

Proposal for Interim Winter Maintenance of Hamilton Blvd & Hillcrest Connector Multi-Use Trails

Presented by Whitehorse Urban Cycling Coalition and Cycling Association of Yukon
With support of Klondike Snowmobile Association

Context

In 2019 City of Whitehorse declared a Climate Change Emergency. The largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in Whitehorse is from local mobility within the City (Yukon Government, 2023). According to the City's Sustainability Plan monitoring, the City is not on track with respect to its climate goals, and these goals are at risk with little to no progress.

For over 5 years, citizens have been pleading with the City to provide year-round winter maintenance on the Hamilton Boulevard trail so they have a usable, safe space to cycle commute in winter. The community is becoming increasingly frustrated at the City's lack of action, inadequate and inequitable service on this matter.

Background

City Council has made both climate action and accessibility strategic priorities (2022-2024 Strategic Priorities). Year-round, equitable active transportation is the core of the Transportation and Mobility Goals and Policies in the OCP. Citizens are eager to be part of the climate solution – many wish to choose cycling year-round for some of their trips to reduce their carbon footprint. Some citizens may choose to travel by bike for other reasons, including not having the privilege to operate a motor vehicle. Right now, the socio-economical diverse neighborhoods of McIntyre, Ingram, Logan, Copper Ridge and Granger do not have any year-round safe spaces to travel by active transportation. These neighborhoods constitute almost 25% of the City's residents, and they do not have a safe way to cycle from their homes to school, work, the Canada Games Centre, get groceries, and other amenities in downtown. The maintenance that KSA provides for the Hamilton Boulevard is not usable for active transportation in winter, and as a volunteer organization, they do not have the capacity nor mandate to this.

In winter 2022/23 the City demonstrated they can maintain multi-use paths with hard-packed snow surface without grit application – the Lower Escarpment Trail, the Airport Trail and Range Road/Alaska Highway trail were all maintained this way and were excellent for winter cycling (even better than gritted trails) and also usable surface for snow machines. This winter shared use in practice had been functionally in effect for several years on the Crestview-Porter Creek multi use trail.

Also in the 2023, the City approved both capital and substantively increased operating budgets for the winter maintenance of active transportation routes.

In summary, the City now has the budget, equipment and demonstrated capability to plow the Hamilton Blvd trail such that it can be used for both snowmachine out-and-away travel and winter cycle commuting.



Photo 1. Example of excellent, accessible, safe and convenient winter trail surface on Airport trail in winter 2022/23

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The Request

In the long-term, there needs to be separate spaces for winter cycling and motorized (snowmachine) out-and-away travel. We recognize that development of the separated space is not achievable for this winter, and thus propose a shared-use model that works for both sets of users. Although not ideal for either user group, both groups are prepared to be accommodating such that the groups' mobility needs are met in the interim. KSA is supportive of this proposal. It is the cycling community's view that in the long-term, separated spaces are needed. Thus, this proposal is to be clearly seen as an interim strategy:

1. That the City of Whitehorse provide plowing of the Hamilton Boulevard (and Hillcrest Connector*) Multi-Use trail, leaving a hard packed snow surface, as was done in winter 2022/23 on the Lower Escarpment, Airport and Range Road/Alaska Highways MUPs.
2. No grit shall be applied.
3. At the onset of winter, allow small snowfalls (i.e. <2cm) to accumulate on the path and be naturally packed by users to establish a base.
4. Once a base is established, do not plow to asphalt, but leave the hard packed snow base intact.
5. Plow to ensure that no time shall more than 2 cm of loose snow accumulate on the trail (this includes windblown snow)
6. Windrows at intersections shall be removed, including ensuring access to beg buttons.
7. The hard-packed, ungritted surface is usable by snowmachines and is an excellent surface for winter cycling. Once the snow cover is in place, the rilled blade can be used to provide additional traction, or the surface if it becomes icy and requires renovation.
8. WUCC will provide user-based monitoring of conditions and issues over the course of the winter.

The KSA is the steward of the motorized multi-use trail system in Whitehorse. As such, they support the proposal for the interim maintenance program as described here and jointly assessing the success with the City and the various user groups.

*Including of the Hillcrest connector is an important part of this winter maintenance strategy so there is connectivity between Hillcrest, the elementary school, and the Hamilton Blvd MUP.

By providing usable winter maintenance to these key active transportation routes, the City will be able to proudly stand up and demonstrate to citizens a tangible and meaningful action on climate change, inclusion and accessibility.

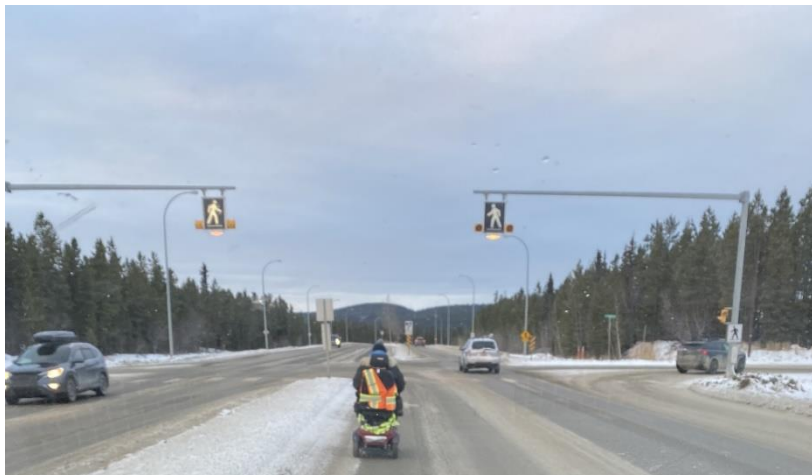


Photo 2. Year-round maintenance of active transportation routes is not just for cyclists. This citizen has no safe space to travel in.