

DATE OF MEETING June 20, 2016

AUTHORED BY GORDON FOY, MANAGER OF TRANSPORTATION

SUBJECT **E&N TRAIL – DOWNTOWN SOUTH ALIGNMENT STUDY**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To present outcomes from the E&N Trail – Downtown South Alignment and Costing Study and obtain Council's direction for next steps.

### **Recommendation**

That Council endorse the recommended alignment for the E&N Trail between Franklyn Street and Seventh Street, but defer trail construction and releases funding currently allocated to trail construction back to reserves until such time as there is greater certainty on the future of rail.

## **BACKGROUND**

On 2014-MAR-20 Council passed a series of initiatives (see Attachment A) to support the development of the E&N Trail south from Downtown (Franklyn Street) to Seventh Street, a distance of approximately 2km. Due to newer rail safety regulations and constraints within the Downtown, trail construction was anticipated to be significantly more challenging and costly than existing segments of the E&N Trail. To address these challenges, this study was initiated to identify a preferred alignment, preliminary design and estimated cost for the trail. Funding for the study was shared between the City (\$50,000) and the Nanaimo Regional Rail Trail Partnership (\$25,000).

The construction of a multiuse trail adjacent to the E&N Railway through the Downtown presents a series of significant challenges over existing parts of the E&N Trail, including;

- a narrow rail right-of-way - dropping from the typical 100 feet (30.3m) corridor to 50 feet (15.1m) and in some locations as little as 25 feet (7.6m),
- residential and commercial buildings immediately adjacent to the corridor,
- slopes, drainage infrastructure and mature trees within the rail right-of-way, and
- frequent (six) at-grade rail-road crossings.

Integration of the trail into existing at-grade road crossings is particularly challenging in the context of new railway crossing regulations that trigger at-grade road/rail/trail crossing upgrades. These upgrades could cost between \$0.8-1.2 million per crossing.

Acknowledging these challenges, the E&N Trail Downtown South Alignment & Costing Study (see Attachment B) sought to develop a viable and cost efficient trail alignment that would provide a comfortable and attractive user experience, meet rail safety requirements, and support adjacent neighbourhood goals and objectives.

Regular Council Meeting

2016-JUN-20

### Concept Development

Development of the concept started with identification of two technically viable alignment options (see Attachment B – pages 15-16);

- Option A sought to stay along the tracks as much as possible but was more expensive due to additional at-grade crossing upgrades, and
- Option B deviated from the tracks onto the adjacent road network in some areas, avoiding crossings and other costs, but was less direct and included steeper grades.

Both options were brought forward to public consultation in the summer of 2015 including an open house, an online survey, and meetings with community stakeholders and rail representatives.

Feedback received through consultation emphasised trail users' sensitivity to circuitous routing and steep grades. From a practical perspective respondents expressed concerns that if the trail deviated significantly from the rail line, trail users could continue to use the existing informal/illegal trail network along the tracks.

This feedback was used to combine elements from both options into a recommended alignment. Taking advantage of the direct and well graded railway, the proposed alignment (see Attachment B – pages 20-26) runs adjacent to the tracks except for small deviations at Prideaux Street, Franklyn Street and Milton Street; reducing at-grade crossing upgrades from six to three locations.

### Estimated Costs

Using the recommended alignment, a preliminary design and Class "D" cost estimate for the trail was developed, including a 50% allowance for contingency and future design and engineering. Costing included a typical 3m paved trail cross section, trail crossing improvements at road crossings, at-grade railway crossing upgrades, new and relocated drainage infrastructure, retaining walls, lighting where the trail is isolated from the roadway, and allowances for land purchases and landscaping. Based on the concept and assumptions described above, the total estimated cost of the recommended trail concept is \$7.2 million of which 45% of costs are related to upgrading at-grade rail crossings.

Two costs that were included in the cost estimate, but could be potentially refined in the future were also noted, including;

- Lighting (\$850,000) – Recommended for portions of the trail that are isolated from the road network. Cost savings could be achieved through a reduction or elimination of lighting.
- Hecate / Kennedy At-Grade Rail Crossing (\$780,000) – Re-routing of the trail alignment and the conversion of Kennedy Street to one-way westbound (Victoria Road to Hecate Street), may allow the existing at-grade crossing to be retained. Confirming if this is a viable concept would require consultation with the adjacent neighbourhood, detailed design and support from rail.

### Other Considerations

If the trail was phased, the segment between Hecate Street and Fifth Street has been identified as the highest priority segment, due to evidence of higher levels of informal use and the lack of

adjacent road network alternatives. The estimated cost of this segment is just under \$2.0 million, assuming that at-grade crossing upgrades are required at Hecate / Kennedy.

Endorsement of the preferred alignment will ensure the trail alignment is explicitly considered in future development / capital project reviews and potentially create opportunities to construct segments of the trail as part of development / other projects.

As part of Council's March 2014 direction, \$100,000 of Parks DCC Reserve funding and \$300,000 of RDN Parks Reserve funding have been allocated to developing the trail with a target construction year of 2019. The Nanaimo Regional Rail Trail Partnership has also indicated they have up to \$75,000 to contribute to trail development in addition to their contribution to funding this study (\$25,000).

All or part of the alignment may be a good fit for sustainable transportation projects under anticipated federal infrastructure funding. Similar to other senior government funding, projects that have advanced designs and are "shovel-ready" are often better positioned to take advantage of funding opportunities. The findings of this study could support future grant applications.

At the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) Board meeting on 2016-MAR-22 a resolution was carried providing the Island Corridor Foundation (ICF) notice of termination as per Section 11.1 Contribution Agreement, essentially withdrawing RDN funding for rail track upgrades. Also, at the AVICC (Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities) meeting on 2016-APR-8 two resolutions related to the ICF and the future of rail were passed.

If the status of rail was to change such that the railway bed became available for trail development, costs related to at-grade rail crossings would not apply and a portion of costs associated with developing the trail bed, drainage, retaining walls, and property impacts would be reduced. While a no-rail cost estimate was not prepared as part of this study it is anticipated that cost savings would be significant. If changes to the status of rail do occur in the future, reconsideration of the trail alignment should occur at that time.

## **OPTIONS**

1. Option 1 – Endorse the recommended alignment but defer additional trail design / construction until such time as there is more certainty on the future of rail. Release funding allocated to the construction of the trail back to DCC reserves.
  - **Budget Implication:** Funding allocated for this project (Parks DCC Reserve - \$100,000 / RDN - \$300,000) would be returned to reserves.
  - **Political Implication:** Further development of the E&N Trail is a long-term community objective - deferring trail development may intensify the debate about the future of rail.
  - **Other Implications:** Endorsement of the alignment will ensure that future developments and capital projects explicitly consider the alignment. Pedestrians and cyclists will continue to utilize informal / illegal trail networks along the tracks.

2. Option 2 – Endorse the recommended alignment and direct Staff to advance design, public consultation and explore opportunities for funding, including senior government sustainable transportation funding / grants on all or a portion of the trail with objective of initiating construction in 2019.
  - **Budget Implication:** Funding for advancing design will be included in the 2017-2021 Financial Plan. Even with senior government funding it is anticipated that significant local government funding will be required to construct the trail.
  - **Political Implication:** If the trail is constructed, and in the near future the rail is deactivated, efforts could be seen as wasteful.
3. Option 3 – Receive report and provide direction to Staff.
  - **Other Implications:** Future developments and capital projects adjacent to the E&N corridor would only generally consider the future trail. This would potentially result in additional barriers forming in the interim along the trail alignment. Pedestrians and cyclists will continue to utilize informal / illegal trail networks along the tracks.

#### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- The E&N Trail – Downtown South Alignment Study is complete and has identified a recommended alignment for the E&N Trail from Franklyn Street to Seventh Street at an estimated cost of \$7.2 million.
- Given the recent decisions by Local Governments on Vancouver Island, the future of active rail on the E&N railroad is uncertain.
- The largest component of the trail's cost is directly or indirectly related to integrating the trail with an active railroad.
- The City may want to defer the project for a period of time to allow more certainty on the future of rail to be established.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A – Council Minutes – Meeting 2014-MAR-20

Attachment B – E&N Trail Downtown South Alignment & Costing Study Final Report

**Submitted by:**



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Gordon Foy  
Manager, Transportation

**Concurrence by:**



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Geoff Goodall  
Director, Engineering and Public Works

## 4. CORPORATE SERVICES:

### (a) City of Nanaimo 2014-2018 Financial Plan - Decision Package - Projects and Service Level Increases

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#### Councillor Anderson – Proposed Motion

It was moved and seconded that Council:

1. support development of the E&N Trail south from downtown to Seventh Street by 2019;
2. add from General Revenue \$50,000 in 2014 to undertake preliminary design – routing work and provide cost estimates;
3. support the recommendations of the Parks, Recreation & Culture Commission and the Transportation Advisory Committee to allocate \$100,000 from the Trails Capital Budget beginning in 2015, requisite upon:
  - the Nanaimo Region Rail Trail Partnership providing matching or greater funding; and,
  - the Nanaimo Region Rail Trail Partnership and the City of Nanaimo identifying a common priority trail improvement project;
4. apply to the Regional District of Nanaimo Park Acquisition Fund for matching funding;
5. direct Staff to pursue senior government grant opportunities in cooperation with the Nanaimo Region Rail Trail Partnership; and,
6. consider, based on outcomes of the previous motions, utilizing City of Nanaimo General Revenue or exploring opportunities to use Roads Development Cost Charges to complete funding needs.

The motion carried.

*Opposed: Councillors Kipp and McKay*

### (b) Cultural Operating Grant Funding Options

It was moved and seconded that Council:

1. approve an increase in the annual Cultural Operating Grant funding from \$2.30 to \$3.00 per capita over a period of three years, commencing in 2015; and,
2. approve an increase to the Art & Cultural Event Fund by 10 percent annually for 5 years, beginning in 2015.

The motion carried.

*Opposed: Councillors Kipp and McKay*