

Region of Waterloo
Transportation Services
Transportation

To: Planning and Works Committee
Meeting Date: October 10, 2023
Report Title: Downtown Kitchener Cycling Network: Duke Street from Frederick Street to Francis Street

1. Recommendation

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo approve the recommended design of physically separated two-way cycle tracks along the west side of Duke Street (Regional Road 63) between Francis Street and Water Street built by the City of Kitchener, as described in Report TSD-TRP-23-012, dated October 10, 2023.

2. Purpose / Issue:

To share the background for the project and recommend a conceptual design of the Region's portion of Duke Street between Francis Street and Water Street.

3. Strategic Plan:

The proposed changes to Duke Street would help to achieve the Region's following Strategic Objectives:

- **Climate Aligned Growth**
Foster car-alternative options through complete streets and extended alternative transportation networks. By expanding equitable public and active transportation networks across the region, we will make it easier for people to get around and make climate-friendly choices.

By adding the cycling facility to Duke Street between Water St and Victoria St, there will be a safer and more attractive cycle network that will capture short and medium length cycling trips. Additionally, by keeping the direct bus transit service connections on Duke St, medium and long distance transit trips will be served the most effectively.

The growth of the number of cycling trips and transit trips (without additional bus/vehicle kilometers) will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the medium and long term.

4. Report Highlights:

- The proposed cycle track between Francis Street and Water Street is in the

Regional right of way and it is part of the City of Kitchener's downtown cycling network connecting the recently completed All-Ages and Abilities (AAA) cycling facility on Water Street with Victoria Street.

- Future projects will further expand the AAA cycling network to connect to the King-Victoria Transit Hub and to the neighbourhood on the north side of the rail tracks.
- Previous plans envisioned a AAA cycling facility along Duke Street between Frederick Street and Water Street. After the detailed review of the alternative designs, corridor constraints, and long term multimodal transportation objectives, it was concluded that the section between Frederick Street and Water Street should be removed from the Downtown Kitchener AAA cycling network at this time.
- The main reasons for removing this section of Duke Street from the AAA network is that the available corridor space between Frederick Street and Young Street is not wide enough to accommodate two-directional bus service, a two-directional separated cycling facility, and a sidewalk.
- Two-directional bus service along Duke Street is critical for transit as it serves a fundamental role in GRT's downtown bus routing network and ION replacement shuttle service. Removing the two-directional bus service from Duke Street would have immediate and long term negative impacts on transit ridership, operating and capital costs.
- Having both a connected and safe downtown cycling environment to serve mostly shorter trips and an efficient transit service (bus and LRT) to serve mostly longer distance trips are part of the Region's overall transportation strategy.
- Regional and City of Kitchener staff will continue to explore alternatives for improving both the cycling and the transit networks in the downtown area.

5. Background:

Development of the downtown All-Ages and Abilities cycling network:

The City of Kitchener have developed a plan for AAA downtown cycling network and have successfully implemented a number of projects along streets owned by the City. A few sections have not yet been implemented, including the section along Duke Street between Frederick Street and Victoria Street.

Now the City is preparing to further expand the cycling network by constructing bi-directional cycle tracks in the boulevard space between Water Street and Victoria Street as shown in Appendix A. The section between Francis Street and Victoria Street is

owned by the City; however, the section between Water Street and Francis Street is owned by the Region, thus Regional Council's approval is needed for this 100 m section.

The ownership of Duke Street between Frederick Street and Francis Street, and sections of Charles Street, was transferred from the City of Kitchener to the Region of Waterloo in order to give the full control needed for building and operating the ION LRT line and the associated bus services.

Previous City of Kitchener plans envisioned the inclusion of Duke Street from Frederick Street to Victoria in the AAA downtown cycling network. A number of alternative street configurations were examined and it was concluded that the available right-of-way along Duke Street is not sufficient to accommodate a dedicated sidewalk, separated cycling facility, and two vehicular lanes. The results of the screening assignment are provided in Appendix B.

In order to keep both two-directional bus service and provide some improvements to cycling, the "Neighbourhood Bikeway" concept was developed and examined. Neighbourhood Bikeways do not have separated space for people cycling, instead they provide an improved environment for cyclists by reducing the volume and speed of traffic in shared lanes. The volume reduction would have been achieved by only allowing 'straight through' movement to buses, emergency vehicles, and cyclists on Duke Street between Young Street and Frederick Street. All other vehicles wishing to travel on Duke Street between Young Street and Frederick Street would have been required to turn left or right after travelling for one block. This arrangement would discourage through traffic while providing access to the more than 1600 parking spots with sole access from Duke Street but would reduce the overall 'straight through' vehicular traffic by about 75%.

The Neighbourhood Bikeway alternative was presented to the public and to City of Kitchener. Public feedback was not supportive, neither cyclists nor motorists preferred the Neighbourhood Bikeway concept and City of Kitchener staff could not support the concept as it did not meet the City of Kitchener Council's vision of having an AAA network in the downtown.

Why is two-directional bus service along Duke Street important?

With the LRT on Duke Street, and Charles Street, bus services were adjusted to facilitate transfers and provide substitute bus services when the LRT operation is down. Having the LRT and two directional bus services operating along the same streets has been essential to keep the two systems integrated and easy to use.

Moving bus routes to other corridors, e.g. Weber Street, would increase transit operating costs immediately and capital costs in the longer term. There would also be a negative impact on ridership and accessibility. The additional travel distance and turning

movements would decrease the effectiveness and reliability of the bus routes. Moving the routes further from the heart of downtown would adversely impact accessibility to GRT services, and the separation from the ION line would impact the ease of transfer between the two systems. In summary, allowing buses to move in one direction only along Duke Street would have a significant negative impact as it would reduce the long-term growth of transit ridership and would significantly increase both operating and capital costs of transit services. The results of a Transit Impact Assessment are summarized in Appendix C.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public:

Area Municipalities:

City of Kitchener staff participated in the discussions of the alternatives and is supportive of the removal of Duke Street from Frederick Street to Water Street from the AAA cycling network at this time. City staff could not provide full support for a Neighbourhood Bikeway proposal on Duke Street as it does not meet City of Kitchener Council objectives for All Ages and Abilities cycling in the downtown.

Public:

As a follow-up to the commitments in TES-TRP-22-01, a community engagement period was open for public feedback from February 14 through March 13, 2022. As part of that outreach, a survey was made available for input so that the community members could share their feedback on the potential Duke Street plans that were shared with the public at that time.

There were a total of 287 respondents to the online survey. High-level findings of the survey results showed support for Separated Cycling Lanes between Francis Street and College Street but expressed apprehension towards the Neighbourhood Bikeway between College Street and Frederick Street. A more detailed report on the public engagement feedback, including more details around the specific feedback and information around the travel habits and relationship between the respondents and Duke Street, is provided in Appendix D.

The project team also brought the preliminary design idea to the Region's Active Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) in February 2022 and to the City of Kitchener's Active Transportation and Trails Advisory Committee (ATTAC) for comment. The Region's ATAC did not offer an official position on the project. The City's ATTAC supported the separated cycling lanes between Francis Street and College Street, but did not support the Neighbourhood Bikeway concept.

Staff acknowledge the concerns raised by the public and the advisory committees through the public engagement of this project.

7. Financial Implications:

There are no budget implications of this Report. The section from Water Street to Victoria Street will be built and financed by the City of Kitchener.

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

With Council endorsement, for the section between Francis Street and Water Street, Regional staff will work with City of Kitchener staff to:

- Complete detailed design – Winter/Spring 2023/2024; and
- Construction between Water Street and Francis Street (Regions' right of way) and Francis Street and Victoria Street (City of Kitchener's right of way) in 2024.

9. Attachments:

Appendix A: Proposed Duke Street Design Concept

Appendix B: Bicycle Facility Screening Exercise

Appendix C: Transit Impact Assessment

Appendix D: Evaluation of Public Engagement

Appendix E: Summary Presentation

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