DRAFT Trails and Cycling Master Plan Update

Municipality of Thames Centre
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1.0 Overview

Infrastructure and facilities designed to support trail and cycling networks are a vital component of healthy, dynamic communities. A robust and interconnected network provides benefits to residents, businesses, and visitors alike, offering low-cost, healthy, outdoor recreational options that can result in financial savings, provide diverse travel options, alleviate traffic on roads, decrease pollution, and encourage overall economic stability.

This update to the Municipality of Thames Centre Trails and Cycling Master Plan builds upon the vision and guiding principles established in the previous Master Plan regarding current and future trails and cycling network infrastructure / facilities. Furthermore, it takes into account on-going and completed studies, such as the Municipality's Official Plan and Strategic Plan, and Middlesex County's Official Plan and Cycling Strategy. The goal is to develop a network in Thames Centre that can effectively serve the requirements of its population, businesses, and visitors for the next ten years.

This updated Master Plan acknowledges the significant prior efforts made to pinpoint routes and connections for walking and cycling. It compiles this existing work and utilizes projected growth data, community needs, and direct feedback from the public and Municipal staff to establish an updated vision and guiding principles, establish design standards, and offer direction on implementing recommendations.

1.1 Defining Trail and Cycling Networks

Trail and cycling networks encompass modes of travel powered by human effort, including, but not limited to walking, cycling, inline skating, and movement assisted by mobility aids like motorized wheelchairs and comparable power-assisted devices. This definition implies travel with a specific origin and destination, such as journeys to work, shopping areas, places of worship, educational institutions, or other essential locations.

Trail and cycling networks offer numerous benefits, including (and not listed in any specific order):

1. Enhanced Community Well-Being
2. Strengthened Social Ties
3. Reduced Dependence on Private Vehicles
4. Environmental Benefits
5. Economic Growth
6. Promotes Equity
7. Public Health and Safety

2.0 Background and Context

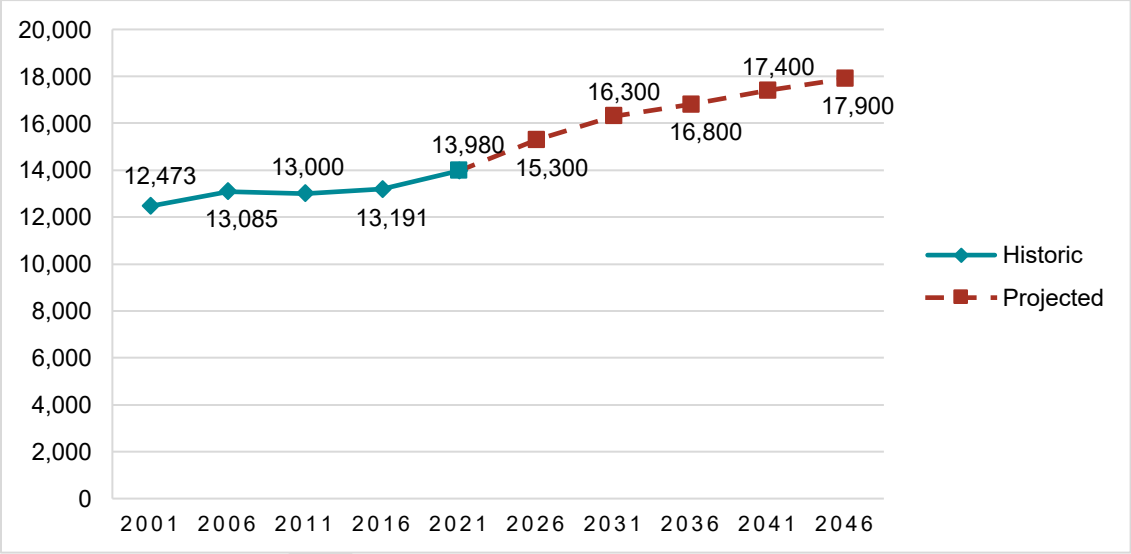
2.1 Understanding Thames Centre's Context

2.1.1 Community Demographics

An examination of Thames Centre's population using the 2021 Statistics Canada Census indicates a total of 13,980 residents. This marks an increase from the 13,191 residents counted in the 2016 Census. It should be noted that population figures will have changed since 2021, however this figure will be utilized as the baseline for this study.

Projections from Middlesex County's Housing Allocations Letter Report (2020), Figure B-11 Municipality of Thames Centre Population and Housing Growth, 2016 to 2046 Reference Scenario, by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., anticipate continued population growth, estimated to reach 17,900 residents by 2046, representing a 28.0% increase. Figure 1 represents the historical population from 2001, and forecasts the increase up to 2046.

Figure 1 - Historical and Projected Population, Municipality of Thames Centre (2001 – 2046)



Source: Statistics Canada Census, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016 & 2021 (excluding undercount), & Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., Middlesex County – Housing Allocations Letter Report (2020).

Understanding the age composition of the community is fundamental for planning active transportation networks like walking and cycling paths. Although younger individuals are often more inclined towards active travel, a notable trend shows an increasing number of older adults and seniors utilizing active transportation for fitness in addition to

commuting. This underscores the critical need for safe infrastructure / facilities designed for active travel.

Canada as a whole is experiencing an aging population. Given that the large baby boomer generation has reached their senior years, it is especially important to factor this demographic shift into planning for active transportation. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of population by age group between 2011 and 2021. It shows that populations increased in over half of the defined age cohorts: Children (0 – 9), Young Adults (20 – 34), Older Adults (55 – 69), and Seniors (70+). Conversely, the Youth (10 – 19), and Mature Adults (35 – 54) populations declined. The most significant growth occurred among Seniors (50.8% increase) and Older Adults (27.7% increase) between 2011 and 2021. Collectively, these two groups comprised just over one-third (36.5%) of Thames Centre's total population in 2021.

Table 1: Municipality of Thames Centre Population by Age (2011 – 2021)

Age Category	2011	2021	% Change (2011 – 2021)	Proportion of 2021 Population
Children (0 – 9)	1,405	1,490	6.0%	10.7%
Youth (10 – 19)	1,930	1,795	-7.0%	12.8%
Young Adults (20 – 34)	1,750	2,040	16.6%	14.6%
Mature Adults (35 – 54)	4,130	3,560	-13.8%	25.5%
Older Adults (55 – 69)	2,560	3,270	27.7%	23.4%
Seniors (70+)	1,210	1,825	50.8%	13.1%
Total	12,985	13,980	7.7%	100.0%

Source: Statistics Canada Census, 2011, & 2021 (excluding undercount).

This aging pattern is also reflected in the median age. Thames Centre's median age has risen considerably since 2011. It is also higher than the median age for both Middlesex County and the province of Ontario, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Median Age (2011 – 2021)

Location	2011	2016	2021
Thames Centre	43.9	45.1	45.2
Middlesex County	39.8	40.7	39.6
Ontario	40.4	41.3	41.6

Source: Statistics Canada Census, 2011, & 2021 (excluding undercount).

Thames Centre is expected to continue following the national and local trend of an aging population. With the number of Older Adults and Seniors growing, the Municipality can anticipate a greater need for active transportation options specifically designed for older residents.

2.1.2 Transportation and Mobility Patterns

Regarding how people commute to work, the primary mode in Thames Centre remains private vehicles. In 2021, a substantial 96.3% of the workforce relied on their own vehicle, or travelled as a passenger in a private vehicle, a 0.6% increase in personal vehicle use since 2011. Only 3.5% of residents travelled to work by walking or biking in 2021, additionally, public transit was used by 0.2% of residents for commuting in 2021. Table 3 offers a detailed view of these transportation habits for Thames Centre, Middlesex County, and Ontario.

Table 3: Transportation Modes (2011 – 2021)

Location	Private Vehicle		Public Transit		Walked / Biked	
	2011	2021	2011	2021	2011	2021
Thames Centre	95.7%	96.3%	0.3%	0.2%	4.0%	3.5%
Middlesex County	85.5%	89.2%	7.4%	5.4%	7.1%	5.4%
Ontario	79.5%	85.6%	14.2%	8.8%	6.4%	5.6%

Source: Statistics Canada Census National Household Survey, 2011 (excluding undercount), & Statistics Canada Census 2021 (excluding undercount).
Note: "Other" mode of transportation has been omitted from this table.

2.1.3 Existing Recreational Paths and Trails

The Municipality of Thames Centre currently possesses more than 45 km of municipal paths and routes for trails and cycling. This network includes over 10 km of sections off the main roads, more than 24 km of paved sidewalks and walkways, 8 km of paved shoulders, and nearly 800 m of off-road walking routes. Additionally, 1 km of cycling lane exists in Dorchester on the south side of Byron Avenue. Beyond these municipal assets, the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority manages nearly 30 km of trails for biking and hiking, with approximately 16 km situated within Thames Centre's boundaries. Figure 2 illustrates the existing municipal trails, parks, and public lands across the municipality.

Figure 3 focuses on the existing assets specifically within Dorchester, while Figure 4 shows those in Thorndale.

The 2015 Trails and Cycling Master Plan (TCMP) highlighted that the majority of Thames Centre's off-road walking paths are located in Dorchester, integrated into the Community Trail system. However, that Master Plan also pointed out deficiencies in the trail system, and areas requiring improvement, such as overgrown sections of the Valleyview II Trail and limitations in access for individuals with mobility challenges.

The TCMP Update necessitates a thorough assessment of the current state of existing trails and cycling infrastructure. This comprehensive review is crucial for formulating future recommendations. This update will also incorporate considerations from other relevant municipal and County plans.

Figure 2: Municipality of Thames Centre, Existing Trails, Parks, and Public Lands

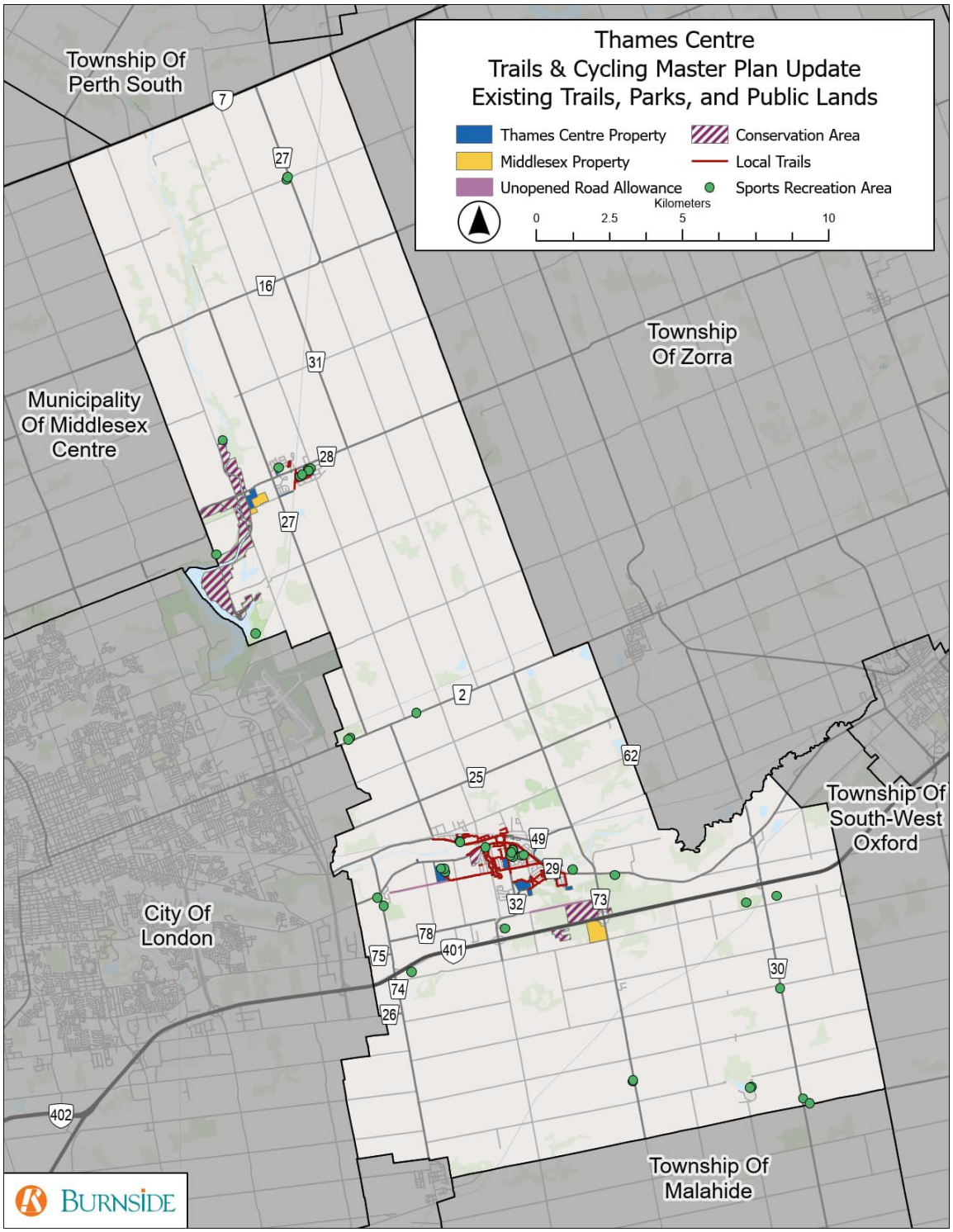


Figure 3: Dorchester – Existing Trails, Parks, and Public Lands

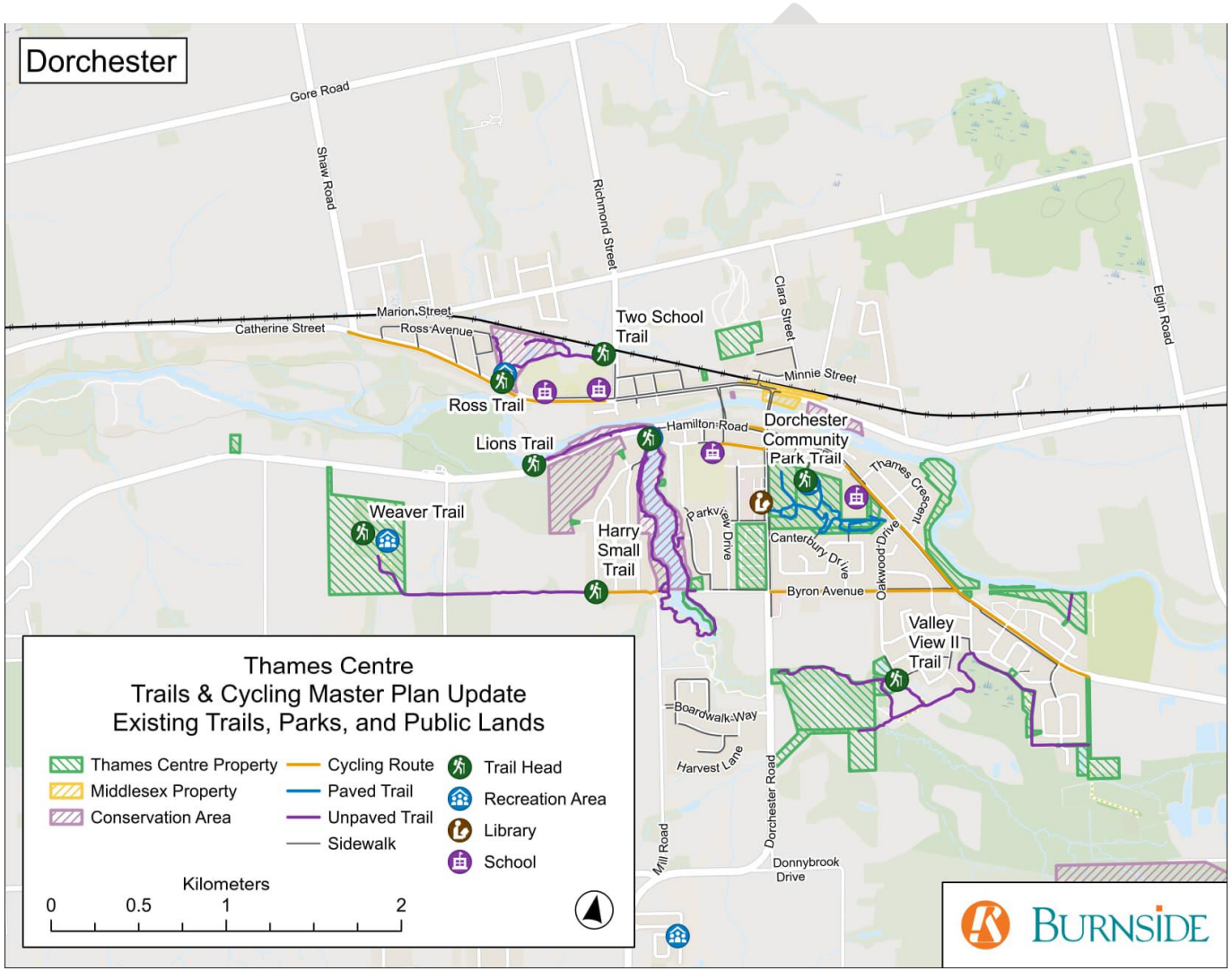
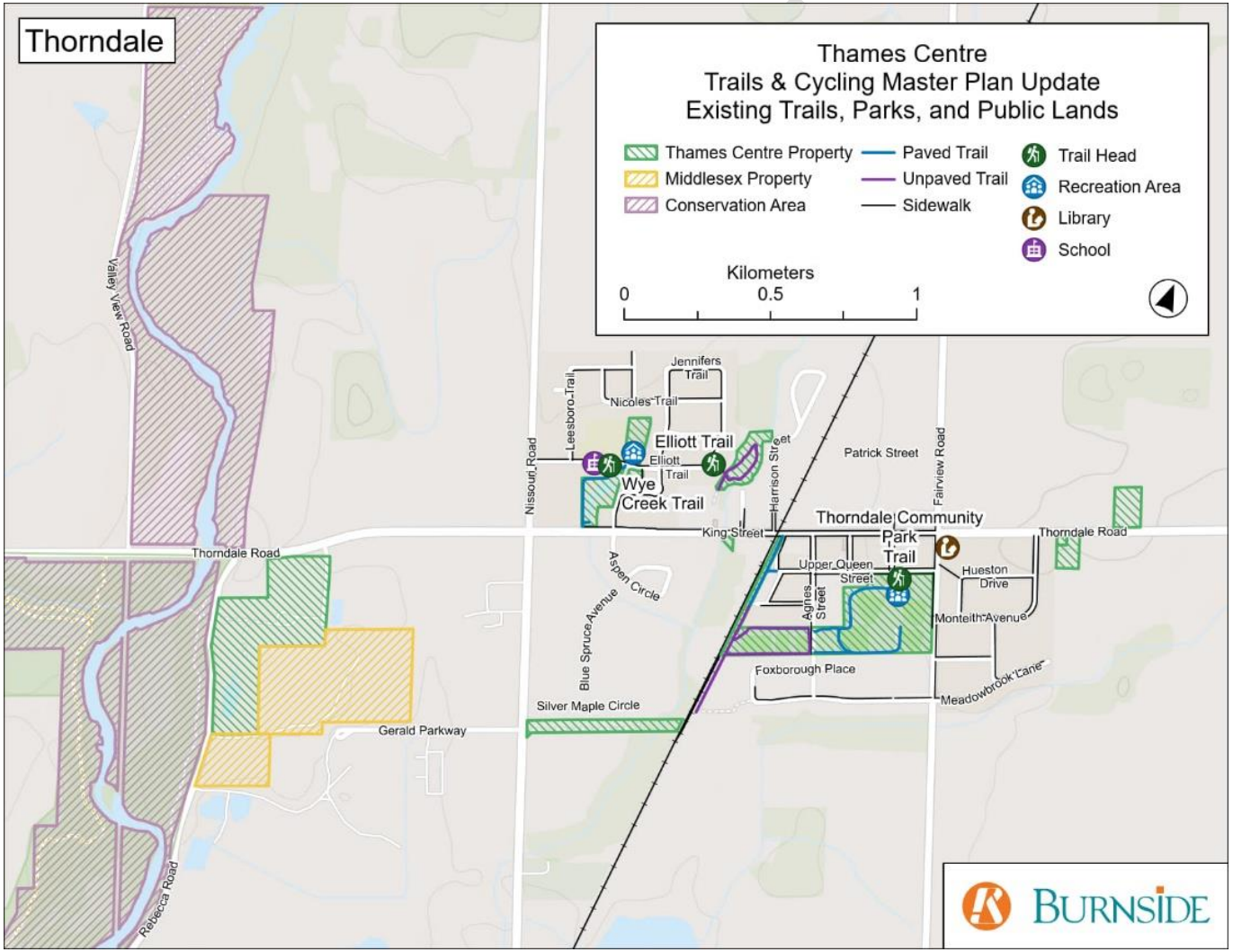


Figure 4: Thorndale – Existing Trails, Parks, and Public Lands



2.2 Guiding Policy Framework

The successful establishment of trails and active transportation networks is underpinned by a strong set of policies found in various key guiding documents. To effectively update the TCMP, it is essential to review the existing policy landscape across multiple levels of government. This section explores specific policies related to trails and active transportation within these documents that are fundamental to shaping the future of trails and cycling infrastructure / facilities in Thames Centre.

2.2.1 Ontario Planning Act (1990)

The Ontario Planning Act plays a significant role in determining land use within Ontario. This legislation addresses aspects of planning, including the regulation and use of land, which has direct implications for the development of active transportation infrastructure / facilities. Specifically, Section 51 grants municipalities the authority to require the dedication of land for pedestrian and bicycle paths as a condition for approving plans of subdivision. This is a crucial mechanism for ensuring new developments incorporate non-motorized travel options, ultimately improving connectivity for residents within their neighbourhoods, and to nearby areas and destinations.

2.2.2 Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) (2024)

The PPS provides policy direction regarding land use planning matters of provincial interest in Ontario. It sets minimum planning standards and encourages communities that are healthy, active, and inclusive. Notably, specific policies lay the groundwork for active transportation and trails across Ontario.

- Section 2.3.1.2 c) states that land use patterns within settlement areas should support active transportation through appropriate densities and land use mix.
- Section 2.9.1 d) directs planning authorities to plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for climate change impacts through approaches that promote green infrastructure, low impact development, and active transportation, while protecting the environment and improving air quality.
- Section 3.9.1 outlines ways to promote healthy, active, and inclusive communities. This includes planning public streets, spaces, and facilities to be safe for all ages and abilities, including pedestrians, fostering social interaction and facilitating active transportation and community connectivity (S.3.9.1 a)). It also involves planning and providing for the needs of people of all ages and abilities through a range of accessible built and natural settings for recreation, including trails and linkages (S.3.9.1 b)). Furthermore, it involves recognizing protected areas like provincial parks and conservation reserves and minimizing negative impacts on them (S.3.9.1 d)).

2.2.3 Middlesex County Official Plan (2023)

The Middlesex County Official Plan serves as a primary policy document guiding land use planning for the County. It acts as an upper-tier framework for providing direction to local municipalities, including Thames Centre, for their own Official Plans and Zoning By-Laws. Section 2.4.2 addresses the transportation system, which encompasses roads, highways, bikeways, trails, sidewalks, railways, and supporting infrastructure. The County supports the creation and upkeep of a sustainable, interconnected, and energy-efficient transportation system that accommodates various safe modes for all users. The Official Plan acknowledges the crucial role active transportation plays in providing opportunities for physical activity and cost-effective travel for both residents and visitors. It specifically mentions support for the County Cycling Strategy, demonstrating strong policy alignment at the County level to back cycling and active transportation efforts within its member municipalities, including Thames Centre.

2.2.4 Thames Centre Official Plan (2022)

The Thames Centre Official Plan provides the local policy framework for land use planning within the Municipality. The following policies establish an outline for active transportation and trails in Thames Centre.

- Section 1.5 states that the Plan sets out the future development pattern for Thames Centre. Specifically, its purpose includes establishing policies that support active transportation choices for pedestrians and cyclists, including developing a municipal-wide trail system and regional cycling network (S.1.5 (20)).

- Section 1.10.6 says that development should be designed to promote safe, convenient, and appealing transportation options for pedestrians and cyclists within, and where feasible, between settlement areas (S.1.10.6 (6)).

- Section 2.26 allows the Municipality to require land dedication for pedestrian and bicycle paths as a condition of subdivision or condominium plan approval.

- Section 5.11 recognizes walking and cycling not only as recreational activities, but also as purposeful, affordable, and accessible transportation modes. It encourages the development, connection, and improvement of trails and pathways for walking and cycling through the development approval process, on-going capital works, and community initiatives. Design criteria and proposed routes may be outlined in a Trails and Cycling Master Plan.

- Section 7.6 allows the Municipality to require the provision of sustainable design elements on adjoining streets or highways under its jurisdiction, including sidewalks, trails, pathways, and street furniture, to help implement the Plan's

policies and enhance streetscapes in the urban areas of Dorchester and Thorndale (S.7.6 (8)).

2.2.5 Thames Centre Strategic Plan (2023)

The Thames Centre Strategic Plan contains strategic directions that can influence active transportation planning within the Municipality. It suggests that when approving site plans, Council should adopt policies promoting features characteristic of small towns, such as sidewalks. The Plan also expresses a vision to champion green initiatives, which can encompass the development of sustainable transportation options like active transportation. Furthermore, it recommends considering the creation and implementation of a Parks and Trails Master Plan based on evolving community needs and expectations, which would directly support active transportation infrastructure.

2.2.6 Middlesex County Cycling Strategy (2018)

The Middlesex County Cycling Strategy offers a long-term plan for the entire County to guide the planning, design, execution, and operation of cycling infrastructure and programming. The Strategy views the expansion and enhancement of active transportation, with a particular focus on cycling, as an opportunity for Middlesex County, its local municipalities, and other partners. Its development aimed to promote safe, accessible, comfortable, connected, and continuous cycling and active transportation facilities / infrastructure (both on and off-road) throughout Middlesex County and connecting to adjacent municipalities.

The Strategy identifies the necessity of establishing policies and plans that strongly support and prioritize cycling. It includes a suggested cycling network intended to serve as a guiding document for implementing cycling facilities / infrastructure throughout Middlesex County and for informing future decisions at both the County and local municipal levels. The Strategy recommends adopting this proposed network as a guide for establishing a connected and linked system across the County and to surrounding municipalities, while also acknowledging the potential need for adjustments.

The Strategy underscores the importance of using the Ontario Traffic Manual Book 18 – Cycling Facilities (OTM Book 18) as the primary reference for selecting, assessing, and designing on-road cycling facilities / infrastructure. It also highlights the significance of other OTMs and the best industry practices for off-road facilities. The Strategy advises that the County and local municipalities consider a Complete Streets approach when redeveloping roads and developing policies to ensure the integration of on-road cycling routes and off-road trails into new residential areas.

By considering the policies and sections mentioned above, the update to the TCMP can be well-informed and align with the existing planning framework.

2.2.7 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), enacted in 2005, mandates the removal of barriers to accessibility in both public and private environments by 2025 through the development, implementation, and enforcement of accessibility standards. This legislation aims to ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities in Ontario across various areas, including goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures, and premises. It also requires the involvement of persons with disabilities, government agencies, and other organizations in decision-making processes.

The Act establishes accessibility standards in five key areas: customer service, employment, information and communications, transportation, and the design of public spaces. It requires municipalities to establish accessibility policies, advisory committees, and plans. Specifically, Thames Centre should follow, to the extent possible, the Design of Public Spaces Standards (DOPS) under the Integrated Accessibility Standards (IAS) by 2016 for newly constructed or redeveloped recreational trails and exterior paths like sidewalks. Section 80.6 of the IAS provides detailed design standards for trails, and Section 80.21 outlines standards for exterior paths of travel, including a requirement for public consultation. Exemptions apply to trails specifically designed for activities such as hiking, mountain biking, and cross-country skiing.

Figure 5: Flight Exec Centre Paved Trails

2.3 Current Trends and Benefits of Trails and Cycling Networks

This section outlines the significant trends influencing the planning and development of trails and cycling networks. Understanding these patterns, both at the local level and more broadly, is essential for creating a relevant and forward-thinking TCMP Update.

2.3.1 General Trends

Increasing Interest in Active Transportation:

- Walking and cycling are gaining popularity as alternatives to motorized travel, with more people recognizing their health and environmental advantages (Active Living Research, 2016)[1].

Infrastructure Investment:

- Communities are prioritizing funding for active transportation infrastructure / facilities such as dedicated cycling lanes, pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, and muti-use paths, making active travel safer and more accessible (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2021)[2].

Rise of E-Bikes and E-Scooters:

- The adoption of electric bikes and scooters has made active transportation feasible for longer distances with less physical effort and have provided individuals with mobility challenges an opportunity to participate (Edge, & Goodfield, 2017)[3].

Emphasis on Comfort Amenities:

- Ensuring active transportation networks are appealing and comfortable is crucial for successful utilization. This can involve adding features like rest stops with seating, shade, water fountains, landscaping, washrooms, or destination amenities like showers at workplaces (Transport Canada, 2007)[4].

[1] Active Living Research. (2016). Moving Toward Active Transportation: How Policies Can Encourage Walking and Bicycling. Active Living Research.
[2] Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada. (2021, July 28). Government of Canada announces the country's first-ever federal strategy and fund dedicated to building active transportation trails and pathways. https://www.canada.ca/en/housing-infrastructure-communities/news/2021/07/government-of-canada-announces-the-countrys-first-ever-federal-strategy-and-fund-dedicated-to-building-active-transportation-trails-and-pathways.html
[3] Edge, S., & Goodfield, J. (2017). Responses to electric bikes (e-bikes) amongst stakeholders and decision-makers with influence on transportation reform in Toronto, Canada.
[4] Transport Canada. (2007, November). Amenities and programs that encourage active transportation in all seasons. Transport Canada.

Growth in Micromobility Sharing:

- Programs offering shared bikes and scooters, including station-based and dockless systems, provide convenient urban commuting options that encourage active transportation adoption (NACTO, 2022)[5].

Heightened Health Awareness:

- Increased understanding of the importance of physical activity has led many to integrate walking and cycling into their daily routines. Since 2001, approximately 75% of residents in Canadian census metropolitan areas (CMAs) have seen an increase in individuals using active transportation (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2014)[6]. The 2015 TCMP noted research showing a trend of physical inactivity and that regular users of active transportation are generally healthier.

Consideration of "Idaho Stop" Laws:

- In 1982, Idaho enacted legislation allowing cyclists to treat stop signs as yield signs, and red lights as stop signs where they can proceed after stopping if clear. Other states have since adopted this. This law is intended to improve cyclist safety by allowing them to clear intersections before vehicles, reducing potential collisions (NACTO, 2022)[7].

COVID-19 Pandemic Influence:

- The pandemic increased the demand for active transportation options, prompting cities to implement temporary measures like wider cycling lanes. This period also saw more individuals seeking outdoor recreation and using trails and cycling routes (Statistics Canada, 2022)[8].

Demographic Shifts:

- As highlighted in Section 2.1.1 of this Update, changes in the population, particularly an aging demographic, indicate a growing need for accessible active transportation opportunities and connections.

[5] NACTO. (2022, December). Shared Micromobility Permitting, Process, and Participation. https://nacto.org/publication/shared-micromobility-permitting-process-and-participation
[6] Public Health Agency of Canada. (2014, October 14). Mobilizing Knowledge on Active Transportation. https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/healthy-living/physical-activity/mobilizing-knowledge-on-active-transportation.html
[7] NACTO. (2022, June). Breaking the Cycle Reevaluating the Laws that Prevent Safe & Inclusive Biking. https://nacto.org/publication/breaking-the-cycle
[8] Statistics Canada. (2022, November 30). Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed commuting patterns for good? https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221130/dq221130c-eng.htm

2.3.2 Trends within Ontario

Provincial Initiatives:

- Strategies such as Ontario's #CycleON and Vision Zero actively promote walking and cycling through enhancements to infrastructure and safety.

Municipal Strategies:

- Municipalities, both urban and rural, are investing in improved cycling facilities / infrastructure, and creating environments more favourable to pedestrians. Since the 2015 TCMP, a number of municipalities have opted to develop Master Plans to guide the establishment of active transportation networks.

Focus on Active School Transportation:

- Programs encouraging students to walk or cycle to school are being implemented to improve children's physical activity levels. Students using active transportation to get to school are more likely to meet or exceed their daily minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MCPA) per day (Middlesex-London Health Unit, 2012)[9].
- Active and Safe Routes to School (ASRTS), a collaborative partnership in Middlesex County, aims to encourage active transportation for school travel through an implementable School Travel Planning program (Middlesex-London Health Unit, 2025)[10].

County-Wide Cycling Strategies:

Middlesex County implemented its County Wide Cycling Strategy in 2018. Several other Counties are in the process of, or have finished, developing similar strategies to link lower-tier municipalities with upper-tier municipalities within their jurisdictions.

2.3.3 Federal Financial Contributions

The Canadian government is planning to invest $3 billion annually in public transit systems, starting in 2026 – 2027. This includes dedicated funding for active transportation projects, beginning with the $400 million commitment in the 2021 Active Transportation Fund, aimed at improving walking and cycling infrastructure (Government of Canada, 2025)[11].

[9] Middlesex-London Health Unit. (2012). Healthy City Active London. Middlesex-London Health Unit.
[10] Middlesex-London Health Unit. (2025). Active Transportation. https://www.healthunit.com/active-transportation
[11] Government of Canada. (2025, February 27). Active Transportation Fund. https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/trans/index-eng.html

2.3.4 Benefits of Trail and Cycling Networks

This sub-section details the advantages that a robust trail and cycling network can provide for the Municipality and its residents, covering health, social, environmental, and economic aspects.

Enhanced Community Well-Being:

The presence of trails and cycling facilities encourages consistent physical activity, contributing to better overall health and a reduced risk of chronic illnesses (Charleston Civic Hub, 2024)[12]. The 2015 TCMP emphasized that regular users of trails for recreation or commuting tend to be healthier and have lower risks of obesity and other diseases.

Strengthened Social Ties:

Well-designed networks of trails and pathways create opportunities for social interaction, fostering community cohesion (Charleston Civic Hub, 2024)[12]. The 2015 TCMP noted that trail use has also been shown to increase community and social enthusiasm by encouraging compact developments and more livable communities where people are more likely to interact personally.

Reduced Dependence on Private Vehicles:

An increase in trail use lessens reliance on personal vehicles, therefore easing traffic congestion and offering economical travel options for both residents and visitors (Charleston Civic Hub, 2024)[12].

Environmental Benefits:

Decreasing reliance on motorized vehicles reduces greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution (Centre for Active Living, 2017)[13], and noise levels. It can also decrease the amount of land needed for vehicle infrastructure, supporting climate change mitigation efforts.

Economic Growth:

Trails and cycling facilities stimulate tourism, local business activity, and property values. When used for commuting or regular errands, trails and cycling facilities also lead to personal savings on fuel, parking, and vehicle maintenance (Centre for Active Living, 2017)[13].

[12] Charleston Civic Hub. (2024, November 18). Boosting Active Transportation: Strategies For Healthier, Greener Cities. https://www.designdivision.org/boosting-active-transportation-strategies-for-healthier-greener-cities/
[13] Centre for Active Living. (2017). Benefits of Active Transportation. Centre for Active Living.

Promotes Equity:

Trails can improve accessibility for vulnerable populations, providing less costly access to amenities and services.

Public Health and Safety:

Dedicated cycling facilities / infrastructure lowers the risk of collisions and improves safety for all road users. The 2015 TCMP discussed concerns about cycling safety and how dedicated infrastructure can help address these issues, also noting that trails can be designed with user safety in mind using principles like Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

Figure 6: Mill Pond Trail

3.0 Community Engagement

Public participation played a critical role in the development of the Master Plan Update for Thames Centre. Community feedback was gathered through two Public Information Centres (PICs) – one held in Dorchester on May 20, 2025 and one in Thorndale on May 22, 2025, and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. These methods provided valuable insights into community members' interests, concerns, and priorities regarding the active transportation network, including trails, sidewalks, and cycling routes.

3.1 Interviews and Public Open Houses

Discussions with various local stakeholders, including members of Council, and the Municipality's Senior Management Team and Recreation Team, provided valuable insights into the current state and future aspirations for trails and cycling in Thames Centre. Furthermore, two Public Open Houses (POHs) were held, one in Dorchester on May 20, 2025, and one in Thorndale on May 22, 2025. The POHs were arranged as "drop-in" style sessions where representatives from the study team were available to answer questions and discuss the TCMP Update with interested members of the public.

The POHs began at 6:30 p.m. and ran until 8:00 p.m. Display boards were placed around the room, as well as map figures to be marked up by attendees. A copy of the display boards and figures can be found in Appendix A.

Overall, roughly 30 individuals attend the Open Houses. Written comments were received from approximately 15 attendees. Participants also added comments directly to the display boards using sticky notes, as shown in Figure 7, and marked up the mapping with their ideas and feedback, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 7: Example of Interactive Display Board

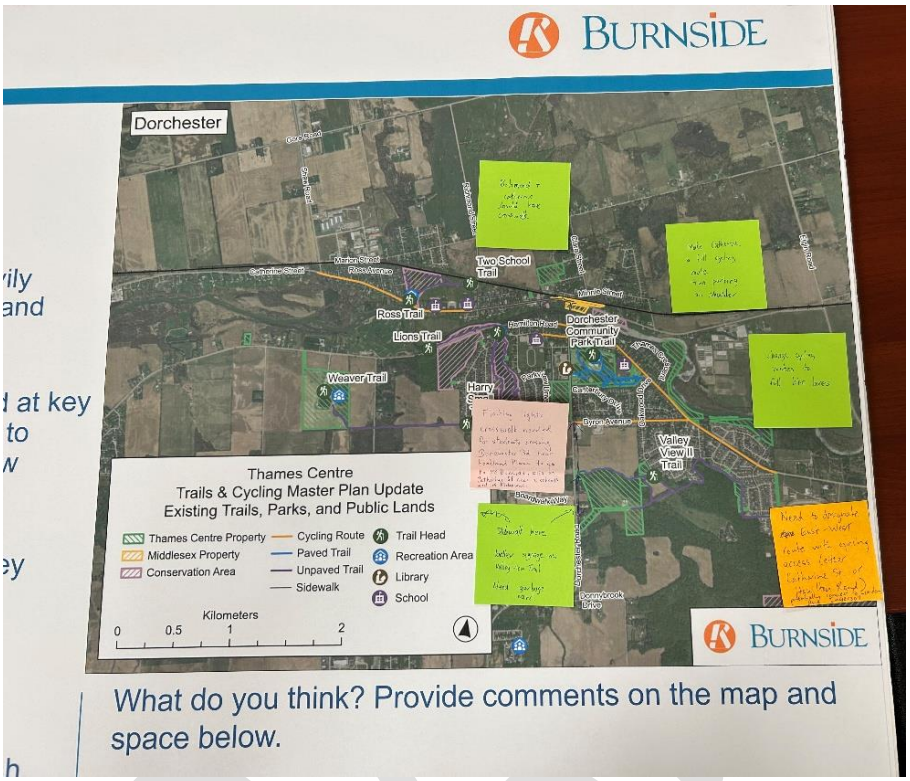
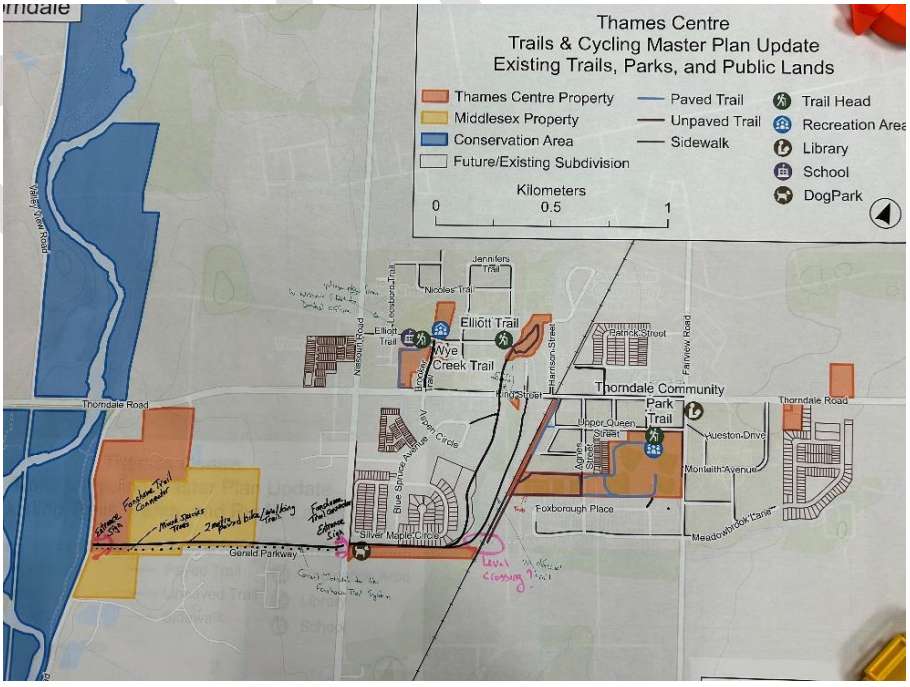


Figure 8: Example of Interactive Mapping



The following sections summarize feedback received from interview participants, as well as email comments from individuals that could not make the POHs and comments received from the attendees of the open houses are summarized in the following sub-sections.

3.1.1 Key Feedback Themes

1. **Vision, Importance, and Usage:**
   - The existing 2015 Trails and Cycling Master Plan's vision and guiding principles remain highly relevant and comprehensive.
   - Trails are very important for residents and visitors of all ages, with the Mill Pond Trail being particularly popular, attracting users from within and outside the Municipality.
   - Pedestrians are the predominant users. While e-scooters and e-bikes are increasing on paved trails, the Municipality does not currently intend to permit them, and ATVs are generally not allowed on trails.
2. **Accessibility:**
   - Accessibility is a crucial focus, especially for Thames Centre's aging community, with trail and sidewalk accessibility being a top priority.
   - Efforts include wider trail openings and barrier removal for wheelchair access. Some stakeholders desired paving all trails, though most are currently stone dust.
3. **Partnerships:**
   - Clarity on responsibilities and liability may be needed with the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA), potentially requiring more comprehensive agreements.
   - The Fanshawe Conservation Area offers a unique opportunity for a larger regional trail connection with Thorndale's trail system, but user fees would need to be addressed if a new park entrance is developed.
   - Further partnership with the County could lead to new cycling lanes or cycling routes on some County roads.
4. **Maintenance and Amenities:**
   - Needs include improved emergency and connection signage on trails, more seating (beneficial for older adults and seniors), and additional waste / recycling receptacles.
   - General cleanup is needed to remove deadfall and invasive species, and to keep up with regular trimming. Suggestions included hiring a "Trail Monitor" and adding land acknowledgement signage and naturalized playgrounds at rest stops.
   - Accessibility and inclusivity on all possible trails with regular maintenance was a key request.
5. **Winter Trail Maintenance:**
   - Year-round trail access is important, with a desire for paved trails to be maintained in the winter.

- However, the Municipality is not currently equipped for widespread winter maintenance due to equipment limitations and operational cost barriers. Some limited clearing may be possible on key trails. Some users enjoy trails for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing and would not want snow to be cleared.
- Specific paved paths heavily utilized by children (e.g., south of Flight Exec Centre in Dorchester, Oakwood Drive to the daycare, West Nissouri Public School to the dentist in Thorndale) were highlighted as needing regular plowing and salting. The Mill Pond Trail was noted as unsafe to maintain in the winter due to steep slopes and risk of slipping along the pond banks.

6. **Barriers to Construction:**
   - Cost is a significant barrier for new facilities, including both capital and on-going operational costs and liability.
   - Other barriers include the need for a second sidewalk plow for winter maintenance and potential easement agreements with private landowners.
7. **Other General Feedback:**
   - Design and enforcement should discourage motorized vehicles on trails.
   - Concerns about mosquitoes and ticks were raised on some trails (e.g., Valleyview II Trail).
   - Providing access to the river for launching canoes and kayaks would be a good addition.

3.1.2 Community Specific Feedback

Dorchester:

- Connections and Expansions – new subdivisions should be required to connect to the existing trail network, with a high desire for connectivity between Boardwalk Way and the Mill Pond Trail. Other desires include extending trails west of Highway 32, connecting newly acquired lands north of Town (Optimist Centre / Conservation Area), and a future trail from the Shopper's Drug Mart plaza to Mill Pond.
- Infrastructure and Safety – Mill Pond Trail's parking was noted as insufficient, leading to roadside parking issues. Lighting has recently been added to some Dorchester trails. Safety concerns at road crossings were frequently cited (Mill Pond Trail and Lions Pond Trail were both identified as unsafe due to traffic speeds, requiring crosswalks. Flashing light crosswalks would be beneficial for students crossing Dorchester Road and Catherine Street.
- Cycling Routes – a bike lane on Richmond Street connecting to Optimist Hall would be beneficial, along with more bike lanes throughout Dorchester for safe travel, including along Hamilton Road into London. An east – west cycling route (e.g., along Catherine Street or Hamilton Road) was desired, with suggestions to pave the shoulder on Hamilton Road East for a cycling lane.

Thorndale:

- Connections and Expansions – a key desire is a connection to the Fanshawe Conservation Area. Opportunities exist as new subdivisions develop. Specific requests include a trail to the dog park, linking the Monteith Avenue subdivision to the Community Centre, incorporating trails with future developments north of King Street, and establishing “Fanshawe Trail Connector” signage and a 2-metre wide multi-use path along Gerald Parkway. Completing the paved trail loop in the Community Centre park was also desired.
- Infrastructure and Safety – a new bridge is desired on King Street over Wye Creek, with steps for pedestrians to connect to the Fanshawe Conservation Area. Thorndale residents expressed a desire for lighting in their trail system. Pedestrian crossings were discussed for King Street due to heavy truck traffic. Completing sidewalks to avoid crossing busy roads like Fairview Road and King Street was noted as needed.

Rural and Regional Connections:

- Connectivity between municipalities is desired, specifically to connect Dorchester to Thorndale, London, Nilestown, and Ingersoll.
- Future subdivision plans should ideally include cycling routes with connections to a community-wide trail network.
- There is an interest in designated bike trails or off-path / road trails for youth and adults who ride mountain bikes, e-bikes, and dirt bikes, as these are currently not permitted in many areas. This could include a dirt trail in new parklands to avoid conflict with other users.

4.0 Future Outlook

This update to the Trails and Cycling Master Plan aims to ensure the Municipality's active transportation network continues to serve its residents effectively, adapting to evolving community needs and aspirations. The previous Master Plan's vision, established in 2015, rightly focused on providing a healthy and sustainable outlet for recreation and connecting residents with key destinations and adjacent municipalities. This vision remains highly relevant, as trails are still considered very important for residents, primarily to provide the ability to get outside and exercise, as well as attract visitors.

However, the significant changes and emerging priorities necessitate a refreshed perspective. Over the years, there has been a notable increase in new developments and subdivisions across the Municipality, requiring a strong emphasis on seamlessly connecting these new areas to the existing trail and cycling network. Public feedback highlights the growing diversity of active transportation users, including an increase in e-bikes and e-scooters, which introduces new considerations for trail design, multi-modal use, and safety management. Residents, particularly students and young families, have expressed significant concerns regarding safety on roads and shared paths, advocating for dedicated and physically separated bike lanes and safer pedestrian crossings, especially near schools and busy roads.

Furthermore, with an aging community, accessibility has emerged as a key focus, underscoring the need for trails that accommodate people of all ages and abilities, including those with strollers, wheelchairs, and other mobility aids. There is a clear desire for active transportation to serve not just recreational purposes, but also as a healthy, affordable, and safe alternative for daily travel, allowing residents to bike or walk to school, shops, and other essential destinations without solely relying on cars. Therefore, the updated overall vision is as follows, and expands off the previously established vision, while integrating these expanded priorities, aiming to cultivate a more comprehensive, safer, and inclusive active transportation network for the Municipality.

> *"The Municipality of Thames Centre envisions a comprehensive, safe, and accessible trail network that seamlessly connects all residents and visitors with key destinations, adjacent municipalities, and new developments. This network will prioritize the wellbeing and diverse needs of all users, offering a healthy, sustainable, and affordable alternative for both daily travel and recreation, thereby fostering a vibrant and connected community."*

4.1 Objectives and Guiding Principles

The following objectives and guiding principles of this Master Plan Update aim to guide the development and enhancement of the active transportation network to achieve the stated vision:

Enhance Connectivity and Integration:

A primary objective is to create a highly connected trail and cycling network within Thames Centre, seamlessly linking existing trails with new and proposed developments. This includes establishing crucial links from new subdivisions like Boardwalk Way to established assets such as the Mill Pond Trail in Dorchester and integrating pathways within upcoming residential areas.

Furthermore, the plan seeks to establish vital inter-community connections to neighbouring municipalities like London, Nilestown, Ingersoll, and Thorndale, recognizing the desire for safe and efficient travel across regional boundaries.

Prioritize Safety for All Users:

A critical objective is to improve safety across the entire active transportation network for pedestrians, cyclists, and all other users. This involves addressing specific hazardous areas, such as narrow trail sections with limited visibility, and implementing solutions like convex mirrors, wider paths, and clear signage.

For cycling, an emphasis will be placed on creating dedicated and physically separated bike lanes where possible, particularly on busy roads and near schools, to minimize conflicts with vehicular traffic and parked cars. Efforts will also focus on discouraging and managing unauthorized motorized vehicles on trails not designated for their use.

Maximize Accessibility and Inclusivity:

The Master Plan aims to ensure that the active transportation network is accessible to people of all ages and abilities, recognizing the needs of an aging community, young families, and individuals with mobility challenges. This involves exploring options for wider trail openings, ensuring well-packed surfaces suitable for various mobility devices, and connecting accessible trails to accessible parks. The goal is to provide a mix of trail experiences, from naturalized paths to paved surfaces, catering to diverse preferences while ensuring fundamental accessibility.

Improve Amenities and Maintenance Practices:

An important objective is to enhance the user experience through strategic amenity provision and consistent maintenance. This includes optimizing the placement and quantity of essential amenities such as waste and recycling receptacles, and seating and benches along trails to support longer walks and rest stops.

Improvements to parking facilities at popular trailheads, like the Mill Pond Trail, are desirable. Furthermore, the plan seeks to implement proactive maintenance strategies, addressing issues like deadfall, overgrowth, and pests, and to manage public expectations regarding year-round access and winter maintenance capabilities.

Foster Strategic Partnerships:

A key objective is to strengthen existing partnerships and forge new collaborations with relevant agencies, organizations, and private landowners to facilitate trail development and maintenance. This includes re-assessing agreements for shared liabilities and costs, exploring connections with fee-based trail systems, and ensuring coordination with County plans for road upgrades that can incorporate cycling infrastructure. Leveraging the expertise and resources of local volunteer groups, such as the Mill Pond Committee, will also be vital.

Community-Centric Design:

All planning and development of the active transportation network will be driven by the expressed needs and desires of the community, ensuring that trails and cycling routes provide tangible benefits for residents of all ages and abilities. This includes prioritizing connections that enhance daily life, support health and wellbeing, and expand recreational opportunities for residents.

Fiscal Responsibility and Sustainability:

Decisions regarding new trail construction amenities, and maintenance will be made with careful consideration of long-term operational costs and financial capacity. This principle encourages cost-effective solutions, explores diverse funding mechanisms, and prioritizes investments that yield the greatest community benefit and contribute to the network’s longevity.

Environmental Stewardship:

The planning and development of trails will consider their environmental impact, promoting sustainable practices and preserving natural assets. This includes addressing concerns like light pollution, managing natural hazards like deadfall, and ensuring that the network contributes positively to the natural environment and biodiversity of the region.

5.0 Trail and Cycling Network Recommendations

The following section outlines the recommendations (and anticipated timeframe for implementation) aimed at enhancing the trails and cycling landscape of Thames Centre. These recommendations encompass a wide range of initiatives designed to optimize existing resources, improve accessibility, promote community engagement, and foster a vibrant and inclusive active transportation environment for residents and visitors alike.

As Thames Centre continues to evolve and change demographically, these recommendations serve as a roadmap for prioritizing key areas of focus and guiding future planning and development efforts. By implementing these recommendations, the Municipality can enhance its trails and cycling offerings and continue to build out the active transportation landscape.

Recommendations are organized into those which are applicable to Dorchester and Thorndale and those which are more general to all locations.

The following goals have been identified through this trails and cycling master plan process for the Municipality of Thames Centre:

Table 4: Trail and Cycling Network Goals

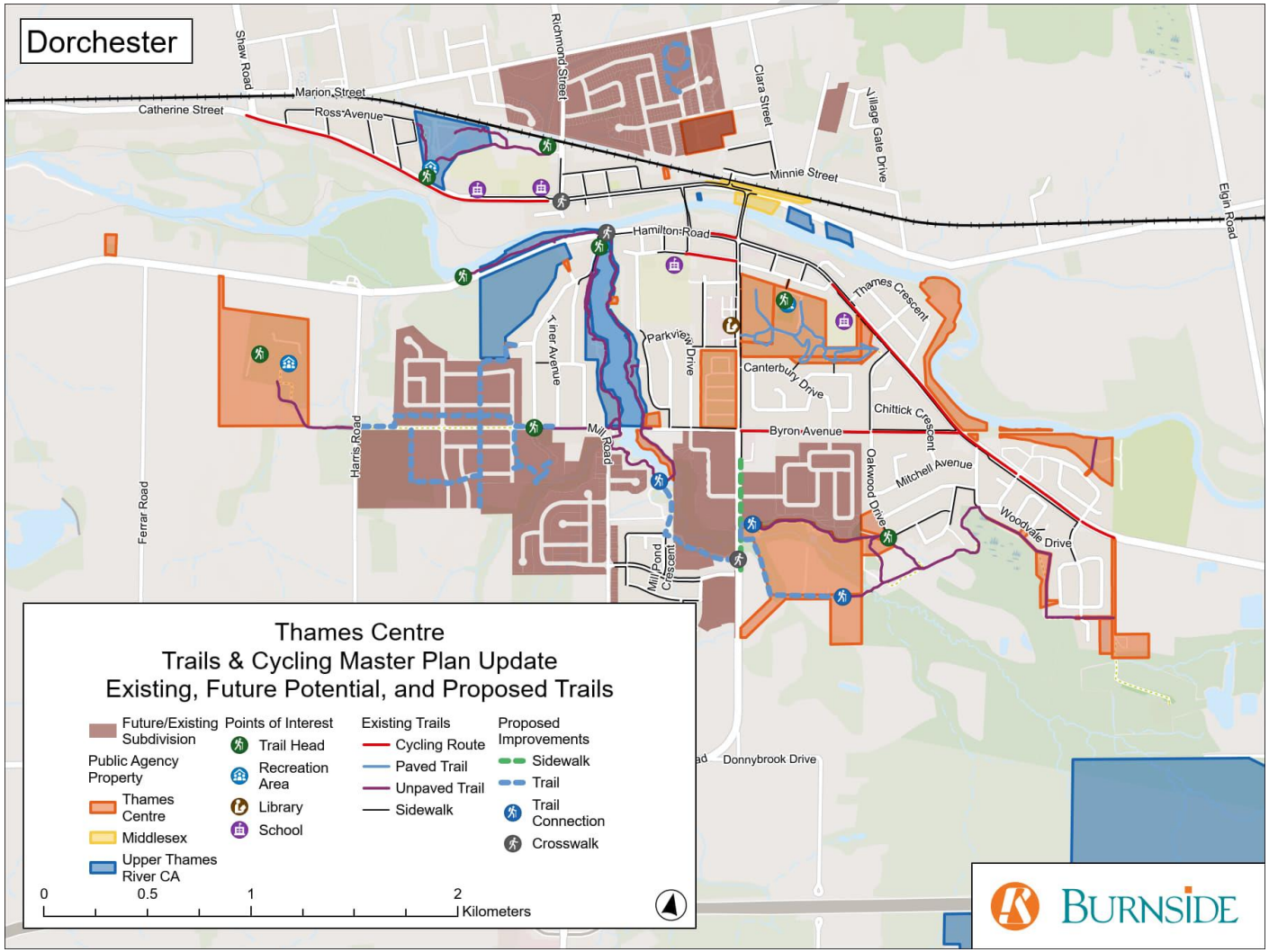
Goal 1	Improve Trails and Cycling Facilities in Dorchester
Goal 2	Improve Trails and Cycling Facilities in Thorndale
Goal 3	Support County Projects in Rural Areas
Goal 4	Improve Trail Conditions
Goal 5	Include Active Transportation Facilities in New Developments
Goal 6	Foster Partnerships with Trail Organizations

Each goal is described in detail in the following sections, together with recommended actions to achieve each goal.

5.1 Goal 1: Improve Trails and Cycling Facilities in Dorchester

Key actions to improve the trails and cycling in Dorchester are shown on Figure 9 and described in the following sections.

Figure 9 Proposed Trail and Cycling Improvements in Dorchester



Action 1A: Construct a Sidewalk on Dorchester Road (Byron Avenue to Boardwalk Way)

Add a sidewalk on Dorchester Road between Byron Avenue and Boardwalk Way. It is understood that this project is currently in the planning stages and should proceed as a high priority project in the short term.

Action 1B: Establish a Trail Connection from Boardwalk Way to the Mill Pond Trail

A trail should be constructed to connect the Boardwalk Way subdivision to a future park to the north and to the Mill Pond Trail. The proposed trail would run from Dorchester Rd. to the northwest with connections to Boardwalk Way, Mill Pond Cres., the future park, and the Mill Pond Trail. This link will provide residents with direct access to recreational amenities and support trail and cycling network goals.

Action 1C: Construct a Safe Pedestrian Crossing at Dorchester Rd.

Create a pedestrian crossing on Dorchester Rd. to provide a safe connection between the Valleyview II Trail with the future Boardwalk Way Trail that is the subject of Action 1B. This connection would support cross-community access and enhance trails and cycling opportunities. Dorchester Rd. is a County road and will require partnership with the County to construct.

Action 1D: Construct Trails in Subdivision West of Clara St.

Ensure trails are included in the proposed subdivision located west of Clara St. A trail could be constructed around the wetland south of Marion St. A further connection should be provided to the sidewalk on Eva St.

The trail around the wetland may require an ecologically sensitive design to avoid impacts to ecological features and functions.

Action 1E: Develop a Trail Network through the Christie St. Subdivision

A new subdivision is proposed west of Wheeler Ave. The subdivision should include walkways to allow safe pedestrian movement. As part of this development, Christie St. will be extended to the west along the route of the existing Harry Small Trail. This trail should be realigned and integrated into the subdivision’s trail network.

As future development may transition the Harry Small Trail into a sidewalk and road-based corridor, it is recommended that the Municipality explore options for a multi-use path that is realigned to the north of future lots along the northside of Christie Street to continue to maintain its role within the broader trail system.

Action 1F: Create Safe Pedestrian Road Crossings

Pedestrian road crossings are recommended in two locations, including:

- At Richmond St. and Catherine St. which is a key intersection for school children enroute to Northdale Central Public School, and St. David Catholic School.
- At Hamilton Rd. where the Lions Pond Trail connects to the Mill Pond Trail.

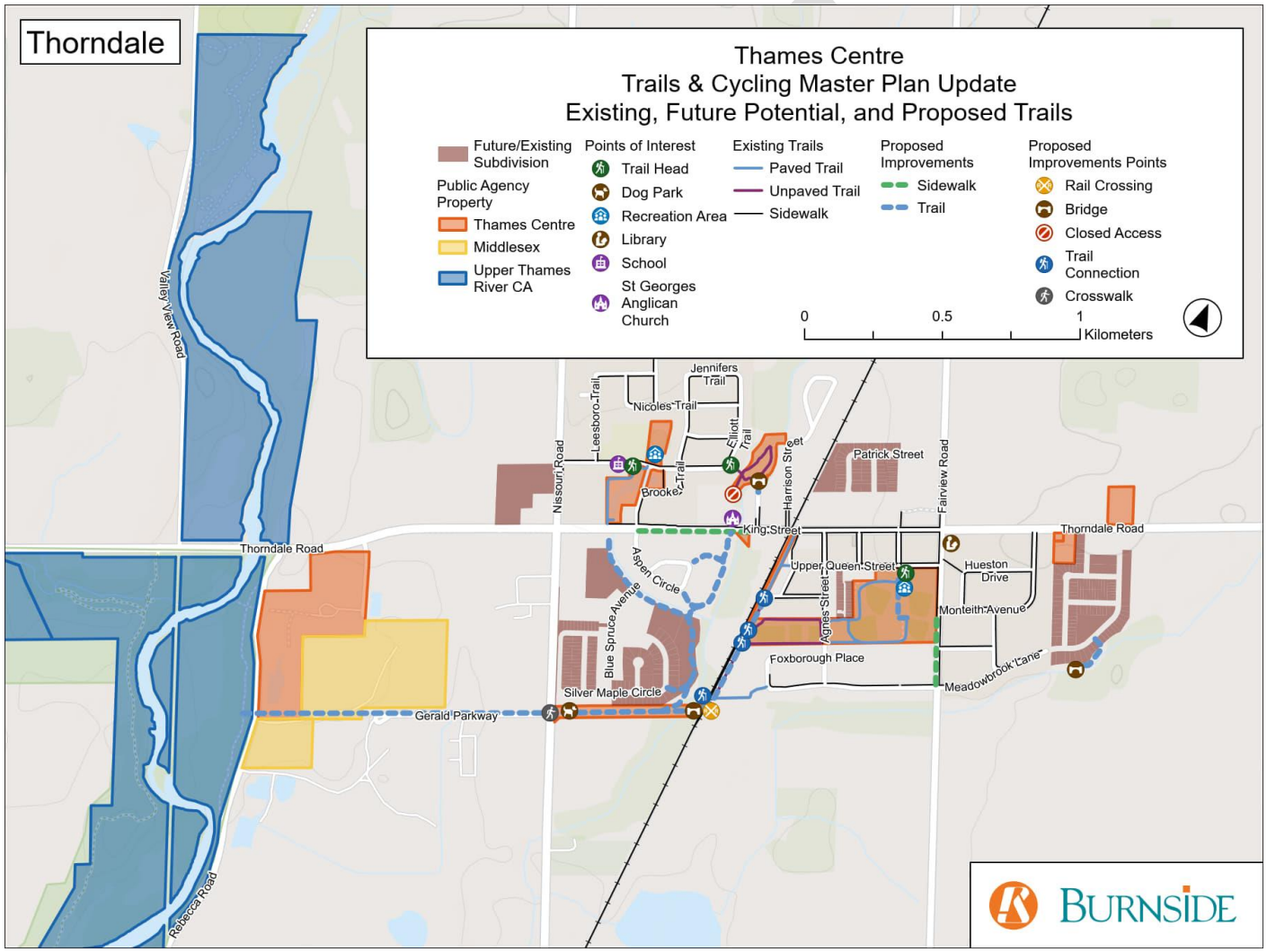
Crossings should be designed in accordance with OTM Book 18 guidelines, subject to traffic volumes and speeds.

Catherine St. and Hamilton Rd. are both County roads and any crossing measures will require partnership and approval of the County.

5.2 Goal 2: Improve Trails and Cycling Facilities in Thorndale

Key actions to improve the trails and cycling in Thorndale are shown on Figure 10 and described in the following sections.

Figure 10: Proposed Trail and Cycling Improvements in Thorndale



Action 2A: Finalize Thorndale Lions Community Centre Paved Loop

Complete the paved trail loop within the Thorndale Lions Community Centre Park. While most of the loop is currently paved, a small section remains unpaved. It is understood that some changes to park structure may occur near the section of unpaved trail. Paving the final section should be incorporated into any future plans for this portion of the park.

Action 2B: Remove Elliott Trail Connection to St. George's Church

The Elliott Trail in the north end of Thorndale currently includes a trail connection through the St. George's Church property. To limit unauthorized access through private property, the trail section that leads into the church property should be formally closed and omitted from official trail mapping on the municipal website and other shared trail information. Signage and / or a barrier should be erected to deter unauthorized access.

Action 2C: Construct New Elliott Trail Connection from Temperance Rd.

In lieu of the current access to the Elliott Trail through the St. George's Church, an alternate entrance through Temperance Rd. should be explored. This connection would provide access to the trail from the south but would require construction of a pedestrian bridge across Wye Creek.

Action 2D: Construct Trail Network Through Rosewood Subdivision

Continue to work with the developer to construct trails in the parkland and open space between the subdivision and railway line. A trail should be provided running north-south between King St. and the southern end of the development, with connections to Aspen Circle and Silver Maple Circle.

An additional connection should be constructed along the Peterson Drain. This section of trail would link to the Wye Creek Trail north of King St. A safe pedestrian crossing of King St. may be warranted to connect the two trails and should be designed in accordance with OTM Book 18 guidelines.

Action 2E: Create a Formal CN Railway Crossing and Wye Creek Bridge

The railway line represents a barrier that limits trail connectivity between the east and west sides of the community. A pedestrian crossing should be developed to link the existing trail on the south end of the Foxborough Place stormwater management ponds on the east side of the rail corridor to the planned trails through the Rosewood subdivision that are the subject of Action 2D. This connection would also require construction of a pedestrian bridge over Wye Creek.

The rail crossing will require approval of CN Rail and must be constructed in accordance with rail safety guidelines. Lands on the west side of the rail corridor are in private ownership and will require partnership and landowner approval. The location of the Wye

Creek bridge should be explored. It may be preferable to construct this on municipal lands to the south rather than on private lands. The optimal location should be studied based on watercourse dynamics, land ownership and optimal trail connectivity.

Action 2F: Extend the Thorndale Railway Trail to the Trail South of the Foxborough Stormwater Management Pond

There is an existing trail along the east side of the CN rail corridor. It runs roughly from King St. southward to the soccer fields. This should be extended further to connect to the paved walking path at the southern edge of the Foxborough Stormwater Pond. Along with Action 2E, this would close an important gap in the current trail network.

Action 2G: Construct a Trail from the Railway Corridor to the Fanshawe Conservation Area via Gerald Parkway

A trail could be constructed through the municipal lands south of the Rosewood subdivision. A connection to the future Rosewood subdivision trails should be provided. This trail would run through the dog park and continue westward along Gerald Parkway to the Fanshawe Conservation Area. A safe pedestrian crossing on Nissouri Rd. should be included.

This route includes lands which are owned by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, Middlesex County and private landowners. Consultation and partnerships will be required.

Action 2H: Complete Gaps in the Sidewalk Network

As the community has grown, a need has been identified for additional sidewalks along key roadways. The following sidewalk gaps should be addressed:

- King Street (Thorndale Road) is a primary east-west route through the community. With construction of the Rosewood subdivision, there will be an increase in the number of residents south of King St. A sidewalk on the south side of the road may be warranted between Aspen Circle and the rail corridor. This is a County road. The municipality should work with the County to have sidewalks constructed. This is best undertaken during any planned maintenance or upgrades to the road.
- With construction of the Foxborough Place development, a sidewalk on the west side of Fairview Rd. from Foxborough Place to Monteith Ave. may be warranted. Fairview Rd. is a municipal road which does not require County approval.

Action 2l: Establish Bridge Connection South of the Monteith Lands

Work with the developer of the Monteith lands at the southeastern edge of the community to construct a trail from the subdivision, crossing the Elliott Drain and connecting to future open space lands to the south.

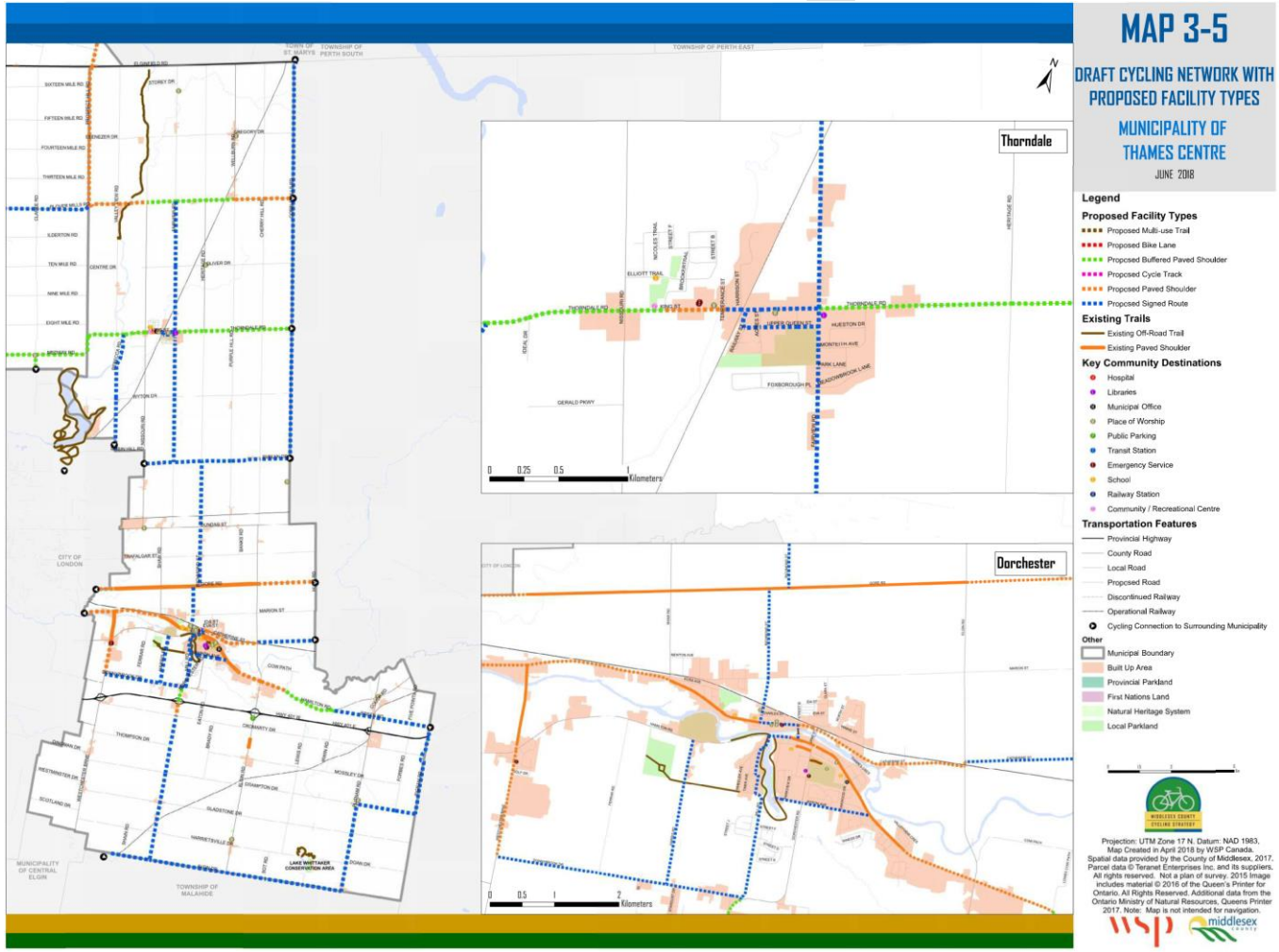
5.3 Goal 3: Support Implementation of the County's Cycling Strategy

Middlesex County has developed a Cycling Strategy (2018) that identifies preferred cycling routes across the County, including through Thames Centre.

The Municipality of Thames Centre should continue to work with the County to ensure that appropriate routes are identified and constructed.

The Cycling Strategy includes a number of recommendations for Thames Centre. Cycling facilities are proposed on County roads as well as local municipal roads. The following actions support the Cycling Strategy's inter-community connections and local recommendations in Thorndale and Dorchester. **Error! Reference source not found.** provides a copy of the Cycling Strategy's recommendations for Thames Centre.

Figure 11: Middlesex County Cycling Strategy for Thames Centre



Goal 3A: Establish Inter-Community Connections

The Cycling Strategy recommends facilities such as paved shoulders on key rural roads. Facilities should be designed in accordance with OTM Book 18, the Cycling Strategy and the recommendations provided in Section 6.0 of this report.

The Municipality should support County-led efforts to create inter-community cycling routes. This includes:

- Paved shoulders on Catherine St. between Dorchester and London.
- Buffered paved shoulders on Thorndale Rd. east and west of Thorndale.

Although not included in the Middlesex Cycling Strategy, a cycling route to Nilestown via Hamilton Rd. was suggested during consultations for this report.

Goal 3B: Develop Cycling Facilities in Dorchester and Thorndale

As shown on **Error! Reference source not found.**, cycling facilities are proposed on local roads within Dorchester and Thorndale, including several signed cycling routes. The Municipality will support the County on these initiatives.

5.4 Goal 4: Improve Trail Conditions

Study participants generally indicated satisfaction with trails in the municipality. However, some improvements to trail design and amenities could broaden community participation in cycling and trail use.

Action 4A: Improve Trail Accessibility

It is recognized that not all trails are intended to be accessible. Some trails are meant to provide a natural experience that may not be suitable for all ages and abilities. This includes some trails such as the Mill Pond Trail. It is not necessary to make all trails in the municipality fully accessible.

However, there is value in ensuring that there is a selection of trails that are easy to navigate for persons with mobility limitations, particularly given the community's aging population and the Municipality's commitment to accessibility and inclusivity.

The Municipality should work with seniors, disability rights and parenting groups to identify where accessible trails may be most beneficial. This may include areas near seniors' residences, near trail heads with ample parking, near community centres or other community gathering spaces.

Recommendations for accessible trail designs are provided in Section 6.2.

Action 4B: Optimize Garbage Receptacle Placement

Litter can reduce trail enjoyment and negatively affect natural areas. It is important to provide garbage receptacles to allow trail users to appropriately dispose of waste. It can, however, be time consuming for staff to empty waste bins. Bins should be placed at trail heads with easy access by maintenance vehicles.

Action 4C: Improve Trail Amenities

The Municipality can improve the experience of trail users by providing and improving amenities and ancillary features such as:

- Seating and rest areas: Seating and bench options along trails are helpful, particularly for seniors, families with young children, those with mobility limitations and other users who may need to rest during longer walks. The Municipality can leverage existing programs, such as memorial benches and seek grants and community partnerships for these features.
- Parking facilities: The Mill Pond Trail is currently the only trail with dedicated parking lots. It has been reported that the most popular lot can exceed capacity on the busiest days. Signage should be added to identify the location of alternative parking lots. Formal parking counts may be needed if parking capacity remains a concern. Additional parking spaces may need to be considered.
- Trail lighting can support broader use of trails in the winter and in the evening. Lighting should only be considered on the most well-used, paved trails near residential areas.

Acton 4D: Provide Limited Winter Trail Maintenance

Residents have expressed some desire for year-round access to the trail system. Winter maintenance requires specific snow clearing equipment and staff time and commitment to ensure clearing is completed within a reasonable time after a snowfall.

Snow clearing most appropriate on paved trails. The Municipality should select a small number of suitable trails and run a pilot program to gauge the level of effort and trail usage. Information should be made public about which trails will be cleared, the clearing schedule and expectations.

Trails selected for winter maintenance should be those that support safe travel to schools and those within and connecting to residential areas.

Some trail users reported uses such as snowshoeing and cross-country skiing on unmaintained trails. This option should remain open on some trails in the Municipality.

Action 4E: Manage the Use of Motorized Vehicles

While the unauthorized use of motorized vehicles on trails was not identified as a significant concern, e-bikes and e-scooters are becoming more popular. The Municipality has generally prohibited the use of motorized vehicles such as snowmobiles, dirt bikes, and ATVs on trails. To ensure compliance, signage at trail heads should clearly indicate what trail uses are acceptable and where motorized vehicles are not permitted.

Acton 4F: Incorporate Interpretive Signage

An interpretive trail route may be developed to add interest and educational opportunities to the Municipality's trail network. Key topics or themes for interpretive materials may include:

- Indigenous heritage or land acknowledgements.
- Local natural features.
- Community history and local historical events.

Where Indigenous history and current Indigenous presence is proposed for interpretive signage, members of local Indigenous communities must be included in the development of content, location, language, symbols, art etc.

Consideration should also be given to partnering with groups like the Mill Pond Committee to create engaging educational signage, for activities like native species scavenger hunts, to enrich user experience.

5.5 Goal 5: Include Trails in New Development Plans

Action 5A: Ensure the Connectivity of New Subdivisions

Section 5.11 of the Thames Centre Official Plan indicates that, "The development, connection, and enhancement of trails and pathways for walking and cycling shall be encouraged as part of the development approval process…".

The Municipality should ensure that new subdivision applications include connections to existing trail networks, new trails in open space and parklands and pedestrian / cycling connections within and between neighbourhoods, to the extent possible. Municipal planners should review applications for their ability to connect to, and extend, the Thames Centre trail network.

5.6 Goal 6: Foster Partnerships with Trail Organizations

Action 6A: Strengthen Partnerships

Fostering strong partnerships with relevant agencies and organizations is vital for trail construction, maintenance, and long-term sustainability across the Municipality.

Trail organizations can provide key support to active transportation projects. The Municipality should continue to foster relationships with organizations, including local groups such as Local Lion's Club chapters and the Mill Pond Committee. These organizations may be able to offer funding, trail expertise and volunteer manpower to assist with trail projects. Similarly, the municipality could support these organizations through grant funding support and in-kind works.

Action 6B: Confirm Partnership Agreement Details

Agreements are currently in place with the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA). The Municipality currently has responsibility for the management of some UTRCA properties. In the future there may be opportunities to include additional organization in the construction and maintenance of trails.

It is important to have clear, comprehensive agreements in place with partners to ensure that roles and responsibilities are well understood. There are inherent risks with trail use; however, those risks are generally very low. To put the matter in perspective there are hundreds of thousands of kilometres of trail in Canada, which provide an enormous amount of recreation with very low rates of injuries, litigation, and risk.

In addition to obtaining legal advice, the County can take measures to minimize injuries, including the following:

- Post clear signs at appropriate locations indicating that the trail is a "recreational trail" and that a person is entering for recreational purposes use it at their own risk.
- Consider the categories (e.g. adults, children, elderly, disabled, non-English speaking / reading tourists, etc.) and skill levels (e.g. beginner, intermediate, advanced, etc.) of persons who may use the trails and the types of activities they might engage in while there (e.g. walking, cross-country skiing, biking, dog walking, etc.).
- Consider the kinds of accidents that might be "reasonably foreseeable" under a variety of conditions that may occur.
- If an unusual, hidden, or unexpected danger arises as a result of human activity / error or weather or earth conditions, post clear warnings of such dangers at appropriate locations in a way that can be easily seen and understood by all persons entering. Note that what is not perceived as dangerous in the daylight may become dangerous at night, and that postings should allow sufficient time for the people to avoid hazard.

- If dangerous conditions exist, which are known to the Municipality but cannot be remedied quickly, reasonable steps should be taken to prevent trail users from entering the area.
- Where entry by the public is prohibited, clear signs should be posted at points of entry (e.g. “Do Not Enter”, “Trail Closed to the Public”, Private – No Trespassing”).
- If children or youth are likely to use the trails, physical precautions such as adequate guardrails, fences or placing of obstructions to prevent entry may be necessary in addition to warning signs identifying that they should be supervised by adults.

Any partnership agreements that include trail construction, maintenance or monitoring should clearly identify the party responsible for the safety measures noted above, including a trail inspection and monitoring schedule and a communication plan to advise the public of changes in trail conditions.

6.0 Design Guidelines

Where possible, the Municipality is recommended to construct trails and cycling in accordance with OTM Book 18. A summary of those guidelines is provided in the following subsections.

6.1 Trails / Cycling Infrastructure Specifications

Based on the suggested trails and cycling improvements, design guidelines for facilities / infrastructure have been established, including paved shoulders, multi-use paths, and sidewalks.

Consideration may also be given to adding supplementary features such as benches, signage, and lighting, where feasible. The guidance provided in OTM Book 18 should be followed as closely as possible.

Table 5 presents a summary of the desired and minimum widths for trails and cycling infrastructure. For paved shoulders, the desired width is 1.5 to 2.0 metres, with a suggested minimum of 1.2 metres. Multi-use paths have a desired width of 3.5 metres, and a suggested minimum of 3.0 metres. Sidewalks have a desired width of 1.8 to 2.0 metres, and a suggested minimum of 1.5 metres.

Table 5: Recommended Trail and Cycling Infrastructure Widths

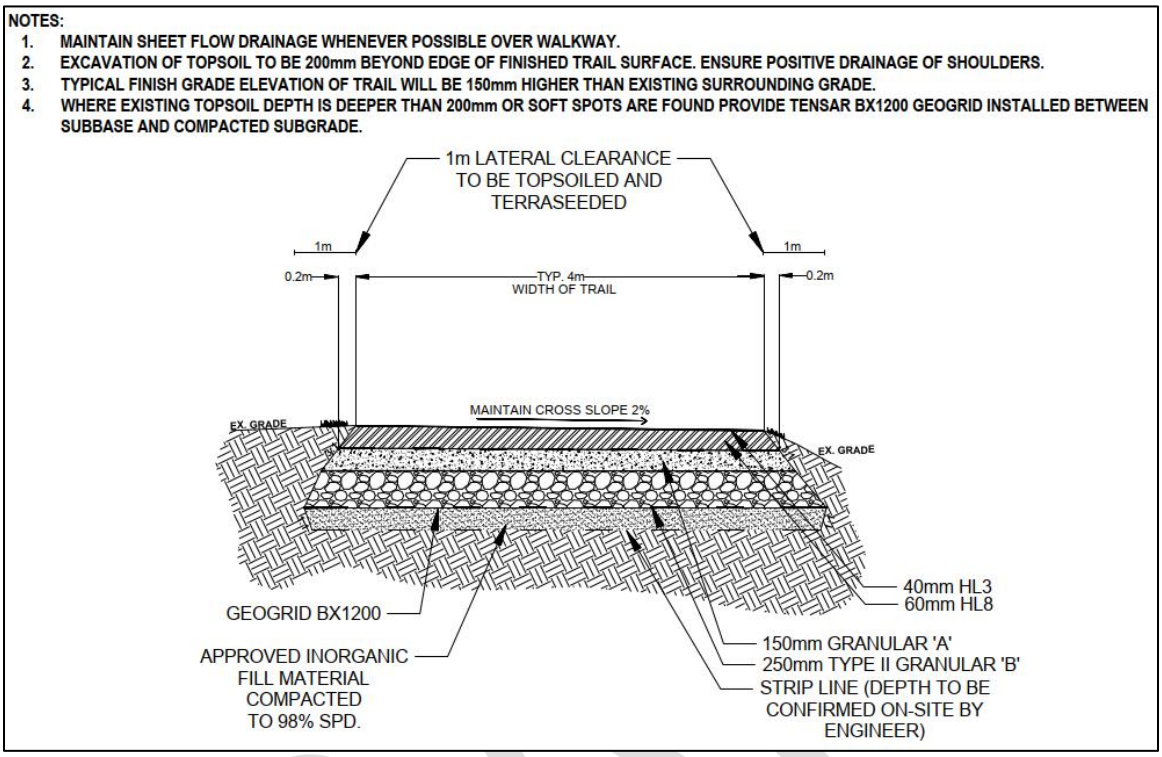
Infrastructure	Desired Width	Suggested Minimum Width	Surface Type
Natural Trails	1.0-3.0 metres	1.5 metres	Stone Dust
Multi-Use Paths	3.5 metres	3.0 metres	Asphalt
Paved Shoulders	1.5 to 2.0 metres	1.2 metres	Asphalt
Sidewalks	1.8 to 2.0 metres	1.5 metres	Concrete

6.1.1 Multi-Use Paths and Off-road Trails

Multi-use paths are designed for two-way travel and can accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists. As per OTM Book 18, the preferred width for a multi-use path is 3.5 metres, although the suggested minimum width is 3.0 metres.

A paved multi-use path design is shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**.

Figure 12: Multi-Use Path Detail



A typical stone dust path is shown on Figure 13.

Figure 13 Typical Stonedust Path

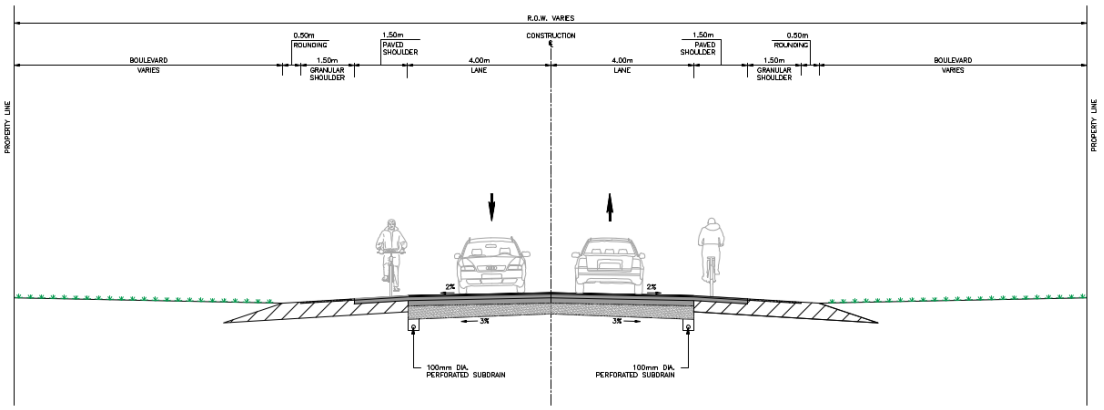
6.1.2 Paved Shoulders

Paved shoulders are typically found on rural roadways but can also be implemented on urban and suburban streets. They can be considered accessible for bicycles if they offer sufficient operating space, clear pavement markings for separation, and a smooth surface free from snow and debris. It is recommended that the width of the paved shoulder be determined based on the speed and volume of traffic on the road. According

to OTM Book 18, the preferred width for a paved shoulder is 1.5 metres or greater. However, in areas with space constraints, the minimum width can be 1.2 metres.

An example of paved shoulders is provided in Figure 14.

Figure 14:Paved Shoulders Detail



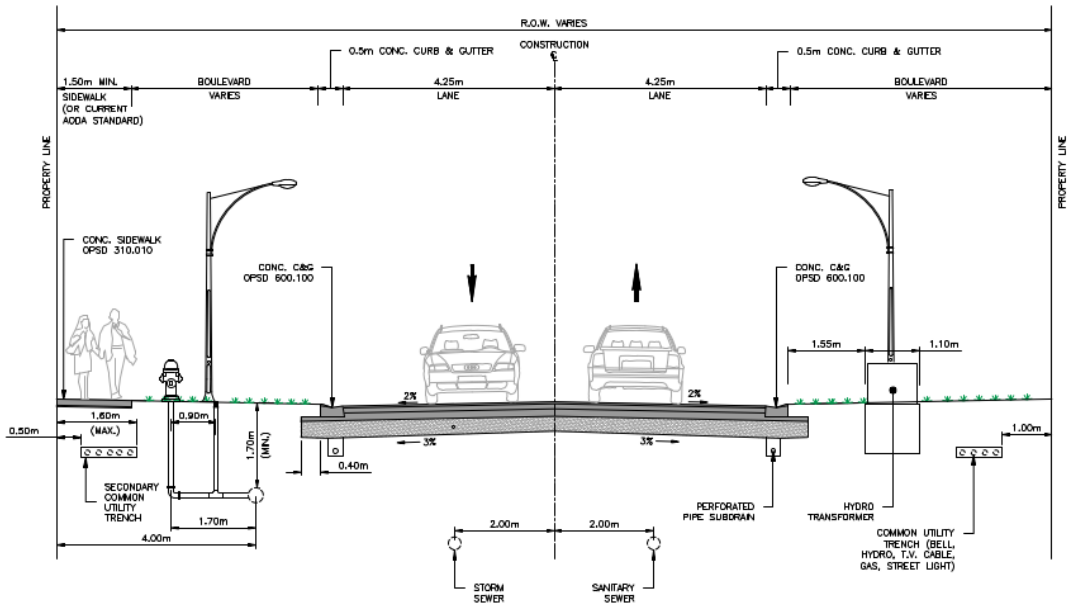
CYCLING ROUTE TYPICAL SECTION

6.1.3 Sidewalks

Sidewalks are primarily designed for pedestrians and should be present on at least one side of all streets. To facilitate comfortable two-way pedestrian movement, the preferred sidewalk width is 1.8 metres or more, with a suggested minimum width of 1.5 metres.

A typical sidewalk design is shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Typical Sidewalk Detail



NEW SUBDIVISION TYPICAL SECTION

6.1.4 Signage and Pavement Markings

All signs used for cycling facilities should be consistent with the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) Bikeway Traffic Control Guidelines for Canada or the Ontario Traffic Manual series. “Share the Road” warning signs may be placed to remind motorists to share the road with cyclists and to reinforce that a bicycle is defined as a vehicle in the Highway Traffic Act. Warning signs should be consistent with OTM Book 6 – Warning Signs. Pavement markings should be consistent with OTM Book 18 – Cycling Facilities.

Figure 16: Examples of Potential Signage

Examples of signage such as “Bike Route”, “Share the Road”, and “Trail Crossing” should be strategically implemented to support safe cycling experiences within Thames Centre. “Trail Crossing” signage is recommended at key trail intersections, including the connection between the Lions Pond Trail and the Mill Pond Trail, the Valleyview II Trail and Boardwalk Way Trail, and the Temperance Road Trail and Wye Creek Trail, to alert both motorists and trail users of potential crossing activity and to enhance visibility and safety at these locations. “Bike Route” and “Share the Road” signage should be installed along designated cycling corridors such as Catherine Street in Dorchester. These signs will serve to reinforce the presence of cyclists, promote shared use of the roadway.

6.1.5 Wayfinding

Clear signage can improve user experience, safety, and navigation. Wayfinding can include information panels, maps, directional signs, etc. Wayfinding signage should be consistent with OTM Book 1B – Sign Design Principles and compliant with AODA.

Signage should also include information to allow users to accurately identify their location in case of an emergency. Existing trail signage should be enhanced to clearly delineate paths, indicate trail lengths (e.g., kilometres walked), and provide clear directions for trail connections.

To support accessibility and safety, signage should also include trail-specific information such as surface type (e.g., gravel, asphalt, natural soil), slope and grade, and the presence of stairs or other potential barriers. Additionally, wayfinding signage could include trail amenities, as well as length. These details help users assess whether a trail is suitable for their ability level and are aligned with accessibility standards.

Emergency-related signage should be standardized across the trail system. This includes consistent use of civic addresses, location markers, and digital tools. Long distance trails may benefit from additional location indicators like municipal boundaries, cross-road names, and distance markers to help users orient themselves and access nearby services.

6.1.6 Winter Maintenance

Although active transportation traffic decreases in the winter months, there are many pedestrians and cyclists who use trail and cycling facilities year-round. According to OTM Book 18 and the TAC Geometric Design Guide for Canadian Roads, the following best practices for winter maintenance are suggested:

- Roadway plowing often results in accumulated snow in the roadside area. To prevent overlap onto the pedestrian through zone, an adequate furnishing zone should be provided.

- To avoid water accumulation, the placement and alignment of drainage grates should consider the potential for obstruction.
- Pedestrian through zones should be kept free and clear of snow and debris to not impede pedestrian safety.
- Municipalities that experience significant snowfall should employ a proactive or anti-icing strategy.

The Minimum Maintenance Standards for Municipal Highways (Ontario Regulation 239/02) recommends the following winter maintenance service levels for cycling facilities:

Table 6: Winter Maintenance Service Levels for Cycling Facilities

Cycling Facility Type	Snow Clearing	Ice Prevention	Ice Treatment
Multi-Use Paths	Maintain to 8 cm within 48 hours, minimum of 1 metre (O.Reg 366/18 s16.3).	Treat the trail if practicable to prevent ice formation or improve traction within 48 hours if the municipality determines that there is a substantial probability of ice forming on a sidewalk, starting from the time that the municipality determines is appropriate to deploy resources for that purpose (O.Reg 366/18 s15).	Under routine weather events, within 48 hours after becoming aware of icy conditions (O.Reg 366/18 s15).

6.2 Accessibility

According to the 2022 Statistics Canada Canadian Survey on Disability, 27% of Canadians aged 15 or older reported having at least on disability that limited their daily activities[14]. For many of these individuals, their disability may hinder their full participation in active transportation.

[14] Statistics Canada. (2023, December 1). Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017 to 2022. The Daily. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231201/dq231201b-eng.htm

The seven principles of universal design, as outlined in Table 7, should be considered during the planning or design of any active transportation network recommendations. The goal of universal design is to achieve inclusion for everyone.

Table 7: Seven Principles of Universal Design

Principle	Description
Equitable Use	The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
Flexibility in Use	The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
Simple and Intuitive Use	The design is easy to understand and use, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
Perceptible Information	The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
Tolerance for Error	The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
Low Physical Effort	The design can be used efficiently, comfortably, and with minimal fatigue.
Size and Space for Approach and Use	Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use, regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.

6.2.1 Accessible Trails

Accessible trails should be safe for all users, free of obstacles, well illuminated, easy to find, and well-integrated with ramps as an alternative to stairs along the route. The following best practices should be considered when designing trails:

- Wayfinding should be present at key entrance, exit and decision points.
- Sufficient clear width should be provided for people using wheelchairs, scooters and service dogs.
- Surface should be stable, firm and slip resistant.
- Running slopes should be limited to 5% and cross-slopes should be limited to 2%.

7.0 Implementation Plan

The recommendations presented within this Master Plan Update will be executed over time. The following sections detail how projects are prioritized based on short, medium, and long-term actions, provide preliminary cost estimates, identify potential funding sources, and list opportunities for collaboration.

7.1 Project Phasing

In the context of this Master Plan, a phased approach to implement recommendations is essential for ensuring the effective delivery of various initiatives which consider feasibility and financial implications.

Four distinct phases are identified to guide the phasing of projects:

1. Short-Term (1 – 3 years)
2. Medium-Term (4 – 6 years)
3. Long-Term (7 – 10+ years)
4. On-Going

While potential challenges and solutions have already been identified for the proposed recommendations, the following phasing strategy has been prepared to clearly outline the recommendations and forecast the anticipated timelines for each recommendation to be addressed. The general timeline categories have been recommended to allow for various stages of implementation, while ensuring the continued delivery of trails and cycling services and infrastructure.

A full breakdown of recommendations and anticipated timelines can be seen in Table 8 as well as the following figures.

Table 8: Project Phasing

Recommendation	Timeframe			
	Short-Term (1 - 3 years)	Medium-Term (4 - 6 years)	Long-Term (7 - 10+ years)	On-Going
Goal 1: Improve Trails and Cycling Facilities in Dorchester				
Action 1A: Construct a Sidewalk on Dorchester Road (Byron Avenue to Boardwalk Way)				
Action 1B: Establish Trail Connection from Boardwalk Way to the Mill Pond Trail				
Action 1C: Construct a Safe Pedestrian Crossing at Dorchester Rd.				
Action 1D: Construct Trails in the Subdivision West of Clara St.				
Action 1E: Develop a Trail Network Through the Christie St. Subdivision				
Action 1F: Create Safe Pedestrian Crossings				
Goal 2: Improve Trails and Cycling Facilities in Thorndale				
Action 2A: Finalize Thorndale Lions Community Centre Paved Loop				
Action 2B: Remove the Elliott Trail Connection to St. George's Church				
Action 2C: Construct a New Elliott Trail Connection from Temperance Rd.				
Action 2D: Construct a Trail Network Through the Rosewood Subdivision				
Action 2E: Create a Formal CN Railway Crossing and Wye Creek Bridge				
Acton 2F: Extend the Thorndale Railway Trail to the Trail South of the Foxborough Stormwater Management Ponds				
Action 2G: Construct a Trail from the Railway Corridor to the Fanshawe Conservation Area via Gerald Parkway				
Action 2H: Complete Gaps in the Sidewalk Network				
Action 2I: Establish a Bridge Connection South of the Monteith Lands				
Goal 3: Support Implementation of the County's Cycling Strategy				
Action 3A: Establish Inter-Community Connections				
Action 3B: Develop Cycling Facilities in Dorchester and Thorndale				
Goal 4: Improve Trail Conditions				

Recommendation	Timeframe			
	Short-Term (1 - 3 years)	Medium-Term (4 - 6 years)	Long-Term (7 - 10+ years)	On-Going
Action 4A: Improve Trail Accessibility				
Action 4B: Optimize Garbage Receptacle				
Action 4C: Improve Trail Amenities				
Action 4D: Provide Limited Winter Maintenance				
Action 4E: Manage the Use of Motorized Vehicles				
Action 4F: Incorporate Interpretive Signage				
Goal 5: Include Trails in New Development Plans				
Action 5A: Ensure Connectivity of New Subdivisions				
Goal 6: Foster Partnerships with Trail Organizations				
Action 6A: Strengthen Partnerships				
Action 6B: Confirm Partnership Agreement Details				

Figure 17: Phased Proposed Trail and Cycling Improvements in Dorchester

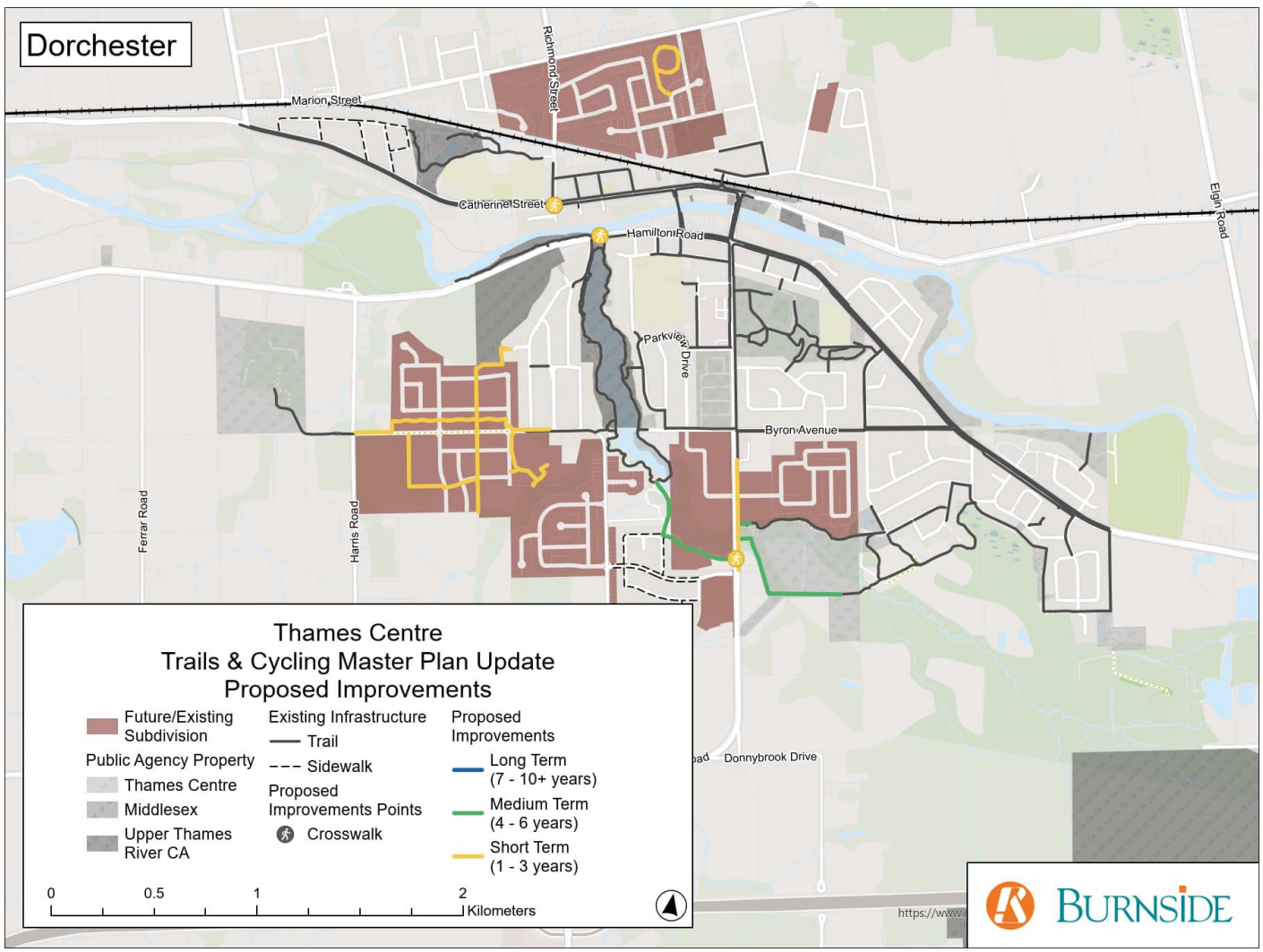
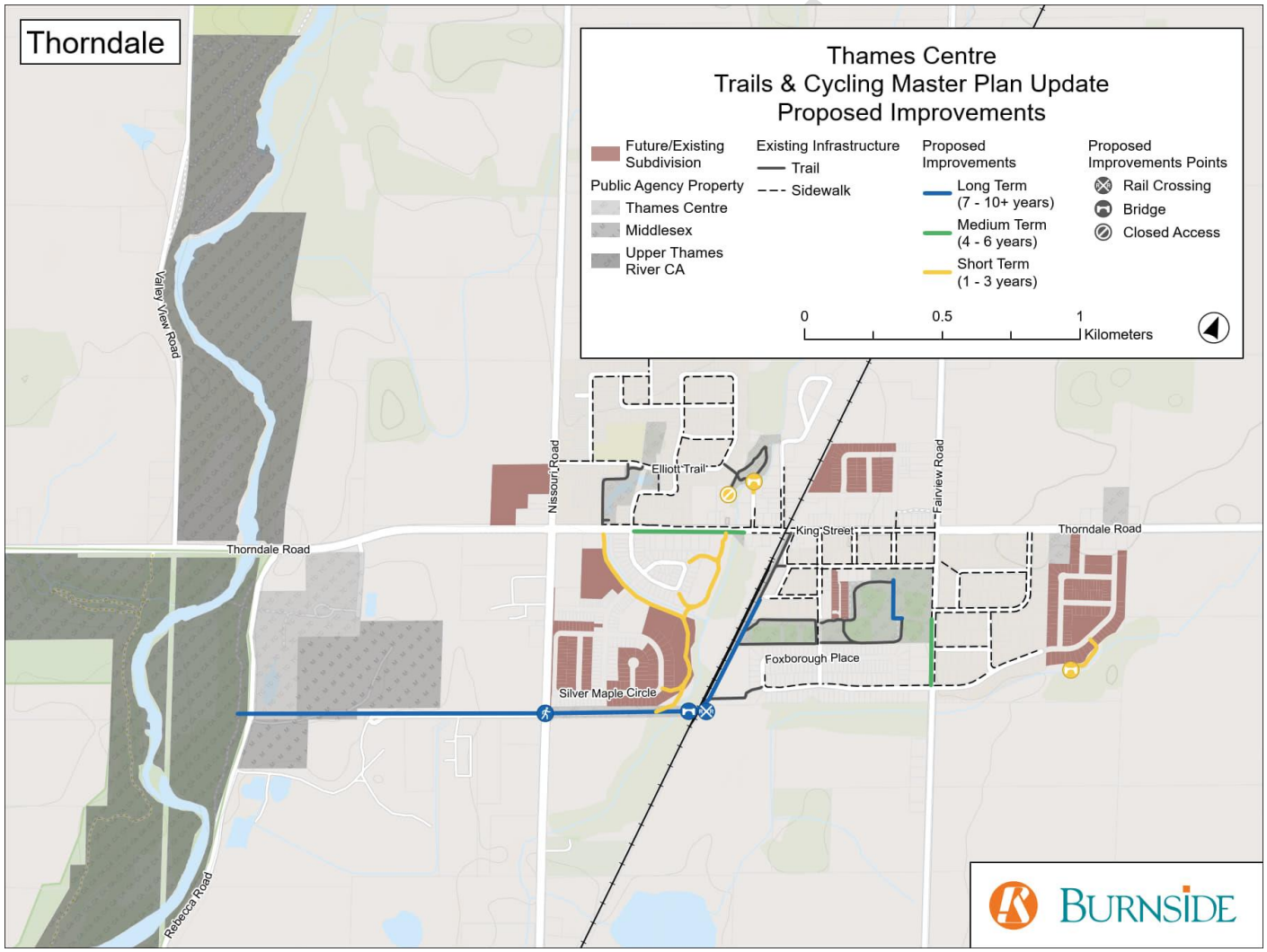


Figure 18: Phased Proposed Trail and Cycling Improvements in Thorndale



7.2 Preliminary Cost Projections

A high-level assessment has been conducted to estimate the financial investment needed to achieve the recommendations in this Plan. Table 9 provides a cost estimate per kilometre for various street typologies.

Table 9: Estimated Cost per Unit

Facility	New Construction Cost (per km)

A high-level budget estimate for the recommendations is provided in the following table.

Table 10: High-Level Budget Estimates for Recommendations

Recommendation	Length (m)	Unit Cost ($1,000)	Capital Cost ($1,000)
Dorchester			
Sidewalks	540	$7.55	$4,077.00
Trails	1480	$4.24	$6,275.20
Cycling Route	5550	$3.84	$21,310.40
Thorndale			
Sidewalks	640	$7.55	$4,832.00
Trails	3150	$4.24	$13,356.00
Rural			
Cycling Route	11500	$3.84	$44,160.00

7.3 Potential Funding Sources

The following potential sources of funding have been identified for the Municipality to consider in supporting the recommendations from this Master Plan, listed in no particular order.

1. Development Charges – an update to the Municipality's Development Charges will summarize the projects eligible for collection through development charges.
2. Ontario's Rural Economic Development (RED) Program – supports rural communities by funding programs that remove barriers to community economic development.
3. Grants Ontario – a source of active grants provided by several Government of Ontario ministries.
4. Trillium ROOTS Community Support Fund – supports commitments to sustainability in rural Ontario. Focus areas include environmental sustainability, and emergency response, both of which must be capital in nature. Requests for funding are reviewed quarterly.
5. Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) – Canadian grant-making foundation that supports "seed", "grow", and "capital" grants. This can include conducting research or feasibility studies and pilot projects.
6. Infrastructure Ontario's Loan Program – provides long-term financing to eligible public-sector clients to support community-based infrastructure projects.
7. Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program – provides long-term, stable funding from Infrastructure Canada through targeted funding streams, including green infrastructure, community, culture and recreation, and rural communities.
8. Green Municipal Fund – grants and loans for municipal environmental projects, including transportation-related projects that support active transportation.

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BURNSIDE

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Appendix A

Public Open House Materials

BURNSIDE

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Appendix B

Design Standards