



NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION
COMMISSION DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE

Review of the Capital Pathway Strategic Plan

PUBLIC CONSULTATION REPORT
MAY 27 TO JUNE 17, 2020

Canada

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I. Project description

A. Background

The Capital Pathway is a network of over 220 km of off-road, multi-use pathways. It is a popular discovery route, and a means of accessing a range of destinations through many different landscapes.

Covering such a large and diverse area, the Capital Pathway offers residents and visitors experiences that reflect the natural beauty, cultural heritage and symbolic importance of Canada's Capital Region.

The National Capital Commission (NCC) is currently in the final phase of renewing the strategic plan entitled *Pathway Network for Canada's Capital Region (2006)*. The purpose of the revised plan, entitled *The Capital Pathway Strategic Plan*, will be to provide a framework for future planning and day-to-day management of the Capital Pathway. It will also present an aspirational vision for the multi-use pathway system in Canada's Capital Region.

B. Plan objectives

The main planning objectives of the new Capital Pathway Strategic Plan are as follows:

- Renew the vision.
- Set strategic directions and priorities for the next 10 years.
- Provide management tools.
- Harmonize NCC and municipal planning, where possible.

The new strategic plan will address various topics, including pathway design, new linkage opportunities, user safety, signage and amenities.

C. Planning process

The plan renewal will take place in four stages.

- Phase 1: Assessment, research and analysis of existing conditions (summer–fall 2017)
- Phase 2: Review of vision and strategic directions (winter–spring 2018)
- Phase 3: Drafting of the new strategic plan (summer 2018–winter 2019)
- **Phase 4: Approval of the final plan (summer 2020) — CURRENT PHASE**

II. Public consultation process

A. Overview

The development of the Capital Pathway Strategic Plan has included multiple phases of public consultation. The first, in February 2018, solicited ideas and aspirations related to important themes such as connectivity, safety, resilience, integration and expansion, seasonal

considerations, and user-friendliness. The second, held in June and July 2018, invited participants to provide feedback on the proposed vision, big ideas and strategic directions for the Capital Pathway. In the current and third phase, we made the full draft of *The Capital Pathway Strategic Plan* publicly available and invited members of the public to provide their input on its contents.

Objectives

- Provide participants an opportunity to review the full draft of the plan and take stock of new proposals for the Capital Pathway.
- Integrate public feedback on the draft plan into the final draft that will be submitted to the NCC's Board of Directors for approval.

a. Date and time

May 27 to June 17, 2020

b. Format

Web page and comment box

B. Invitation and promotion

An email invitation was sent using the Public Affairs Division's distribution lists, which include the following stakeholders:

- Interest groups, user groups and environmental groups
- Residents' associations
- Individuals

Messages were also posted on social media (Facebook and Twitter) soliciting the participation of all interested members of the public, and a paid promotional campaign was run on Facebook for the duration of the consultation.

C. Participants

a. Online

The online consultation attracted a total of 6,671 unique page views and 326 comments from members of the public.

b. User groups

In addition to being invited to participate in the online consultation, user groups were consulted separately during small-group meetings that were held ahead of the online consultation.

D. Consultation procedure and tools

a. Web page and comment box

The final phase of public consultation on the planning documents emphasizes transparency and accountability: members of the public are provided the full draft of the plan and a final opportunity to shape its contents before it is submitted to the NCC's Board of Directors for approval. In addition to making the full draft of the plan available online, we created a web page that summarized — in words and images — the most prominent features of the plan, along with the general context in which it was drafted. Public feedback was collected via a comment box on the same page, as well as by email. Interested participants were also invited to review public consultation reports published as part of previous phases of engagement.

At the end of the three-week consultation period, all comments were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, read by an analyst and assigned a series of tags corresponding to the type of feedback provided. This permitted the NCC to identify patterns and to more effectively summarize public input. In addition to the analysis conducted by the Public Consultations team, all raw comments were shared with the project team.

III. Public consultation highlights

A thorough analysis of the comments submitted to the NCC as part of this final stage of public consultation revealed the following trends.

- Reactions to the draft plan were positive. A clear majority of the comments expressed satisfaction with the plan and with specific proposals.
- Few participants were critical of the plan. Instead, most participants used this opportunity to stress the importance of specific initiatives near and dear to them, highlight existing challenges, and make recommendations as to how the NCC could best move forward with the enhancement of the Capital Pathway.
- The elements of the plan that attracted the most positive feedback:
 - separating pedestrians and cyclists, and widening the pathways in high-traffic areas
 - improving the quality and comfort of the outdoor winter experience
 - creating new links within and along the border of the existing network, and harmonizing the regional active mobility network.
- Ideas on how to improve the Capital Pathway tended to focus on ways to build upon and extend the plan's proposals, with a particular emphasis on safety, user experience and environmental considerations.

IV. Analysis of results and main comments received

A. Safety

Issues and experiences related to safety loomed large in much of the feedback provided by participants. These comments centred primarily on interactions between different types of users of the Capital Pathway, and with their exposure to motorized vehicles. As in previous rounds of public consultation, participants shared experiences of feeling unsafe or apprehensive along various parts of the pathway. The proposals to separate pedestrians and cyclists and to widen the pathway in high-traffic areas were thus greeted with significant enthusiasm. Many participants viewed this approach as being of paramount importance in improving the overall user experience of the Capital Pathway.

A number of participants suggested specific areas in which to make separation and widening a priority. Others encouraged the NCC to convert certain roadways — such as the Queen Elizabeth Driveway — to pathways, or to reclaim space currently occupied by vehicle lanes. Several participants praised ongoing pilot projects of this kind, and the proposals to separate and widen pathways, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The topic of bridges and intersections with roadways also attracted a number of comments geared toward improving safety for pathway users. Recommendations were various, largely specific to a particular location, and included raised crossings, cross-rides, four-way stops, distancing pathway intersections from road intersections, underpasses, bike boxes, protective barriers and the addition of pedestrian/cycling bridges at various locations. Participants also called attention to pathway sections that need repairs and maintenance.

Other participants approached safety from a rules-based perspective. A number stressed the importance of signage and user education to effectively communicate rules and expected behaviour. Others advocated increased enforcement of pathway rules. There were mixed feelings among a small group of participants about some of the proposed guidelines, with some supporting the use of bells to signal passing and others arguing that the safest way for pedestrians and cyclists to share the pathway is for pedestrians to walk on the left-hand side facing oncoming cyclists.

Lighting was another issue that participants approached from the perspective of safety. Several participants expressed their approval of proposed plans to improve lighting along the pathway, highlighting areas such as tunnels and poorly lit segments that they felt are currently unsafe to travel at night. Some cautioned against the use of lights that are too powerful, warning that they could blind users and therefore reduce safety.

Finally, several participants opposed allowing motorized vehicles on the pathways, including scooters and skateboards. A few of these participants were more hesitant

about e-bikes, acknowledging that these should be treated differently from other motorized vehicles. Some participants noted that individuals with mobility challenges should be exempted from rules that ban or place limits on the use of electric means of transportation on the pathways.

B. Network consolidation

The addition of pathway segments that create new links within and along the border of the existing network were cheered by many participants. A number of participants indicated which new segments they were most excited about, with some developing a case for making these additions a priority. Others suggested numerous routes and connections not included in the plan. Some participants expressed interest in having the Capital Pathway extend outward and provide better access to the existing network from such surrounding areas as Orléans, Barrhaven, Kanata, Constance Bay, Masson-Angers, Chelsea, Buckingham, Manotick and even Montréal.

A small number of participants related difficulties reading the maps included in the draft plan, which limited their ability to understand the proposals and provide feedback.

C. Winter use

Many participants enthusiastically welcomed the proposed procedures to improve the quality and comfort of the outdoor winter experience. A number shared their appreciation for the snow clearing done this past winter, and hoped that these types of efforts would be sustained and expanded to other pathway segments. Some participants identified particular pathways as priorities for snow clearing. Others asked that the NCC provide more groomed trails for cross-country skiing in various areas. In a similar spirit, several participants encouraged the NCC to continue supporting local organizations that provide winter recreational services to pathway users.

A small number of participants were concerned about salt use in winter pathway maintenance, both because it potentially creates puddles that can then freeze, and because of potential harm to ecologically sensitive areas.

D. The environment

Like safety, environmental considerations were approached by participants from different perspectives. Resilience was top of mind on this front for several participants, who welcomed the plan's provisions to address flooding and pooling. Others stressed that the natural surroundings of the pathway should be protected. Some participants recommended enhancing the biodiversity of the areas along the pathway, and others suggested increasing the canopy cover to provide shade and respite from the heat for

users. One participant, however, noted that fallen leaves can negatively impact certain recreational activities, and argued that it would therefore be best if deciduous trees were set back from the pathway. A few participants advocated the use of environmentally friendly materials in any future construction, and for lighting options that minimized negative effects on wildlife.

E. Miscellaneous

Certain topics were raised by more than one participant, but were too disparate to be grouped under a broad thematic heading. These are briefly summarized here.

- Several participants urged the NCC to continue collaborating with municipalities and to encourage them to make upgrades to their own pathway infrastructure.
- Several participants stressed the importance of access to basic amenities such as washrooms, drinking fountains and garbage bins along the Capital Pathway.
- Some participants made recommendations as to how the presence of dogs on the pathway could be better managed.
- Some participants advocated for increased accessibility of pathway facilities and adjacent infrastructure. Among the requests made by these participants were wider paths, accessible parking and accessible crossings of the Rideau Canal locks.
- A few participants were split about paving: some wanted more segments to be paved, while others preferred gravel or soft and permeable paving because this is more comfortable for joggers.

F. Sample comments

The following table presents some examples of comments made by participants during this final round of consultation.

Topic	Sample comment
Safety	The more separation the better, especially in parts of the pathway that intersect with and run through neighbourhoods. It is wonderful that people can bike commute to work and ride quickly for exercise, but this can be dangerous when they share the path with children, those with mobility issues and anyone who just wants to enjoy a stroll. More education and signage is essential.

Many cyclists don't have a way of knowing their speed, so including radar speed signs in trouble spots would be great. And there needs to be options for enforcement where issues continually arise.

Awesome NCC is considering/planning all these. Definitely wider pathways or separated pathways are required to ensure they are enjoyed by as many individuals as possible to maintain health through recreation and maintain safety. For years I have thought they are not wide enough, especially after seeing the recreational paths in Finland, which are at least twice the width, if not more.

I only wonder if, given the success of the Queen Elizabeth Driveway opening to active transportation during COVID-19, future reallocation of parkways can be at least mentioned as a strategic consideration. While these aren't "pathways," QED could be viewed as one right now. Even a brief section saying it's an opportunity to be examined, with continuing pilots, evaluated for feasibility, etc. would be worthwhile.

Sounds great. Maybe consider lighting along the SJAM paths, because it is both very dark in many places AND the proximity to the car lanes mean that I am often blinded by the headlights of approaching cars.

Please do not allow motorized scooters on the pathways. They travel too fast and will be abandoned at inopportune locations and become an eyesore.

Network consolidation

This is fantastic! Excellent balance of user needs, resilience and environmental mindfulness. Both the proposed plans and the directions and strategies exceeded my expectations. As a resident of Lowertown, the proposed segment between Major's Hill Park and the Rideau River would be a valuable link and bring users to some of the nicest parts and views of our neighbourhood.

I live in Constance Bay. I see a lot of cyclists on the roads in the area, especially on weekends. Would be great to expand the bike paths to link with this area. I'm sure a lot more people from the urban areas would enjoy it as well.

The links to and from the Prescott-Russell Trail in the Greenbelt Pathway East need to be researched — as the route proposed from Tauvette Park is somewhat convoluted, building a bridge over the small creek and ravine would provide for a more direct routing and the link at the western end of the Trail needs [to be] reassessed, as it would enter onto a VIA Rail spur line that is still used. The NCC and City of Ottawa have conducted a study on the use of an existing informal walking trail, but no recommendations have emerged.

Winter use

Please consider winter maintaining as much of network as possible for bike commuting. Thank you.

Thank you for clearing the snow from the bike paths (and bridges) leading to Ottawa during the winter. Anything that can be done to increase cleared areas would be appreciated, like the bike path

along the Lac-des-Fées Parkway, from Gamelin to Taché, especially.]

More groomed x-country skiing please. That has been life changing for me and would like SJAM extended etc.

I believe the NCC should provide greater support (financially and with resources) to the community groups that have sprung up to create winter trails for their neighbourhoods. I was part of the Britannia Winter Trail Association this past season, and we will need continuing support from the NCC and the City of Ottawa to continue and expand this initiative.

The environment

More flowers, plants, grasses along the paths. Replace dead trees, plant new trees to replace future ones that [are] starting to get old and tired.

Emphasis of taking into account flooding is also welcome, as flooded pathways are not usable, flooding can cause damage that is better prevented and, importantly, please remember that the pathway network also serves as part of the community flood control barrier system, and so it is important to consider building pathways with enough elevation to protect from being overtopped by floodwaters, where applicable.

I particularly like the idea of expanding the winter trail use in the urban areas, preserving green corridors, and the general smart designs. Without this type of planning, communities don't flourish and it becomes a depressing urban wasteland, and we would lose our connection with our basic essentials of

life and our need to stay connected with nature.

I would like to see more benches placed along the pathways and more benches that are under shade trees. It seems to me that most of the current NCC benches are placed directly out in the hot sun. On a hot summer day, I always note that these benches are typically unused, while the few benches that are situated under nice shade trees are always occupied. People need relief from the sun and the heat when they are using the pathways!

Miscellaneous

Encourage the City of Ottawa and Ville de Gatineau to create bike paths between the NCC pathways. For example, in Hull, between the Lac-des-Fées Pathway and the one along the river, there should be a path providing a direct connection.]

Ensure amenities are available throughout (garbage cans, toilets, etc.)

More signage and enforcement about dogs being on-leash please, especially in the Mud Lake and Dows Lake areas.

I am mostly concerned that the statement in your document “Pathway amenities should use natural materials and colours that blend into and complement their surroundings.” To me that means NOT paving paths. Pavement is very hard on joints and not conducive to “comfortable” use at all. Certainly cyclists like it, but it is not good for walkers or runners. I am one of a number of people I know who use the paths daily, but can NOT run on pavement. Non-paved pathways are a much more healthy choice.

There is also a high need for an area with designated accessible parking around the Hiawatha area. More families and individuals from Orléans and Cumberland are likely to utilize the path if parking was easier and accessible to all abilities. Thank you.

V. Integration of results

The results of the public consultation have been reviewed along with feedback from NCC staff and external stakeholders. Adjustments and additions will be made to the plan's text and graphics to incorporate suggestions and improve the overall clarity of the plan.

In some instances, comments were focused on specific locations or detailed situations that fall outside the high-level scope of the Capital Pathway Strategic Plan. In most instances, these comments were in keeping with the strategic directions and guidelines of the plan. These detailed comments will be retained and considered to inform the subsequent Implementation Plan and/or specific projects and improvements along the Capital Pathway.

VI. Next steps

- Final edits (July–September 2020)
- Submission to the NCC Board of Directors for approval (October 2020)
- Implementation Plan to prioritize and execute the plan's actions (2020–2021)