

June 28, 2020 Sustainable Gabriola Update:

Ferry Hill Pedestrian and Bicycle Pathway

Why We Care:

At the Mar 08, 2020 meeting of *Gabriola Talks* at the Community Hall, a committee including Bob Andrew, Ivan Bulic, Tom Cameron, Scott Colbourne, Steve Earle, Tobi Elliott, Chris Straw and Fay Weller was asked to explore transportation issues that could address impacts of climate change on Gabriola.

The committee meet by Zoom on March 23, and agreed that a dedicated and safe pedestrian and bicycle pathway between the Village and the Ferry Terminal would encourage more Gabriola residents and visitors to walk or cycle to and from the ferry, thus decreasing vehicle emissions and congestion.

Current access to the terminal does not separate pedestrians and bicycles from motorized vehicles. There are no marked crosswalks or adequate signage directing pedestrian traffic in the terminal area, nor are there sidewalks along the south side of North Rd where pedestrians and cyclists walk to the Village with their backs to oncoming vehicles unloading from the ferry. Nor are there street lights along that section of North Rd, making pedestrian visibility particularly difficult at night and in the winter season.

The committee decided that a dedicated pedestrian and bicycle pathway running approximately .45 kms from the intersection of North Rd and Taylor Bay Rd (outside the area included by BC Ferries in their plans for the redevelopment of the Descanso Bay Ferry Terminal) along North Rd up “Ferry Hill” to the terminus of the planned Village Way Trail at the junction of North Rd and South Rd should be included in any plans considered by the RDN, MOTI and BC Ferries regarding pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle traffic to and from the BC Ferries Terminal at Descanso Bay.

Genesis of the RDN Village Way Trail:

Between 2012 and 2014, a number of community meetings, an RDN hosted “open house” and a series of planning meetings between RDN, MOTI and Islands Trust were organized in response to requests from Gabriola residents for safe and accessible pedestrian, bicycle and mobility-vehicle pathways in the Village area.

At the time many ideas, proposals, visions and iterations of pedestrian and bicycle pathways were discussed including a continuous pedestrian and bicycle path from the Village to the Descanso Bay BC Ferries Terminal as the foot of North Rd.

Howard Houle, at that time RDN Director, recalled that “a presentation was made to the RDN Board asking that a pedestrian and cycling pathway on Ferry Hill be included in the plans for the Village Trail.”

The RDN decided not to include Ferry Hill in its subsequent Village Way Trail planning process.

In 2014, the RDN developed initial plans for a 2m wide Village Way Trail stretching 1.5 kms along the north side of North Rd from Tin Can Alley to the junction of North Rd and South Rd, at the Post Office. The Village Way Trail was designed to accommodate pedestrians and mobility vehicles, with the adjoining road shoulder being repaved for cyclists.

The plan was further revised in 2015 and 2016, and initially budgeted at approximately \$1.1M.

Current Village Way Trail Process:

On Mar 25, 2020, current RDN Director Vanessa Craig reported that “*the Village Path project is being organized through the RDN Parks department. At the latest update I heard the final plans were still with MOTI for final approval. Before the COVID-19 situation the goal was to build the pathway this year – likely starting in the fall.*”

Craig added that “*Although I agree that a connection to the ferry terminal is important, at this time the path is planned to extend between Tin Can Alley and the intersection of north/south roads. The connection to the ferry is not included within the current engineering plans or the budget.*”

On Apr 02, 2020, RDN Planner Yann Gagnon said the Village Way Trail “*project is projected to begin in Fall 2020, but might be delayed due to Covid-19.*”

As to plans for future extensions of the Village Way Trail beyond the Post Office, Yann said “*not at this time.*”

On June 24, 2020, the RDN announced that it had reached an agreement with MOTI calling for tenders for construction of the Village Way Trail to be submitted by July 08. The tender is estimated at \$1,2M.

BC Ferries Terminal Redevelopment:

In March, 2019, BC Ferries approved the *Descanso Bay Gabriola Island Terminal Development Plan*

<https://www.bcferrries.com/files/AboutBCF/publicconsultation/terminal-development/201903-gabriola-tdp.pdf>.

The *Plan* sets out the long term vision for future development of the terminal for the next 25 years.

The *Plan* also identifies a number of key issues regarding pedestrian and bicycle access to the terminal as outlined in the below excerpts:

“Section 2.2 - Site Context:

At the terminal itself there are no pedestrian facilities, except for a barrier-separated walkway and waiting area between the parking lot and the terminal ramp. Outside of the terminal area there are generally no dedicated pedestrian or cycling facilities (or even shoulders that could be used), and thus these road users share the road with motorists.

Section 7 – Transportation and Servicing:

7.1 – Land Transportation Policies:

k) The creation of an off-road bicycle and pedestrian trail along Gabriola’s busiest traffic corridor from the ferry hill to Tin Can Alley should be considered when land use decisions, rezonings, subdivisions, road resurfacing or other development occurs along this route.

Section 3.3 - Key Issues and Opportunities:

The TDP has been informed by community and BC Ferries staff feedback. (Among) the key issues and opportunities identified are as follows:

- *No formalized pick-up drop-off areas resulting in a congested and haphazard area at and near the terminal during unloading and loading periods*
- *Inadequate pedestrian and cyclists facilities for those customers arriving and departing the terminal*

Problem #2: Pedestrian and Cyclist Accommodation:

There are no pedestrian and cycling facilities. It is expected that as traffic volumes increase to and from the Island, the level of exposure for vulnerable road users (e.g., pedestrians and cyclists) will increase. While on-street parking and ferry queues take up much of the off-road space, cyclists and pedestrians are travelling on the road and amongst traffic with uncontrolled and unpredictable movement. Observations included pedestrians crossing at multiple points along the road. Due to the terminal’s proximity to downtown Nanaimo, the walking and cycling demand at this terminal is significant.

Safety and Security:

*Improve traffic layout adjacent to the terminal to improve road safety at the terminal
Incorporate pedestrian and cycling facilities to reduce conflicts between users at exit of terminal.*

Key features of TDP:

- *New sidewalks for improved foot passenger / pedestrian safety and accessibility of all ages and abilities.*

Current Status of Gabriola TDP:

BC Ferries managers met with the Gabriola Ferry Advisory Committee in June, 2020. At that time BC Ferries Communications Manager Darin Guenette said that Covid19 related impacts on BC Ferries has put capital projects including the Gabriola Terminal Development Plan on indefinite hold.

Guenette added that there are no timelines for terminal development completion.

BC Motor Vehicle Act [RSBC 1996] Chapter 318:

Definitions

1. In this Act: “**highway**” includes:

(b) every road, street, lane or right of way designed or intended for or used by the general public for the passage of vehicles;

Section 182: Pedestrian walking along highway.

(1) If there is a sidewalk that is reasonably passable on either or both sides of a highway, a pedestrian must not walk on a roadway.

(2) If there is no sidewalk, a pedestrian walking along or on a highway must walk only on the extreme left side of the roadway or the shoulder of the highway, facing traffic approaching from the opposite direction.

Gabriola OCP (Bylaw No 166),

Section 7.1 - *The MOTI-Islands Trust agreement includes provision for the designation of scenic/heritage roads and bicycle routes in the Trust Area. A bicycle route plan allows for the adjustment of shoulder width standards when roads are upgraded by MOTI.*

3. To support alternative transportation initiatives that reduce dependency on private automobile use and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including, but not limited to, public transit, car stops, neighbourhood zero emission vehicles, car shares, bicycle routes, and walking trails that link population to services;

4. To provide a network of bicycle routes and ensure island roads are able to accommodate cycling safely;

5. To encourage the provision of a network of public pathways island-wide and safe pedestrian access along the Island’s main roadways;

June 28, Sustainable Gabriola Meeting Recommendations:

The Meeting discussed the above update and recommended the below listed items as possible further actions to consider:

1) Create a multi level group including RDN, MOTI and BC Ferries to co-ordinate planning for a Ferry Hill pathway.

2) Meet with RDN Director Craig and prepare a presentation to the RDN Board.

3) Engage a planning professional (academic, engineer, traffic safety, police, first responder) to prepare a report on the current hazards facing pedestrians and cyclists on Ferry Hill. The report could accompany any presentations to RDN, MOTI and BC Ferries.

4) Obtain letters and statements of support from current and previous elected officials including RDN Directors, MLAs, Island Trustees, and those involved in safety and health on Gabriola including RCMP, BC Ambulance, GFPID Board and School Trustees.

5) Create an island-wide petition in support of a dedicated pedestrian-bicycle path on Ferry Hill.