

Region of Waterloo

Planning, Development, and Legislative Services

Regional Growth, Development and Sustainability Service

To: Sustainability, Infrastructure, and Development Committee

Meeting Date: September 10, 2024

Report Title: Kissing Bridge Trailway – Proposed Pedestrian Bridge

1. Recommendation

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on options being evaluated for the potential construction of a pedestrian bridge along the Kissing Bridge Trailway (KBT), a component of the larger Goderich to Guelph (G2G) Trail.

3. Strategic Plan:

This report addresses both Climate Aligned Growth through the provision of low-carbon, active transportation opportunities and greenspace, as well as Homes for All by encouraging further tourism-based economic development opportunities in the Region.

4. Report Highlights:

- The G2G Trail is a 132 km multi-use recreation trail and greenspace that extends from Guelph to the shores of Lake Huron in Goderich. Within the Region of Waterloo, the KBT is a 45km component of the G2G Trail. The KBT is jointly leased by the Province to the Region of Waterloo and the County of Wellington for use as a recreational trail.
- There are two gaps in the KBT that prevent it from becoming an entirely off-road trail: 1) crossing of the Grand River near West Montrose (Woolwich Township); and 2) crossing of the Conestogo River in Wallenstein (Wellesley Township). At these two locations the original railway bridges were removed when the rail line was decommissioned.
- An independent, local fundraising initiative has secured private funding contributions to support the design and construction of a pedestrian bridge over the Conestogo River in Wallenstein. The volunteers leading this initiative have prepared a conceptual design brief for the proposed bridge. The Township of

Wellesley has also obtained a small amount of funding from the Federal Government to support bridge design and construction.

- To expedite the construction of the bridge and capitalize on this funding opportunity, several options for supporting the design, construction, and maintenance are being evaluated by staff. These include the following:
 - **Option 1:** That the Township of Wellesley assume responsibility for bridge design and construction, including the completion of an Environmental Assessment (EA), and that the Region of Waterloo assume responsibility for the operation and maintenance of this asset, including legal liability, once constructed if certain design conditions are met and approval from the Province of Ontario is secured. A significant portion of the costs associated with design and construction can be offset by private funding contributions; however, funds required for the remaining balance of design and construction costs have not yet been identified. Furthermore, costs and associated funding for either demolition or long-term refurbishment of the bridge have yet to be identified and allocated. Avenues to secure additional funding from upper levels of government will be pursued as this option will not be feasible in the absence of such funding.
 - **Option 2:** That the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of the bridge becomes a component of the Region's Transportation Planning and Capital Works Program, with the Region assuming the full financial and legal responsibility for the bridge. Capacity and budgets are fully allocated for the next several years, so this option is not feasible in the short-term. If directed by Council to pursue this option, an additional FTE will be required to project manage this work and this project will need to be added to the Capital Plan.
 - **Option 3:** That the construction and maintenance of the proposed bridge is not supported at this time. The volunteers leading this fundraising campaign have indicated that the private funding will be lost if a commitment to build the bridge is not secured in the short term. Thus, if a bridge is desired in the future, the total expenses incurred by the Region and partners will be significantly higher.
- Staff will continue to work with partners to refine cost estimates, evaluate options, and provide a recommendation to Regional Council in the coming months.

5. Background:

In 2010, the Goderich to Guelph Rail Trail (G2G) was formed with the intent of promoting the entire length of the former railway as an accessible, multi-use, off-road hiking and recreation trail. The Kissing Bridge Trailway is a 45 km component of the

G2G Trail that stretches across the northern portion of the Region from Guelph to Millbank. This trail is an important Regional tourist destination with economic benefits to the Region.

The G2G Trail is owned by the Province of Ontario and leased to several stakeholders. The KBT, as a component of the G2G Trail, is jointly leased by the Province to the County of Wellington and the Region of Waterloo for use as a recreational trail. This lease is now on its fourth extension term and will expire on August 31, 2027.

The G2G Trail is managed by the G2G Rail Trail not-for-profit organization; this organization is also a lease holder with the province for the portions that fall within Perth and Huron Counties. Through discussion with the G2G Rail Trail staff, it was determined that this organization does not have the capacity to assume responsibility for the proposed pedestrian bridge.

Within the Region of Waterloo, the KBT is divided into sections that are managed and maintained by volunteer steward groups. Management is overseen by an Advisory Board made up of representatives of the steward groups, several non-affiliated landowner and business representatives, and a representative appointed by each of the County and Regional councils.

A conceptual design brief for the proposed bridge over the Conestogo River has been prepared by an independent engineering firm at the request of community volunteers and circulated to the Township of Wellesley and the Region for review and comment. While this design brief provides useful for conceptual direction, a comprehensive engineering design study and EA are still needed. Some resources for the EA and the construction of the bridge can be provided by the Township of Wellesley, however, Township staff have indicated that it is preferred that the Region complete this work.

Should Council direct staff to pursue this option, the project will need to be added to the capital program, and other projects will need to be deprioritized or postponed accordingly, to manage the funding gap described in the Financial Implications section. As the Region's infrastructure project managers are fully engaged in delivering the Transportation, Water and Wastewater and Waste Management Capital Plan, a new FTE will also be required to perform this work.

This group of community volunteers is also seeking an alternative road crossing for trail users at Line 86 in Wallenstein to address pedestrian / cyclist safety concerns. The crossing of Line 86 will be studied by the Region as a transportation issue (i.e. road user safety) in due time.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Area Municipalities: Regular and on-going discussions have been had with the Township of Wellesley to ensure that all options considered are mutually beneficial.

7. Financial Implications:

The completion of an engineering peer review study directed by Region staff indicates that an Environmental Assessment (EA) and the eventual construction of the proposed pedestrian bridge is estimated to cost approximately \$8,000,000. The project estimate generated by community volunteers is significantly lower at \$5,500,000, but this estimate does not consider all costs associated with a project of this magnitude. The estimate differential can be attributed to the selection by the volunteer group of lower upfront capital costs for construction. This approach does not support a 75-year life cycle for some major bridge components and would therefore be subject to major rehabilitation costs 15-20 years from construction. These bridge design choices presented by the volunteer group relate to the selection of lower cost pier rehabilitation strategies and proposed deck materials.

Funds raised by local volunteers amounting to \$3,000,000 will be allocated directly to this cost, as would Township of Wellesley funds of \$330,000 and federal funding of \$180,000. Each preliminary assessment leaves a remaining funding gap to complete the capital project construction ranging from \$4.49 million with the Region's estimate to \$2.49 million for the volunteer group's estimate.

Total maintenance costs will be dependent on the anticipated lifespan and design of the pedestrian bridge. Staff estimates that approximately \$21,000 will be required annually to support on-going maintenance for the proposed Regional approach, which focuses on a longer term life cycle for the proposed structure.

Staff will continue to work with partners to refine cost estimates, evaluate options, and provide a recommendation to Regional Council in the coming months

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

Staff will continue to work closely with staff at the Township of Wellesley, the County of Wellington, the G2G Rail Trail, and community volunteers to identify and evaluate potential options for the design, construction, and maintenance of this pedestrian bridge.

9. Attachments:

None

Prepared By: Meaghan Eastwood, Manager, Sustainability and Climate Services

Reviewed By: Danielle De Fields, Director, Regional Growth, Development and Sustainability Service

Mike Henderson, Director, Transportation Services

Frank Kosa, Director, Design and Construction

Approved By: Rod Regier, Commissioner, Planning, Development, and Legislative Services

Jennifer Rose, Commissioner, Engineering and Environmental Services

Doug Spooner, Commissioner, Transportation Services