructure (Province of Manitoba, n.d.). Active transportation in small towns may appear different than those of larger urban centres, however unique opportunities arise. AT in small towns can lower traffic volumes and encourage safe and comfortable spaces, retain young people and small families, create jobs, attract business investment, and provide an alternative to public transit (Province of Manitoba, n.d.). AT improvements may also be more easily achieved due to less dense and less busy areas in small towns, and though these areas may cover larger distances, many individual trips are much shorter lending themselves to modes of AT (Province of Manitoba, n.d.).

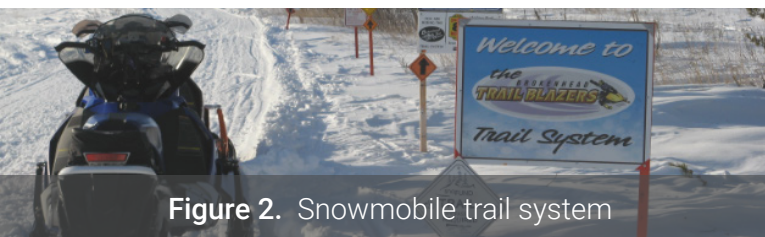


Figure 2. Snowmobile trail system

Successfully integrating AT into small, rural communities can present many challenges. Budget, coordination, support, existing infrastructure, and implementation are key considerations identified by professional collaborators Don Hester and Conor M. Smith. Budget can be a common issue in small towns or rural communities as funds are often limited and earmarked for other projects. Coordination with Manitoba Infrastructure



Figure 3. Historic Rail Trail sign

and Transportation proved to be a significant challenge and may be similar for other small towns where highways run through. The timing and design of proposed improvements would be dependent on provincial highway redesigns, and the support from the province for this. Rural towns like Beausejour often have varied street and sidewalk widths, in addition to irregular utility locations and standards. This would require a variety of approaches to address existing infrastructure to support a cohesive AT network. Lastly, implementation, as the success of an AT Master Plan is dependent on bringing the Plan to life in the community. Conor M. Smith states successful “implementation depends on the long-term institutionalization of a Plan – cross-policy references and integration in other planning initiatives, regular and consistent resource allocation, and most importantly, people”. AT Master Plans such as this one, are often over a longer period, and a lot can change in those years, and if the right mechanisms and framework are not present in the Plan at its inception, it may fall short of its intended goals and outcomes.

2.2 Beausejour

The Town of Beausejour, meaning ‘beautiful stay’ or ‘a good place’ was incorporated as a town in 1912 (Manitoba Historical Society,

2022), and is currently home to 3,307 residents (Town of Beausejour, 2022). Beausejour is located in the Rural Municipality of Brokenhead, roughly 50 minutes northeast of downtown Winnipeg. The Town emerged following the success of railway-led industrial development in the 20th century, most notably due to the success of the Manitoba Glassworks (AECOM, 2018). Now, the Glassworks building serves as a Provincial Heritage Site and one of the many recreation points in town (AECOM, 2018). Beausejour is home to a variety of recreational assets, trails, green spaces, amenities, and an active downtown commercial corridor (AECOM, 2018), making it a prime spot for enhancing active transportation.

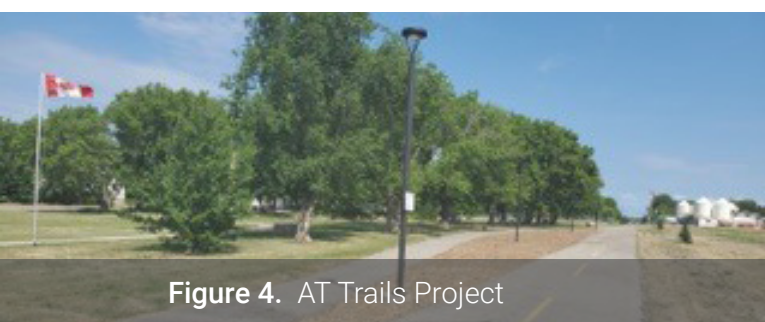


Figure 4. AT Trails Project

The Town of Beausejour has expressed a keen interest and commitment to planning in their town, to address a variety of social, economic, and environmental outcomes (AECOM, 2018). As a direct result of a public engagement campaign conducted by Age-Friendly Manitoba in 2010, both the improvement and development of active transportation infrastructure emerged as a key priority for the community. The major concerns of the residents were “accessibility, all-season use, safety and security, and the provision of a wide range of transportation

options and amenities” (AECOM, 2018, p. 6). Following this campaign, in 2015, the Town and the RM of Brokenhead entered into a Memorandum and Understanding to develop an integrated, borderless recreation system (AECOM, 2018). As a result, the *Recreation Master Plan* was created to further this Memorandum and Understanding. The major suggestion of the *Recreation Master Plan* was to develop a linear system that would connect all parks and other identified recreation assets (AECOM, 2018). Most notably, in Beausejour’s path to active transportation success was the establishment of the Standing Committee on Active Transportation in 2015, which was created to “lead, plan, coordinate, and implement Active Transportation in the community” (AECOM, 2018, p. 6). The committee holds six residents, one council representative, Town staff members and other resident volunteers (AECOM, 2018). The Committee completed its 2017-2019 Strategic Plan in 2016, and identified a vision statement: “a vibrant, resilient community with clean air, healthy citizens, and a safe, accessible, convenient, interconnected Active Transportation system”. A key priority of this plan, and vision, was to conduct an AT study, resources were set aside to hire a planning consultant to establish “a plan that would guide the development and implementation of a comprehensive Active Transportation network with guidance and input from the committee and through public engagement input” (AECOM, 2018, p. 6). This key priority became the *Town of Beausejour Active Transportation Master Plan (ATMP)*, led by planners Don Hester and Conor M. Smith, published in 2018.

3.0 Case Summary

The purpose of the ATMP was to provide recommendations and implementation guidelines for the Active Transportation Committee’s vision for the Town of Beausejour. The committee identified three goals in the pre-planning process to ensure their vision could be achieved:

- Develop a safe, efficient, and comprehensive Active Transportation Network that connects Beausejour’s existing recreation facilities and amenities

- Remove barriers to accessing Active Transportation infrastructure, services, and amenities for those with accessibility needs
- Provide a range of Active Transportation options in all seasons (AECOM, 2018)

Supplementary to these key goals, five objectives were identified:

1. Communicate current and projected socioeconomic conditions as they relate to active transportation development

2. Consult the public and integrate feedback and input into the Plan
3. Develop an active transportation network that connects community origins and destinations efficiently and equitably
4. Define a typology of routes, infrastructure, and amenity options, including capital cost estimates and lifecycle costing considerations, accessibility, and seasonal use considerations
5. Propose a 10-year plan for the staging of development and implementation of the Plan (AECOM, 2018)

It was understood that the participation of the public and stakeholders would be a critical part of ensuring this plan would reflect the interests, values, and desires of the community. The Public Engagement Program included meetings with the AT Committee, a meeting with the Rail Trail residents and landowners, an unveiling event on Canada Day, and an open house.

The Plan was divided into two phases:

Phase 1 was focused on a portion of the Lake Line Railway bed land which was acquired by the Town in 2017. The ATMP included a design of amenities and pathways on the

railway corridor into an AT pathway through the community. The two major components of Phase 1 were the construction of the main AT pathway along the rail line corridor, as well as AT connections to surrounding streets and Train Whistle Park, including asphalt pathways, Tyndall stone barriers and metal bollards (AECOM, 2018). The second was the construction of five pocket parks along the rail line corridor, including bicycle racks, benches, planters, waste bins, concrete and unit paving, and benches (AECOM, 2018).

Phase 2 was broader in nature and centred around recommendations for AT routes, infrastructure and amenity options that could be developed over the next decade. The Plan follows a hub and spoke model of development for the proposed AT Network, with Beausejour’s downtown commercial area and Phase 1 serving as the “hub” and the connected AT infrastructure as the “spokes”. Recommendations for facilities in Beausejour follow guidelines presented in the AT Toolkit in the *Master Plan*. Phase 2 of the Plan was broken down into the proposed route network and facility regime, route options, phasing, and a preliminary cost estimate. The proposed route network and facility regime included recommendations for pedestrian facilities, cycling, mixed-use, programmed facilities,



Figure 5. Phase 1 - Component 2

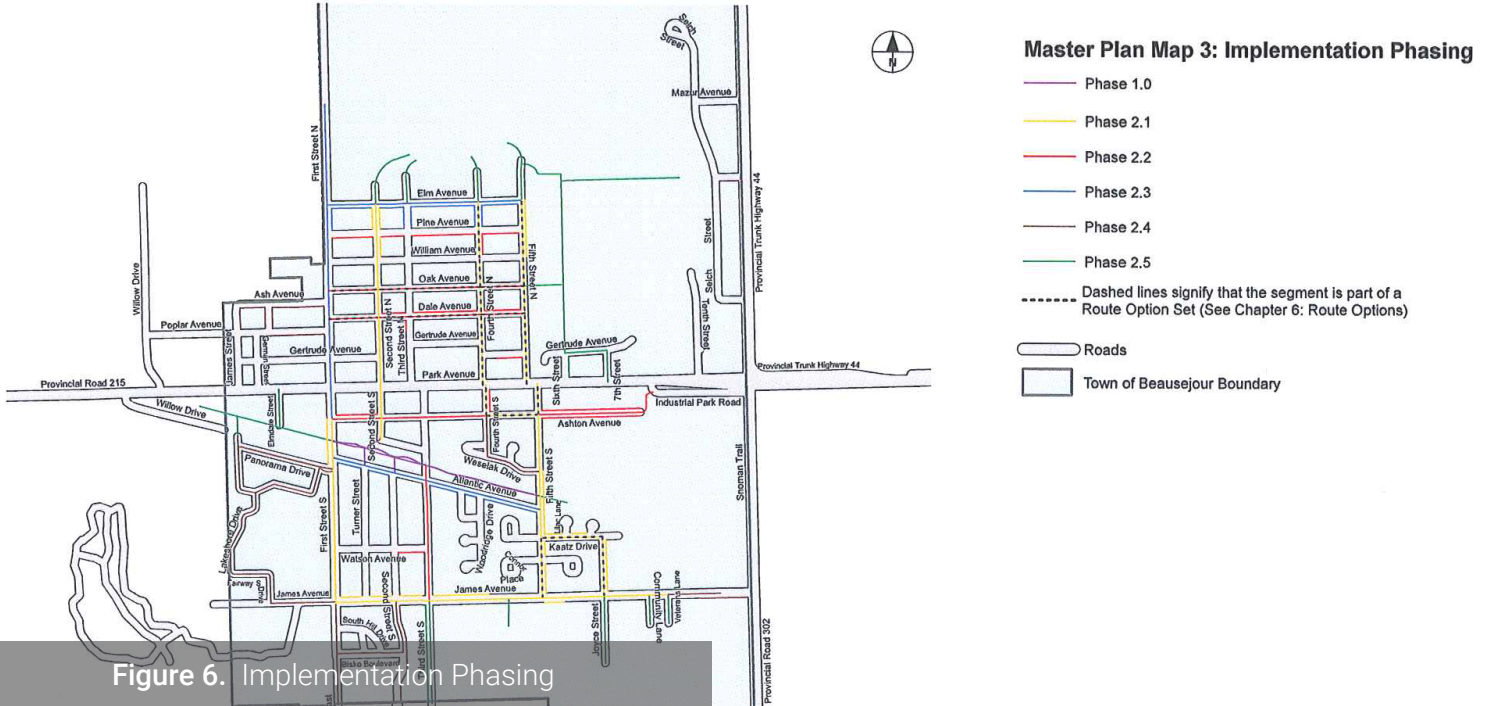


Figure 6. Implementation Phasing

and crossings. While route options presented three route and infrastructure suggestions based on input from the AT Committee, public engagement, and the results of an options

assessment. The preliminary cost estimate outlines a recommendation for successful implementation of the *Master Plan*, categorizing Phase 2 into further sub-components and organizing them from highest to least priority.

4.0 Outcomes

As a result of the *Active Transportation Master Plan*, Phase 1 (section 3) was partially complete at the time of this report being published. A main AT pathway was constructed along the rail line corridor, in combination with AT connections to surrounding streets and Train Whistle Park. These components included asphalt pathways, metal bollards and Tyndall stone barriers. In addition, the second component of Phase

1 has begun with the construction of five pocket parks along the rail line corridor. This component has been named the Trails Project and received funding from the Brokenhead River Community Foundation (Town of Beausejour, n.d.). Selected prairie plants were chosen for the Trails Project due to their hardiness and considerably low maintenance requirements (Town of Beausejour, n.d.).

5.0 Lessons learned

In speaking with Don and Conor, several lessons can be learned from the *Town of Beausejour Active Transportation Master Plan*. Most notably is the impact enlisting a **local champion** can have on the success of an AT plan. The Active Transportation Committee, which was headed by a retired Senior Planner played a large role from the pre-planning stages and now in its implementation. The committee had active support from the Town Council and Town Engineer, as well. Don suggests finding knowledgeable and interested individuals and providing appropriate municipal support could make or break an AT Master Plan such as this one. Conor believes the role of local champions

in the community cannot be overstated, they were a key reason both for commissioning the Plan and for advancing the swift implementation of Phase 1.

The **Public Engagement Program** also emerged as a key to success, as the residents will be the primary users of the proposed AT network in Town. It was a crucial component of developing a plan that would reflect best what the community needed and desired.

As noted earlier, concerns about successful implementation strategies can arise when developing long-term plans; Conor suggests a solution to this would be to ensure a plan is

flexible enough to support implementers and be useful at providing answers outside of the assumptions made when the Plan was written. The AT Toolkit can provide additional resources to be drawn on should the community need to deviate from the Plan.

In addition, the **phased approach** Don and Conor followed allows for efficient budgeting and coordination processes. When phases were categorized according to priority, the next steps are always clear, allowing for smaller

successes over time.

Lastly, Don suggests the importance of **tying an AT Master Plan in with Sustainable Asset Management and emphasizing the benefits AT can bring to the community, particularly for health, wellness, sustainability and climate change mitigation.** Linking active transportation with other important initiatives for communities like the Town of Beausejour can help further integrate goals and objectives into other plans.

6.0 Conclusion

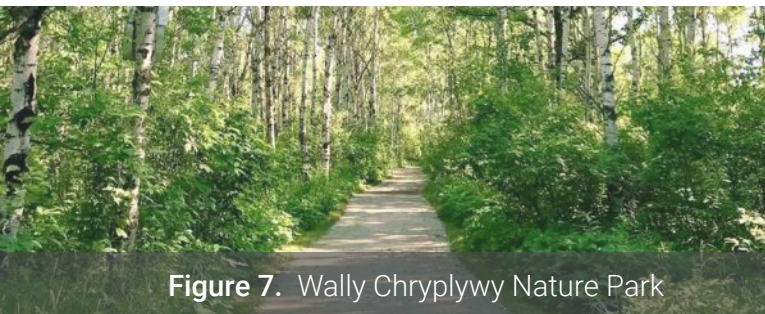


Figure 7. Wally Chryplywy Nature Park

Active transportation is an achievable goal for small towns in Manitoba and beyond. Though several challenges can arise when integrating AT into rural communities, the positive impacts AT can bring are undoubtedly worth the effort. The *Town of Beausejour Active Transportation*

Master Plan, developed by AECOM, specifically Don Hester and Conor M. Smith, provides a unique case study for other small towns to follow. This Master Plan reveals the importance of enlisting local champions and municipal support, creating a meaningful public engagement strategy, flexibility, a phased or incremental approach, and connecting AT with larger motives such as public health and climate mitigation. In recognizing and internalizing these lessons learned, small towns near and far can bring their active transportation goals to life and begin to witness the benefits in their communities.

7.0 References

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