

**The Corporation of the
City of Sault Ste. Marie**

COUNCIL REPORT

July 14, 2025

TO: Mayor Matthew Shoemaker and Members of City Council
AUTHOR: Jonathan Kircal, Intermediate Planner
DEPARTMENT: Community Development and Enterprise Services
RE: Active Transportation Master Plan

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval of an Active Transportation Plan for the City of Sault Ste. Marie.

Background

The Sault Ste. Marie Cycling Master Plan was approved by City Council on August 27, 2007.

At its August 9, 2021, meeting, Council authorized staff to issue a Request for Proposals to undertake a comprehensive Active Transportation Master Plan study. This was subsequently awarded to WSP consulting firm. The corresponding resolution was as follows:

“Council authorize staff to issue a Request for Proposals to undertake a comprehensive Active Transportation Master Plan study, to a maximum cost of \$150,000 (inclusive of non-recoverable HST), with funding to come from carry over funds from the FutureSSM project.”

Analysis

WSP, a multinational consulting firm with expertise in active transportation planning and engineering, in consultation with City staff, developed the attached Active Transportation Master Plan (ATMP).

Although the development of the ATMP officially started in 2021, the project was temporarily paused midway to allow staff to focus on rapidly changing priorities with respect to housing and land use planning prompted by emerging Provincial legislation and municipal priorities. While this pause delayed the completion of the Plan, it also presented an opportunity to better align active transportation goals with land use planning efforts. This coordination strengthens the effectiveness of the ATMP by ensuring that future infrastructure investments support complete, connected, and walkable communities as envisioned in housing and land use planning objectives.

For an effective active transportation plan, it must be supported by a strong land use plan. By directing a mix of housing, grocery stores, retail, employment, and institutional uses to locate within walkable proximity to one another, as well as to direct intensification towards well served areas of the city (Strategic Growth Areas), land use and housing plans established a framework that makes walking, cycling, and public transit more practical for everyday activities such as going to work, shopping, and other leisure activities. By focusing on how and where growth occurs early in the phase, a foundation that will more effectively support the implementation of active transportation infrastructure is established.

What is an Active Transportation Master Plan?

Active transportation refers to any form of human-powered travel that involves physical activity, such as walking, cycling, skateboarding, and the use of non-electric scooters.

The Active Transportation Master Plan is a long-term strategic plan that outlines the goals, policies, and investments needed to enhance active transportation in the community. While infrastructure is a key component, the Plan also includes strategies to influence culture and behaviour, encouraging broader adoption and long-term sustainability of active transportation.

Objectives of the Plan:

Developing an Active Transportation Master Plan is a strategic step towards improving mobility, sustainability, and overall quality of life. As the city grows and becomes home to a more diverse population, the demand for safe, reliable, and accessible multi-modal transportation options will increase. A well-connected active transportation network not only enhances mobility, but also strengthens the City's appeal, making it a more attractive place for residents, workers, and families to call home.

The four objectives of the Plan are:

1. Create Connectivity:

This objective addresses gaps in the transportation network, such as missing sidewalks, bike routes, pedestrian signals, and multi-use trail connections. It ensures seamless access to key destinations, including schools, parks, shopping areas, and the John Rowsell Hub Trail.

2. Enhance Safety and Accessibility:

The Plan prioritizes safe and comfortable travel for all users, regardless of their mode of transportation. This is achieved through features such as bike lanes, pedestrian crossovers, and traffic calming measures. These improvements create inclusive streets that promote active transportation and improve overall connectivity.

3. Advance Transportation Equity:

Not everyone has access to a car, and many individuals face barriers due to financial limitations, age, or mobility challenges. This objective ensures that all residents have access to safe, reliable, and inclusive transportation options by addressing issues such as difficult intersection crossings, missing curb cuts, and inadequate pedestrian infrastructure.

4. Education and Encouragement:

Promoting a culture of walking and cycling is essential to increasing active transportation use. This objective supports education and awareness initiatives such as cycling safety lessons, promotional events, and campaigns such as the "share-the-road" campaign. These efforts build confidence, encourage participation, and enhance overall transportation safety.

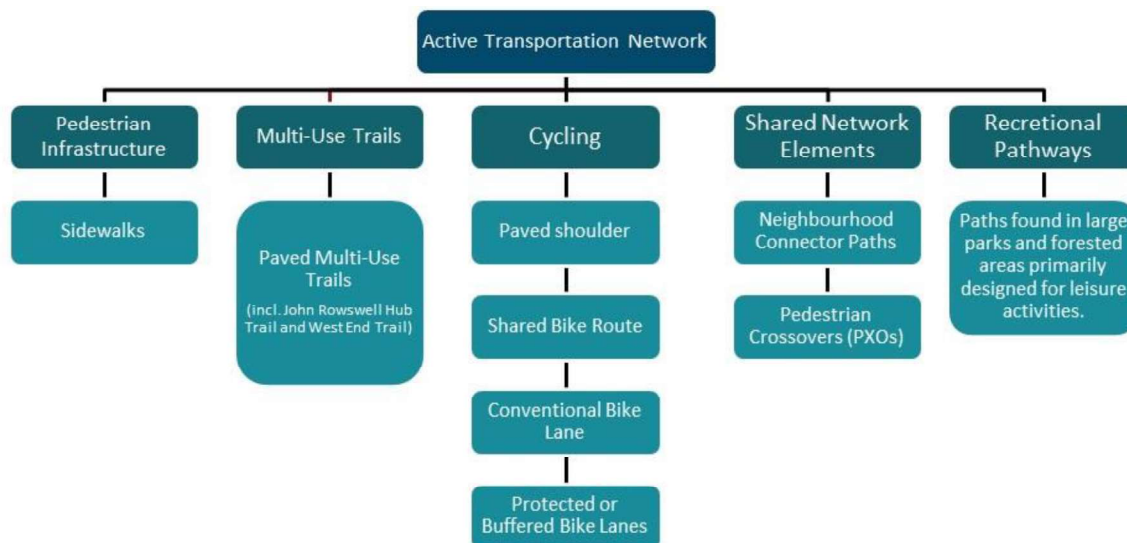
Key Highlights of the Plan:

1. Background Review

The introductory chapters of the Active Transportation Master Plan outline the extensive background research conducted by WSP to inform the recommendations of the Plan. This research includes a review of socio-economic patterns and transportation trends in the city, an assessment of existing active transportation infrastructure, and a jurisdictional scan of policies from municipalities with comparable populations and climates to Sault Ste. Marie.

2. Active Transportation Network Hierarchy

The active transportation network consists of a number of different infrastructure elements that are identified in the Active Transportation Network Hierarchy image below:



The proposed network primarily consists of sidewalks, multi-use trails, cycling lanes, shared network elements, and recreational pathways. A series of maps

have been created to show the current locations of these elements, as well as areas where staff and WSP recommend infrastructure expansion.

It is important to note that the ATMP is not a capital plan but rather a strategic roadmap that outlines a vision for the future of active transportation in the community. Only when the City is ready to proceed with a specific infrastructure project will a comprehensive analysis be conducted to evaluate its overall viability. Depending on the results, modifications to the infrastructure and routes may be necessary. For example, if a road is found to have technical issues that pose significant challenges for the construction of a cycling lane, a nearby parallel road may be considered as an alternative. Both the public and City Council will be kept informed of any changes.

3. West End Hub Trail

One of the more significant proposed investments in the ATMP is the 'West End Hub Trail.' Active transportation infrastructure is currently limited in the west end of the city, and expanding the John Rowsell Hub Trail into this area is a priority.

This proposed trail would run along the perimeter of the urbanized area, utilizing corridors such as Peoples Road, Rossmore Road, Korah Road, the creek network owned by the Conservation Authority, and Wallace Terrace. A series of existing and proposed intervening bike lanes (i.e. 'spokes') will connect the community with this trail system. The City has already begun the first steps to develop this initiative by constructing new multi-use trail segments at the intersection of Peoples Road and Second Line East. A future Hub Trail section is planned to go north along Peoples Road between Second Line and Penno Road this year.

4. Trunk Road Trail

A multi-use trail between the rail line and Trunk Road running between the downtown area and the eastern City limit is under consideration. This trail would provide a continuous, uninterrupted, and safe route for active transportation users, allowing them to better navigate a major transportation corridor that accommodates significant retail and residential areas. Opportunities to address connectivity issues between neighbourhoods and retail establishments on either side of the rail line would also be explored. Staff are in preliminary discussions with the rail authority. This is an example of a long-term strategy due to its complexity and construction costs.

5. Programming and Social Infrastructure

The successful implementation of an ATMP is not just about physical infrastructure, it also involves fostering social infrastructure that raises awareness and interest in active transportation.

Social infrastructure refers to the "soft touch" elements of active transportation, including programs, events, and community partnerships that encourage active transportation. Examples include regularly organized community walks or bike

rides, open street events that temporarily close roads to cars to create space for pedestrians and cyclists, wayfinding maps and signage, bike valets at community events, “bike-to-work” initiatives, and bike shop learning sessions.

A number of such activities already exist in the community due to the efforts of committed community members and organizations that regularly coordinate and host these events. This ‘social infrastructure’ is essential for creating a culture that views active transportation as a legitimate and desirable mode of transportation, integrating it into everyday life.

An Active Transportation Coordinator, as discussed in more detail below, would help coordinate these activities, work with community organizations, and strengthen public engagement to raise the cultural profile of active transportation.

6. Advisory Committee and AT Coordinator

Establishing an Active Transportation Advisory Committee is recommended. Advisory committees are created by City Council and are composed of members of the public with specialized knowledge, supported by staff and one or two Councillors. These committees do not have decision-making powers, but they can provide recommendations to Council and are often influential due to their subject-matter expertise.

Ideally, an advisory committee would include voices from residents, cycling groups, accessibility advocates, and other stakeholders, including different city departments, helping to broaden the city’s perspective on planning and maintaining active transportation infrastructure. Committees also play a key role in institutionalizing community engagement, ensuring that active transportation decisions reflect the needs of users and the community as a whole.

Based on successful models from other cities, advisory committees assist municipal staff and Council by offering recommendations on project prioritization, safety improvements, and funding opportunities while ensuring alignment with broader municipal policies and plans. The committee would also serve as a liaison between the City and the public, gathering feedback and advocating for active transportation initiatives. Additionally, advisory committees monitor progress and evaluate the effectiveness of implemented projects, helping to refine strategies and ensure that active transportation remains a priority for the municipality, and that it is accountable to municipal strategic plans.

Establishing an Active Transportation Coordinator position is also recommended. The coordinator would serve as the central resource for all things related to active transportation. This role would include building partnerships, coordinating events, engaging with the public, supporting education and awareness campaigns, and seeking funding and grant opportunities.

Phasing the Plan

The ATMP outlines a long-term, 30+ year vision that identifies approximately \$145 million in potential capital infrastructure investments across the city. This figure also includes a 45% markup to account for non-construction costs that includes contingency allowances, design and engineering fees, permitting and approvals, and project management and administration expenses. This is an industry standard to ensure that cost estimates are more comprehensive and realistic.

The implementation of the Plan and its individual components/projects will be selective and phased, based on how well the specific item meets the Plan's objectives of positive community impact, network connectivity, accessibility and safety improvements, cost efficiency, feasibility, resource availability, political feasibility, and other criteria of the Plan. High-priority projects will be the focus of early implementation.

Therefore, while the Plan's total cost is \$145 million, the high-priority projects that staff would be focused on represent a cost of \$28.5 million. Two high-priority, flagship projects fall under this \$28.5 million figure – the construction of the West End Hub Trail, and filling in a gap in the Hub Trail along Old Garden River Road, between Northern Avenue and Terrance Avenue. Both projects are multi-year undertakings and represent a combined total of \$18 million for 14 kilometres (8.6 miles) of paved multi-use trails.

Lower and longer-term priority projects are still important and are included in the Plan to ensure the City has a framework in place to be responsive when opportunities arise, such as government grant programs, infrastructure projects and private land developments that provide bundling opportunities. These leveraging opportunities can expand the AT network with minimal additional capital funding from the municipality.

In terms of phasing and prioritization, the Plan distinguishes between 'near-term' and 'long-term' projects rather than outlining rigid timelines. It was intentional to not have an explicit timeframe for the phasing of the plan because there is no consistent, predictable funding source for active transportation infrastructure.

While the ATMP identifies near and long-term priority projects and provides a broad, high-level phasing framework, the more detailed phasing plan will be dependent on budget and funding opportunities being identified.

Funding the Plan

Although the Active Transportation Master Plan is not a formal budget request, approval in principle will support staff budget submissions for both capital and maintenance funding to support active transportation in the community.

Planning staff are recommending two priority projects for early implementation: the West End Hub Trail and the Old Garden River Road Hub Trail gap. The combined cost for these strategic short-term initiatives is estimated at approximately \$18

million. Based on the City's past experience with securing funding, it is anticipated that up to 60% of construction costs may be offset through federal and provincial grants. This would result in a municipal share of approximately \$7.2 million.

To support this investment, as part of this year's budget deliberations, Planning staff will request an annual contribution of \$400,000 over a 20-year time period. This phased approach will allow the City to deliver two high-impact projects while also supporting lower-cost improvements such as new bike lanes, sidewalks, signage, and wayfinding enhancements.

This financial scenario is conceptual, but it does demonstrate the trade-offs between implementation speed and financial impact: faster project completion requires larger annual capital commitments, whereas a longer time horizon allows for smaller, phased capital investments. Further, detailed design and engineering studies for the proposed projects have not yet been carried out. Internal discussions involving Planning, Public Works and Engineering, and Finance are ongoing to develop a more detailed financing and implementation framework.

Staff will continue to actively pursue external funding opportunities to reduce the municipal cost. Where possible, active transportation investments will be coordinated with other planned capital works, such as road reconstructions, to maximize cost efficiencies.

Most infrastructure grant programs and other transfers are based on a cost-sharing model, typically capping their contributions at a percentage of total construction costs; therefore, the availability of readily available municipal funding increases the City's ability to take advantage of grant funding, making City applications more competitive and maximizing overall investment.

The West End Hub Trail and the Old Garden River Road gap also responds to strong public interest and offers the potential to build political momentum for active transportation investments citywide. Advancing these visible, high-impact projects can create a positive foundation for broader implementation of the ATMP.

In addition to capital costs, it must be acknowledged that new infrastructure has long-term maintenance and operation commitments to keep it in a good state of repair, and where applicable, to ensure that they are in a safe condition to use during winter seasons. The Planning Department and Public Works are in ongoing discussions to assess the annual operating impacts associated with the implementation of active transportation infrastructure.

In addition to capital funding, in the future, once funds are assembled to advance a pipeline of projects, City staff will also submit a separate budget request to support the hiring of a full-time Active Transportation Coordinator. This position will be essential to lead the implementation of the ATMP, coordinate interdepartmental work, secure grants, engage the community, and track progress. A dedicated staff

resource, hired at the appropriate time, will ensure that the City has the internal capacity to maintain momentum on active transportation initiatives, programs, infrastructure delivery, and stakeholder collaboration.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of the Plan relies on four pillars:

- Phased capital investments for infrastructure;
- External funding opportunities through federal and provincial governments;
- Maintenance funding to keep infrastructure in a good physical state and to accommodate winter use; and
- Dedicated capacity through an Active Transportation Coordinator and an Active Transportation Advisory Committee.

Public Engagement

A number of engagement activities occurred between fall 2022 to summer 2025. Such activities were advertised in the newspaper and the City's social media accounts, as well as directly emailing identified stakeholders. Such activities included stakeholder meetings with City departments, external agencies, advocacy groups, and non-profits. A series of public information sessions and pop-up information booths were also hosted across the city at key community centres and various community events to raise awareness about the ATMP and collect feedback. The most recent public activities were two information sessions that were specifically hosted prior to submitting this plan to Council to provide the public a final opportunity to comment before being submitted to City Council for approval. These events took place at the John Rhodes and Northern Community Centres on June 3 and 4, 2025. Approximately 30 people attended these events in total. Throughout all engagement efforts, it is estimated that outreach targeted people within the 200-300 range. Further, recent stakeholder meetings with the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council (MYAC) and the Sault Trails Advocacy Committee (STAC) were hosted on June 11 and 24, 2025 respectively.

Public and stakeholder response was overwhelmingly positive. A common theme was that people wanted more opportunities to use active transportation for both recreational and utilitarian purposes, however, due to things such as lack of connectivity and separation from vehicular traffic lanes, many feel that the current network is unsafe and inconvenient. Winter maintenance has also been a recurring theme raised during all public engagement events. Community members noted that during winter seasons, sidewalks, multi-use trails, and bike routes are inaccessible or unsafe, creating barriers to recreational opportunities as well as for those who depend on active transportation infrastructure year-round to get to their destinations. As previously noted, Planning and Public Works are in ongoing discussions about maintenance costs, including winter maintenance. It is recognized that enhanced winter maintenance may require additional equipment, routes, and labour.

Public Works and Engineering Services, the Planning Department, and an active transportation-focused stakeholder group are currently in high-level discussions to develop a strategy for improving winter maintenance of active transportation infrastructure. Based on experience and best practices, WSP has recommended prioritizing a focused network starting with maintaining a small segment of strategically selected routes that are thoroughly cleared of snow during the winter, as opposed to attempting to maintain a larger, City-wide network with mediocre snow clearing service. This approach would emphasize quality over quantity.

Some comments noted that the ATMP should more strongly support what is referred to as ‘transportation demand management’ (TDM). TDM refers to strategies that are aimed at reducing reliance on personal vehicles by influencing travel behaviour through policies such as heightened parking fees, promoting flexible and at-work opportunities, providing incentives to use public transit, establishing carpooling programs, etc. A TDM strategy falls outside the scope of an ATMP and would be best addressed through a separate, city-wide plan. With this being said, TDM is most effective when residents have convenient and safe alternatives to driving throughout the City. Such a foundation is still in the process of being built out; however, it is still discussed in the Plan as a future policy tool.

Some comments were not supportive of the Plan, as it was felt that directing resources to cycling and pedestrian infrastructure is not a good use of municipal resources, as there are fewer AT facility users than vehicles on the road. This perspective overlooks the primary purpose of an ATMP. An ATMP is a long-term strategy to encourage more people to use active transportation by making such infrastructure more convenient and safer. Low pedestrian and cyclist counts relative to motorists may be the result of concerns with the active transportation network rather than a lack of interest. For example, safety, accessibility, and connectivity issues – the very issues that the Plan seeks to address, may be a contributing factor to why active transportation users are not higher. Cities that have made similar investments have seen increases in walking and cycling use once high-quality, connected infrastructure was put in place. Active transportation is also associated with a number of other benefits, such as climate resiliency, creating more walkable neighbourhoods, improved health, and an overall increase in quality of life and community pride.

Despite public and stakeholder engagement officially concluding, staff continue to periodically host pop-up booths at community events to continue engagement and awareness efforts with the public on major projects that the department is involved with. Such engagements are used to further inform policies to keep them updated with community interests.

Financial Implications

While there are no immediate financial implications associated with receiving this report and adopting the accompanying Active Transportation Master Plan, the plan sets the stage for future capital and operating budget requests that will be brought

forward at a later date following its approval. An initial, conceptual approach is discussed in the **Funding the Plan** section of this report. Council can expect a budgetary ask of approximately \$400,000 for consideration within the 2026 budget.

Strategic Plan / Policy Impact / Climate Impact

The ATMP aligns with several focus areas of the City's Corporate Strategic Plan 2024 – 2027. Active transportation supports economic development, quality of life, tourism, and environmental sustainability. It contributes to the City's goal of attracting new businesses and increasing tourism spending (Focus Area 1: Community Development). By providing alternative modes of transportation that are both functional and recreational, the plan promotes sustainable forms of transportation while also investing in a type of recreation infrastructure (Focus Area 2: Quality of Life). By expanding the City's active transportation network, the ATMP helps to further the City's climate goals of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 (Focus Area 3: Infrastructure).

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that Council take the following action:

Resolved that the report of the Intermediate Planner dated July 14, 2025 concerning Active Transportation Master Plan be received and that Council adopt the Plan as a strategic, guiding policy document to inform active transportation investment decisions.

Respectfully submitted,

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