

CASE - IN - POINT

Taking the Pulse of Practice

SPRING 2005

URBAN GREENWAY PLANNING and ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION: The Recent Brandon, Manitoba Experience

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ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION INTRODUCTION

Active transportation is considered any form of human-powered transportation and is important for physical health and environmental benefits. Active transport improves our health, our safety, the health of our environment and the quality of life in our neighbourhoods (Public Health Agency of Canada 2004:1). It is important that North American communities begin to endorse active transportation for these reasons. Support of active transit can include the dedication of routes for cyclists and pedestrians, the safe integration of cyclist, pedestrian and motorized vehicular traffic, provision of bicycle storage and the planning of visually pleasing and inviting streetscapes throughout our communities (PHAC 2004:1). Integrating a network of greenspaces throughout urban and suburban environs and encouraging feedback from citizens, pedestrian and cycling advocacy groups are also noted ways in which a community can endorse active transportation.

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SYNOPSIS

The Downtown Brandon Greenway Planning Study was completed in late 2004 and received a Manitoba Planning Excellence Award at the 2005 Manitoba Planning Conference in Brandon. The study proposes a greenway through downtown Brandon and encourages active transport, environmental awareness and responsibility and beautification of an urban environment.

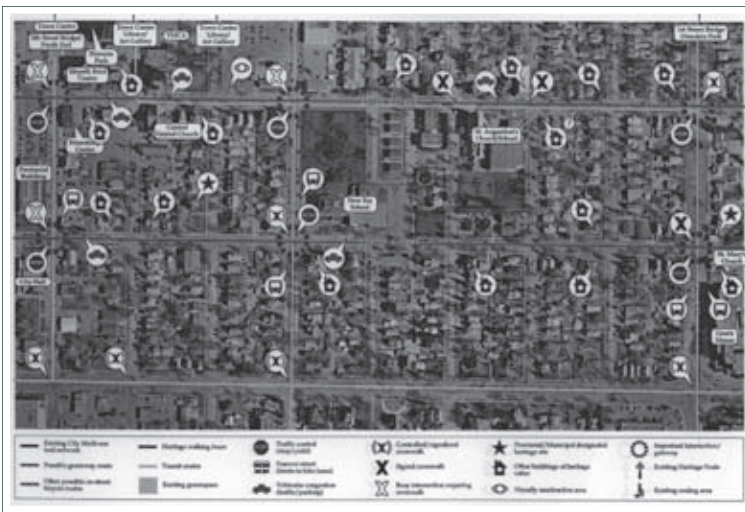


IMAGE CAPTION:
Existing conditions from 9th Street to 1st Street, Brandon.

SOURCE:
BNRC Greenway Project Preliminary Planning Study.

“Brandon’s downtown core neighbourhood is a unique enclave of people from diverse backgrounds set in a context of historic homes and elegant streetscapes. As part of the ongoing renewal of this neighbourhood, a greenway has been envisioned that would extend through the heart of the neighbourhood from Rideau Park in the East End to Coronation Park in the West End. The greenway would be designed not for cars but for pedestrians and cyclists – safe, accessible and sociable parks and streets which embrace the sense of community and foster a pride of place.” (BNRC Greenway Project Preliminary Planning Study)

The greenway study has wide application to other communities interested in the many opportunities and benefits afforded by the potential of greenway development and active transportation. This Case-in-Point’s general interest lies in revitalization strategies, alternative transport and recreation opportunities and ecological consciousness and responsibility within an urban environment. The Study is classified throughout this Case-in-Point in terms of ‘best practice’, as a process template, given its broad interest to planning knowledge and its applicability for other urban centres in Canada.

BACKGROUND (from MB Planning Excellence Awards Submission)

In 2002, the City of Brandon completed a Greenspace Master Plan, to establish a vision for the development and care of the city’s parks, open spaces, walkways and natural areas for the coming ten years. One of the recommendations of the Greenspace Master Plan was to explore the possibility of a greenway through downtown Brandon.

In 2003, the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation (BNRC) engaged Peter Spearey to undertake a planning study to further explore this greenway concept. Working with a steering committee which included representation from the BNRC, City of Brandon Engineering and Parks and Recreation, as well as neighbourhood residents, the study was completed in 2004.

The main objective of this study was to visualize how a greenway might be developed, and the potential scope of design interventions within the existing streetscape. The outcome of the study was to be a graphic tool to facilitate discussions with community stakeholders and possible partners.



IMAGE CAPTION: Existing conditions, 1st Street to Douglas Street, Brandon. SOURCE: BNRC Greenway Project Preliminary Planning Study.

THE ROLES

Several community stakeholders were involved in the study including Laurene Viarobo from the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation (BNRC), Ted Snure from the City of Brandon Engineering Department, Rick Bailey from the City of Brandon Parks and Recreation Department and John Everitt, Garry Miller and Kady Denton representing residents on the Steering Committee.



IMAGE CAPTIONS: Above: Existing pedestrian node, Downtown Brandon. Right: Images of streetscaping and traffic calming measures in similar North American contexts.

SOURCE: BNRC Greenway Project Preliminary Planning Study.

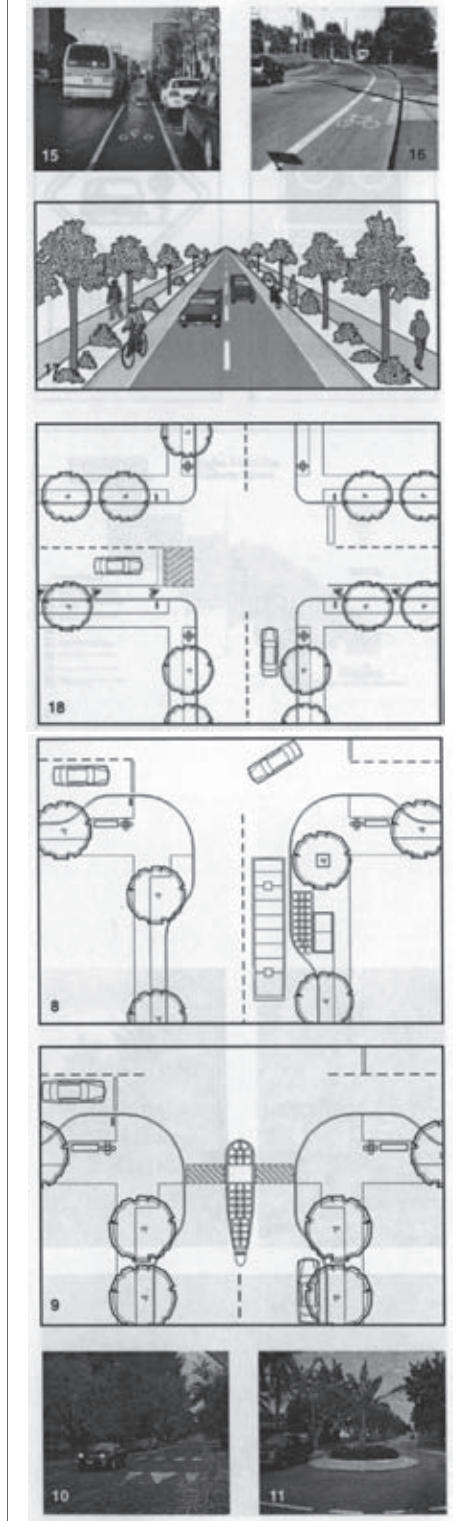
THE PROCESS

The greenway study is composed of three main parts: 1) an analysis of existing conditions and identification of goals and objectives; 2) an identification of planning and design opportunities for a possible greenway; and 3) potential implementation strategies.

This study can be easily utilized as a template for other cities in North America looking to indicate the opportunities for greenways within their urban centres. The Study identifies existing sites in the form of schoolyards, heritage sites, parks, streets, bicycle routes and community centres and develops a strategy for linking and connecting to form a route that has multiple opportunities and is of interest to the whole community. With a purpose of enhancing community and fostering pride, the study seeks social goals through physical planning objectives.

Analysis of Existing Conditions and Identification of Goals and Objectives:

The identification of a preferred greenway route based on two possible routes – Lorne Avenue and Louise Avenue and their existing conditions included: parks and pedestrian nodes, traffic controls, traffic congestion and controlled pedestrian crossings, bus routes and stops, possible bicycle routes



and barriers to bicycle routes, provincial and municipal heritage sites and other significant buildings, natural gateways and visually unattractive areas. Peter notes that the most constraining factor was the ability to accommodate cyclists and pedestrians safely. For example, he cites the location of signalized crosswalks across busy north/south roadways was a factor, as was the volume of automotive use and on-street parking. The result of this component was a series of analytical drawings overlaid on aerial photographs.

The preferred route included portions of both Lorne Avenue and Louise Avenue, links a number of greenspaces and community facilities and makes best use of signalized pedestrian crossings at 18th Street, 6th Street and 1st Street. Peter notes, this preferred route made best use of the opportunities each street offered.

The next task, to identify goals and objectives was based on an understanding of local circumstances, the larger community development goals of the BNRC as well as a study of other communities' greenway projects. The goals and objectives for the greenway in Brandon are:

GOAL: Ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of residents
OBJECTIVE: Increase active transportation including walking, cycling and transit use, create environments which are safe and feel safe, and improve and enhance leisure opportunities.

GOAL: Enhance sense of community
OBJECTIVE: Encourage social interaction and encourage residents to work together to address common problems.

GOAL: Foster sense of pride
OBJECTIVE: Celebrate the unique culture and built heritage of the neighbourhood, beautify the neighbourhood and change negative perceptions of the neighbourhood.

These goals and objectives are wide ranging and can be easily adopted by other cities looking for ways in which to enhance their centres through greenway development and the encouragement of active transit.



IMAGE CAPTIONS: Above: Other North American precedents for urban community spaces. Below: A precedent for traffic calming. SOURCE: BNRC Greenway Project Preliminary Planning Study.



Identification of Planning and Design Opportunities for a Potential Greenway:

The major part of this study identified planning and design opportunities in four areas which could be incorporated into a potential greenway. The intention was not to illustrate specific design concepts, but rather to illustrate to residents, stakeholders and potential partners, using North American precedents, the range of possibilities and their benefits. Peter describes it as, essentially, a best practices review. The opportunities identified within the Study are easily transferable to other North American cities looking to implement urban greenways as an active transportation alternative.

THE PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT: The pedestrian environment of the proposed greenway needs to be a safe, accessible and inviting place, so that people can and want to walk to work or school. Specific initiatives for Brandon included the development of pedestrian nodes along the greenway and the incorporation of traffic calming measurements.

BICYCLE FACILITIES: The streets within the proposed greenway need to be able to safely accommodate both bicycles and cars, so that cycling can be a realistic transportation alternative to the car. Specific initiatives for Brandon included the implementation of bicycle lanes and appropriate bikeway signage.

COMMUNITY GREENSPACE: As with many older communities, the downtown core area suffers from a lack of parks, playgrounds, athletic fields and open spaces. Additional community greenspace development is needed to offer residents the same athletic, recreational and leisure opportunities as those in newer areas of the city. Specific initiatives for Brandon included redevelopment of a schoolyard as a community greenspace, the encouragement of community gardens on vacant lands to beautify and foster a sense of pride in the neighbourhood.



IMAGE CAPTIONS: Top: Precedents for public art installations, like this one in Saskatoon were reviewed in the study. Bottom: Precedents of greenway identification and signage were also reviewed. SOURCE: BNRC Greenway Project Preliminary Planning Study.

THE STREETScape: Streets and sidewalks are critical venues for the life of a neighbourhood to play out. The streetscape needs to not only be functional, but attractive and inviting. But a streetscape is only meaningful if it captures the essence of a place and reflects the character of its people. Specific initiatives for Brandon included the implementation of street furnishings, signage, the development of gateways, a public art program and design standards.

SAFE STREETS: Safety is critical to the health and wellbeing of a neighbourhood, and Brandon's downtown core suffers from the perception that it is unsafe. The planning process for the proposed greenway needs to tackle this problem head on; to address any problems that exist, and to work to change the perception of this neighbourhood for the better. Specific initiatives for Brandon included ensuring the greenway as a safe downtown corridor.

Peter notes that the research for this component was primarily web based and open ended to ensure that all possible opportunities were investigated. The key, he notes was to find connections between things – for example, combining transit stops with traffic calming (i.e.: sidewalk bulges) or including public art as a placemaking and community building exercise. Peter feels that it is this component that makes the project most transferable to other cities in North America looking at similar opportunities.

Potential Implementation Strategies:

The final task of this study illustrated the potential implementation of the greenway project through the use of a conceptual plan. This is a key element to the study. This plan has been developed to illustrate to residents, the public and possible partners what the proposed greenway might be. The issues that need to be addressed in order for the study to become a reality are vital components and are the missing piece in similar studies of its kind.

DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL PLAN: The conceptual plan that is ultimately developed should grow out of the public input process, and be

a firm yet flexible document which articulates a clear vision of a project.

PROJECT PRIORITIES: Priorities need to be defined as: high or immediate, medium or typically within a reasonable amount of time and low or those actions of secondary importance.

POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS: This section identifies types of partnerships that may be possible to fully explore the various planning and design opportunities within the greenway. For Brandon, it is clear that the City and its constituent departments will play a role in any greenway development; other partners were also identified that could safely assume a role in a particular project.

This third step in the Downtown Brandon Greenway Planning Study is imperative in moving forward with the suggested initiatives. Peter notes that the goal of this final component was to illustrate how some of the opportunities identified in the second component could be realized. Peter clarified that the idea was to keep the scope of possible opportunities as wide as possible to act as a 'kit of parts'.

OPPORTUNITIES and LESSONS LEARNED

There remain opportunities for Brandon and other North American cities interested in urban greenways as a mode of active transportation. There remains opportunities for workplaces to endorse active transportation through flexible dress codes, bicycle storage and shower facilities (PHAC 2004). Schools can also endorse active transportation and its benefits by offering cycling and in-line skating skill and safety courses and through working with municipali-

ties to identify safe routes for children while addressing safety and infrastructure barriers (PHAC 2004).

Peter notes using existing sites to determine a greenway route is an excellent opportunity in settings such as Brandon and there are more opportunities for a greenway when one can completely or partially eliminate traffic on the street. This can be accomplished through traffic calming measures such as roundabouts, chokers, diverters, etc., or simply by closing off some blocks and creating park space. In situations

like these, Peter notes that expanded winter uses such as cross country skiing and skating may be possible.

As for the winter season itself, Peter acknowledges that the season was not considered as well as it could have been. There are many opportunities for winter use, not only in terms of varied modes of active transit but opportunities for the consideration of winter city design features – namely, the creation of suncatches and the use of colour to animate the streetscape. As for other missed opportunities, he states, because they

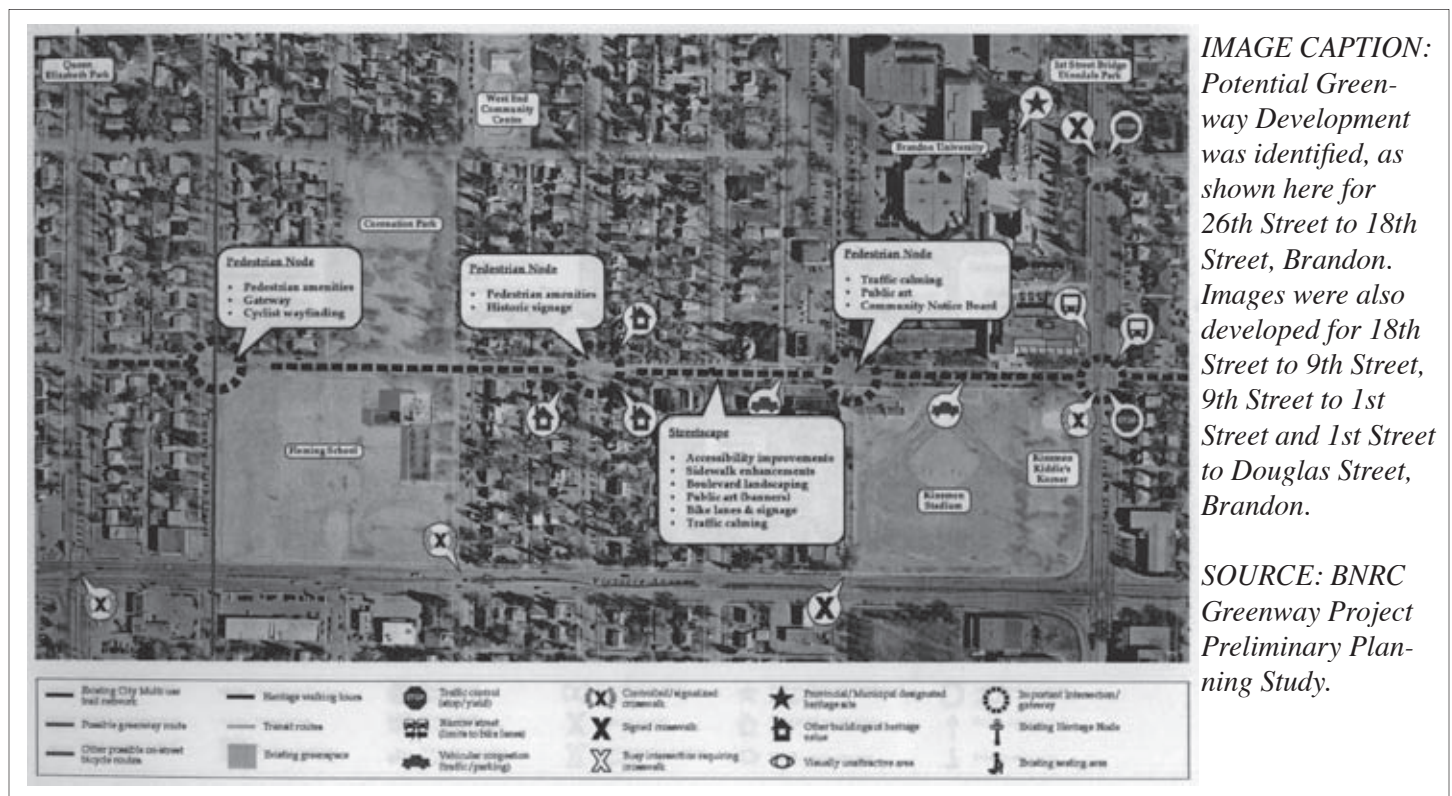


IMAGE CAPTION: Potential Greenway Development was identified, as shown here for 26th Street to 18th Street, Brandon. Images were also developed for 18th Street to 9th Street, 9th Street to 1st Street and 1st Street to Douglas Street, Brandon.

SOURCE: BNRC Greenway Project Preliminary Planning Study.

were aware of the Brandon context, they took a more modest approach. He notes that this is always the practitioner's constant dilemma: balancing the ideal with the practical.

WHAT'S NEXT for BRANDON? (from MB Planning Excellence Awards Submission)

The next step in the project is to use this study as a tool to engage residents, stakeholders and potential partners in dialogue about the greenway and their possible involvement. With the appropriate support in place, initiatives can be undertaken, in a manner carefully prioritized to make best use of resources and address the greatest neighbourhood need.

To capitalize on the immediate opportunity to increase active transportation along the greenway, two projects have been undertaken and are in various stages of development:

Greenway signage has been established to designate the greenway as a route shared by cars and bicycles. This also creates an identifiable and positive image of the route and neighbourhood, to complement future community development initiatives.

Development of educational and

promotional material, including a map/brochure, illustrates this active transportation network, explains the benefits of active transportation and educates drivers and cyclists how to safely share the road.

ABOUT THE COLLABORATOR

Peter Spearey is a graduate of the University of Manitoba: first in 1987 with a Bachelor of Environmental Studies and second with a Masters in Landscape Architecture in 1992. He has been practicing in Brandon since graduating and forming Spearey Environmental. Spearey Environmental has a strong environmental philosophy and encourages active participation from its clients. Mr. Spearey has diversified his business to include site planning and design services, townscaping, graphic arts and design. Just recently, Peter has taken on the position of Supervisor of Parkland Design and Development in the municipality of Wood Buffalo, Fort McMurray, AB.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meagan Henke (B.Env.D. Arch) is a Master's candidate in the Department of City Planning at the University of Manitoba. She has

completed her coursework and is currently working on her thesis, researching winter city design principles, active and alternative transportation and their integration on a downtown Winnipeg site.

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