

Big G in Conversation the Future of Transportation in Guelph October 6

Transcripts

Wendy King

Welcome to Big G. In conversation podcasts inside City Hall.

Hi, I'm Wendy King and on today's show we're talking with the staff from engineering and transportation services and parks about how we help people move around Guelph by bike, mobility device, car or on foot. Let's get started.

Joining me today are Jennifer Juste, manager of Transportation Planning, Engineering and Transportation Services, Steve Anderson manager Transportation Engineering, Engineering, and Transportation Service, and Jay Cranstone Natural Areas Stewardship, Technologist and Parks Department. Hi everybody.

Jennifer Juste

Good morning.

Steve Anderson

Hi Wendy.

Jay Cranstone

Morning.

Wendy King

So our topic is a big one today, transportation in Guelph so Jennifer if you can start us out, so I know there's a transportation master plan that you've been working on, what exactly goes into that?

Jennifer Juste

Yeah, the transportation master plan we're currently working on is an update to our 2005 Transportation master plan, so it's it's long overdue to reflect the changes in demographics and population and behaviors and technologies and how we move around our city. So this, this TMP will be a 30 year plan into the future, so it takes us in 2051 and it's looking at all of those changes it's looking at the best of our abilities. How we think. Transportation technologies and services might be changing over that period of time and ensuring that we can make Guelph safe or all people, equitable, regardless of what mode of transportation you choose, sustainable and helping to achieve our net zero carbon targets for the community. Affordable of course and also supportive of our land use planning. So lots of things have to be taken into consideration when we plan a 30 year transportation plan.

Wendy King

Yeah, for sure. And and you're kind of in a guessing game in a way. I know you have stats and all, but it's got to be a bit of a guessing game as to how are people gonna get around in the future. People gonna drive less drive more, use the bus

more or less, bike? I mean and it's all changed. I mean the last podcast I think he joined us on, we talked about how COVID has changed a lot of peoples lifestyles a little bit so you don't know if you're going to go back to the old ways or we're going to try a whole new way of getting around. So I'm just assuming that all that you have to think about all of that.

Jennifer Juste

That's right, yeah, so part of the plan has included a as strategic COVID assessment, so we've looked at some studies and data that have been collected around North America and around Ontario, and in Guelph as well to try to get a sense of some of those changes. So how many people do we think might start working more from home, and how many people might go back to using transit for getting around the community? And how long is that getting back to normal going to take so we have a sense of that and that's been taken into consideration for this plan.

Umm, but of course you know when we talk about the affordability piece, there's also how much it's going to cost, and we have to figure out when we plan for changes to the road network and the types of facilities we need to move people umm what did that cost and over what period of time are we going to pay for that and how do we pay for that so that the financial piece is also a component of this plan.

Wendy King

And you said it's going to be a 30 year plan, and then what do you do? Update every so often?

Jennifer Juste

Yes, that's right. So we will be presenting this 30 year plan at the end of January to Council for approval and then after that we do need to check back every every five years or so to make sure that the assumptions and the data hasn't changed two substantially that might alter the path that we're on. Sometimes the the province will assign a new population growth targets to the city, and we have to make sure that we can still accommodate that growth in our transportation network. So that's one of the things will check. But all of these other factors that demographic changes are aging population and how is that shaping how people travel and the choices that they make and their needs, is there that work accessible enough? It also is going to look at those technologies that are coming. Which ones are disruptive and really changing fast that we need to pivot and adapt to.

So every couple of years we'll we'll take a look and it won't be as expansive as this plan exercises, has been. It'll be a scope smaller, but it'll still give us that opportunity to keep it on track and make it relevant.

Wendy King

So Council has approved a preferred solution for improving transportation in Guelph, what what is that solution?

Jennifer Juste

So we're calling that solution. The Sustainability and Resiliency Focus, and the reason it's called that is because it is very focused on building infrastructure and what we mean by infrastructure. Things like sidewalks, cycling paths and facilities for transit that support those modes of transportation that are less carbon intensive. More sustainable, affordable and help everybody get around. We have a great road network.

Cars aren't going anywhere. We still need to keep cars moving as well, so we've identified these priority networks throughout the city. Different corridors might have different priorities. Gordon Street is an example where it's a really important corridor in our community, particularly for transit, so that's part of our quality transit network where we want to make sure transit service is really high frequency, really accessible and convenient, and and that we can move buses through intersections efficiently, it's also part of our cycling spine network and the cycling spine network is looking at a protected separated cycling network on certain roads and Guelph so that people of any age and ability can travel by bike and feel comfortable doing so and feel safe and secure doing so. Not mixed in with traffic.

We also have what we're calling a resilience network, and that's a couple of roads that are, you know, we don't need to widen them right now for traffic reasons, but we might want to protect for some space in future in case technologies dictate that we need that space for something or or climate change. Or just people changing attitudes and behaviors. So we're we're. We're trying to build in some flexibility to adapt into this network as well. Of course goods movement, we need to look at that. We need to look at how to support our economy and make sure that trucks can still move in the appropriate places in our community. So that's part of the preferred solution as well, and we want to continue to support pedestrians in our intensification corridors giving them wider sidewalks, more comfortable spaces to walk and access, transit access, their destinations. So in a nutshell, it's a map that shows where these priority networks are, and then we're developing the policies and programs that will help deliver them.

Wendy King

Right now that's a good way to say it. And Steve, what is the city doing to improve safety in general for everyone?

Steve Anderson

Hi Wendy, thanks. In July 2020 or team brought up a report to Council which they adopted which launched our Community Road Safety Strategy and that's a whole suite of different engineering solutions were implementing at intersections in between intersections, with the goal to really reduce, uh the severity of injury, rated related collisions.

Act as much as I'd love to have zero collisions, the reality is there are gonna be some collisions on the road or we're really focused on is making sure those collisions aren't resulting in a severe or life altering injury. Some of the first things

we've deployed or what's called leading pedestrian intervals. So what that is is at an intersection the walk signal comes up for pedestrians before the green light for vehicles come, so it just allows the pedestrians get out several meters into the intersection just to be a little more visible, right? So turning vehicles, it just draws awareness to pedestrians a bit more.

Uh, we are potentially just days away from launching our red-light camera program, which is completing some testing of our our six locations. Uh, which hopefully will help reduce some red-light running, which typically results in some pretty severe injury related angle collisions so there's about 20 to 25 different items in our community about safety strategy. It's all on the guelph.ca if anyone wants to look and we're in the early stages of a fairly robust plan to really reduce injuries in our city.

Wendy King

So red light cameras, not every city has them. So just for a very basic explanation how do those work exactly?

Steve Anderson

So red light cameras are automated enforcement. Any vehicle that crosses the stop line after the signal has gone red, uh, the owner of that vehicle will be issued violation. It's a it photographs the license plate so it, you know we can establish who the driver is, it doesn't take any pictures that anybody personally could be identified. Of course, if you come to a full stop and you make a right turn on red it as signal, which you're perfectly legally permitted to do that, will not result in a violation. Nor if you're already in the intersection to make a left turn when the traffic signal changes to amber or red, if you're in the intersection, you're permitted to complete your turn. It's really anybody who arrives after the lights go on red will be issued the violation.

Wendy King

So you mentioned 6 intersections?

Steve Anderson

That's correct.

Wendy King

And when's that happening?

Steve Anderson

Yes, they are first locations, we were very close, they they will be up and running I would say maybe next week. Some of the other locations are a little bit further behind, but I would expect all six or up and running before the end of 2021. And of course we will be communicating that out to the public before they go live. We're not. We're not trying to be secretive here. We're very transparent about the program.

Wendy King

Yeah, right, exactly. No, it's gonna ask you, 'cause I I had read up a little bit on it and the campaign is called don't rush the red, which I thought was that's pretty clever.

Steve Anderson

That's correct, yes.

Wendy King

And how do you expect that those cameras will be of benefit to everyone, cyclists, pedestrians, motorists?

Steve Anderson

Well, certainly if we can encourage better compliance from the drivers, that should improve safety for everybody crossing pedestrians. We we tend to think about an angle collision is somebody run a red light and struck a vehicle traveling in a perpendicular direction but it's obviously even just more dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists who are crossing the intersection as well, so, you know we're really expecting to see a reduction in the rates of right angle collisions at at, not only those six intersections, but hopefully build in that driver behavior. That'll that'll trickle out to the remaining intersections in the city.

Windy King

Right, and then how do you figure out what you need when it comes to roads, sidewalks, trails?

Steve Anderson

Uh, in terms of like safety measures, yeah, how do you know what you're going to need?

Wendy King

Ya.

Steve Anderson

Well, we collect data when you look at historical data, unfortunately, uhm, we look at some historical collisions so that helps influence what we can do to reduce future collisions and severity, and that's one of the bigger things we look at. We've over the last couple of years. We've invested hugely in our our data and software to be able to run reports and really help us make, um, better decisions on that and on the Go Forward Council last year approved five years while the first of five years of funding for us to collect some permanent data locations that were just starting to roll out. So all of that, all of that data is going to help point us to solutions typically try to reduce injury severity in the future.

Wendy King

And then Jay to bring you into the conversation so parks works with engineering and you're trying to figure out what will work best. Uhm, what do you? What are you doing to improve active transportation?

Jay Cranstone

Well, we're doing quite a few things that I mean trails and in the overall picture they have a really vital role in active transportation. If you think about the the system as an interconnected web, some of the links are on the road, some of them are within the road right away, and and then others are outside the road right of way in our parks and open spaces and and basically, you know, we don't want to have dead ends. I've been involved in trail planning and design for quite a few years since going back to the early 90s and a lots changed since then.

Back then trails were kind of a nice to have. But then through the evolution of active transportation, they're really becoming, or they have become part of a quality connected system. And it it's it's part of building a great city, and we have lots of different users more than we had before. All kinds of different ages and abilities. So there's there's lots to do.

Uh, part parks planning. They really plan design and contract the building of new trail connections and amenities. But then we also have parks operations. Who takes care of the trails once they're built? And I mean, overall, the goal is to create a seamless network. It doesn't matter to the users who is responsible for a particular piece, what's important to them is that it's connected and that is getting taken care of.

So some of the things that that were up to, you know, as as Jenny pointed out, that transportation master plan is underway. Well earlier this year the trail Master Plan update was completed and that's kind of our high level. It's our blueprint for the next 20 years and it it is an update to a 2006 master plan which was the original framework for creating that interconnected web of trails in the city. And it organizes the trails in two different levels.

We called him up like a primary, secondary and a tertiary type network and it's really the primary and some of the secondary routes that are key parts of the active transportation system. So obviously we're collaborating with with engineering on those connections and you know, really, trying to to make that that connected that connected network overall.

Wendy King

That all make sense and users, as you alluded to, they know what they require and what they would like to see. So do you encourage a lot of community involvement?

Jay Cranstone

Absolutely, there's there's so many ways that users can can take part in the development and enhancement of the trail system. So you know, thinking big picture, we really encourage users to get involved at the master planning level through through our public engagement programs. Have your say, for example, where they can submit comments and ideas to the project team, but they can also delegate to Council and you know it's great to have people that are in support of plans delegate into council because it also helps Council understand you know that

we're that we're on the right track and the and that residents are in favor of a plans they can get involved at the individual project level. You know, sometimes there's design charrettes that they can participate in again through have your say. But even kind of on the day-to-day level, they can get involved with one of our partners like the Guelph Hiking Trail Club so they not only run hikes on trails, but they also participate in in building sections of our trail work and they certainly welcome, I know other people to participate and the the new Guelph Trail Master Plan really does recognize the important role that that these third party groups have in the system. So we're trying to support them and empower them as much as they can to keep on doing the great work that they do.

Wendy King

I was thinking as you were talking how maintenance of trails must be crazy.

Jay Cranstone

Yeah, it is. It is a really important aspect. So in terms of the maintenance, that's that's the parks operations responsibility and and you know, parks planning is working on some of those bigger master plan links, but then there's the day-to-day operation of trails you know, including grooming the trails, cutting the edges, fixing potholes. Sometimes we have trees that that come down over the over the trail and we also work on winter maintenance as a part of the active transportation network.

So there is, there has been some winter maintenance of the trails and we're trying to expand that in a logical manner so that it fits with the idea of being able to use the trail system as part of active transportation year round so we can't go out and plow each and every trail that we're trying to do this in a really logical way so.

Residents, if they see spots on the trails that that need repairs, they can always email us through parks@guelph.ca and that gets handed down to our trails lead hand to go and take a look at.

Wendy King

Never ending, that's for sure.

So just to kind of wrap it all up when all is said and done could you guys give me maybe a word or a phrase as to what moving around Guelph will hopefully look like soon.

Jenny, you wanna go first?

Jennifer Juste

I hope it will be more connected. I think that summarizes what we've heard today from our different colleagues.

Wendy King

Steve?

Steve Anderson

I'll go with enjoyable. I think, uh, if we could flip that narrative, I think a lot of

people sometimes get a bit stressed about traffic or where I'm going to park or or those type of things. Like if we could make it fun. Uh, enjoyable app, which probably will depend on the lot of their perception of safety, but I I really think to get out and about and explore what is a pretty awesome city should be enjoyable so I'll be I'll go with enjoyable

Wendy King
Sounds good.

Jay?

Jay Cranstone
I'm gonna kind of echo what Jenny said. You know Seamless is is something for my point of view from our point of view and making sure that we're fixing what we have. But then also connecting those missing links in that overall web so that people could get from A to B as quickly and easily as possible, or if they wanna take a leisurely trip that can have another, you know they have another route, so they've got choices which route they can use.

Wendy King
This has been great, it's gone so fast and you've had so much yeah information to give us. Also, thank you all very much for your time and a special thanks to Jennifer, Steve and Jay for making time for us today.

Steve Anderson
Thanks Wendy.

Jennifer Juste
Thanks Wendy.

Jay Cranstone
Thank you very much.

Wendy King
I'm Wendy King, with the City of Guelph Big G in conversation podcasts. Thanks for joining me. If you have ideas for a show or comments, you can email biggpodcasts@guelph.ca. Until next time, take care and let's keep the conversation going.