



Transition Sooke Response to the Sooke Transportation Master Plan

Embrace the Climate Emergency • Stop unlimited growth • Promote personal mobility

Overview

“Sooke is committed to creating a transportation system that prioritizes safe, sustainable transportation options for all Sooke residents. In doing so, a new approach to decision making related to transportation policy, planning, infrastructure, and services is envisioned where walking, cycling, public transit, goods movement, multi-occupant vehicles and single-occupant vehicles are ranked in descending order of priority”

The aspirations of the draft Transportation Master Plan (TMP), quoted above, are well intentioned. To privilege walking, cycling and transit over movement of automobiles is a radical approach, highly appropriate to these climate emergency times. However, the details of the plan do not actually support the goals.

The proposed transportation network that the TMP describes is good; but it does not go far enough.

If all parts of the plan are approved by Council, funding is secured, and the short-term action items are all completed within five years, the resulting walking/cycling networks of complete streets and off-road trails would be impressive and increase the safety of local active transportation.

If the BC Transit Local Area plan increases regional and local bus routes and services in Sooke over the next three years, commuters of Sooke’s newest residents in the subdivisions currently under construction (Sun River, Broomhill etc.) could reduce the number of car trips sooner than later.

But these are big ifs. Even though the goal is to complete all components of the plan, there is no guarantee that the maps included will in fact be built out in the timeframe of the plan.

Overarching Concerns

A business as usual, growth-oriented plan

“The policies within this document will provide municipal staff, District Council, the development community and all residents with a plan for a connected mobility network that shapes how the District’s transportation system will support the community **as it continues to grow.**”

Transition Sooke Response to the Sooke Transportation Master Plan

This Transportation Master Plan is all about growth, answering the question of how we will move around as our population grows at 2% a year. It is imperative that Sooke re-think this growth model as it flies in the face of the declaration of a climate emergency. Two percent per year growth is not sustainable and will overwhelm all aspects of infrastructure — roads, sewage, water, house development, etc. — and diminish Sooke’s quality of life.

Sooke has declared a climate emergency but it has yet to develop a climate action plan. In anticipation of that climate emergency plan, all plans being developed — Transportation Master Plan, Parks and Trails Master Plan and the Official Community Plan — must focus all actions through a "climate emergency lens."

Plans like the Transportation Master Plan should focus on reducing carbon emissions and enhancing resiliency rather than trying to accommodate increased growth or trying to "catch up" with past growth.

The plan mentions a desire to “enhance the local economy” (p. 11) but does not refer to it at all in the action planning, missing an opportunity to identify measures Sooke can take to reduce the need for commuting altogether by stimulating local employment. This would allow the TMP to acknowledge that “staying home” is a transportation choice and add a “staying at home” section to the inverted pyramid, not for COVID-19, but to reduce GHGs.

Wherever possible, the TMP should present clear options for reducing the need for the personal vehicle in Sooke.

Emphasis on Development Cost Charges as Funder and Plan Driver

“Finance transportation conditions in partnership with land development, service providers and adjacent jurisdictions.”

This approach suggests that planning for growth and development is the driver for enhancing transportation. Unfortunately, such a driver prioritizes growth over environmental and climate concerns — more cars and car infrastructure, destruction of carbon sinks, etc. It also leads to a slow and piecemeal implementation of policy.

By all means, use the District’s many tools to ensure that new development contributes its fair share toward improving the transportation network. But do not make implementation of the network dependent on waiting for an “opportunity for development” to arise before creating the needed infrastructure. Build the infrastructure, serve existing citizens, then see what additional development Sooke needs and desires and THEN apply and utilize Development Cost Charges. Focus on using other methods of funding, listed on page 69, including general revenues, provincial programs and initiatives, federal funding, Green Municipal Fund, Carbon Tax Rebate, ICBC, the private sector—even property taxes—first.

Transition Sooke Response to the Sooke Transportation Master Plan

Sooke needs a functional active transportation network to reduce GHGs now, not sometime in the future. Uncoupling necessary transportation infrastructure from development is crucial to ensure a timely implementation of the plan.

Also-- let's stop talking about sidewalks and bike lanes and bus stops as "amenities" and start calling them "necessities" because that is what they are.

The Elephant in the Plan: Provincial Jurisdiction over Hwy 14

In many places throughout the TMP reference is made to provincial jurisdiction over Hwy 14, and the BC road standards that preclude such basic community needs as stop signs, crosswalks and safe roadside pathways for active transportation users. While the plan appears to accept this constraint, the District of Sooke should not. Instead, the District should advocate with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) to update the road standards for highways going through communities. Many BC municipalities suffer the phenomenon of a dangerous highway bisecting their community, endangering citizens trying to access to different neighbourhoods. Perhaps the District of Sooke could find allies with whom to prevail upon MOTI to make the needed changes.

Exclusion of North Sooke in Maps and Plan

The TMP makes no mention of the local transportation impacts of the \$65 million highway 14 expansion from Connie to Glintz Lake Road. This change in Hwy 14 will not only cause residents in that area to lose their bus stops, but they will be required to embrace circuitous local travel (one North Sooke resident will walk 1,700 metres to visit his neighbour) for the convenience of highway users passing through their neighbourhood. No off-road paths or cycle lanes or complete streets are envisioned for that area, which is a disservice to local residents.

Specific Concerns

Walking and Rolling

"... the plan envisions a new direction for Sooke that ensures all modes of transportation are considered and infrastructure that supports multi-modal transportation are prioritized and included in all new roadway projects" (p.15)

This suggests that such multi-modal infrastructure will not be approached unless something needs to be done to the vehicle roadbed. How about standing that thinking on its head and building the active transportation features — for walkers, cyclers, strollers and scooters — before the potholes need filling? This would allow off-road multi-use pathways to be built sooner, under both the Transportation and Parks and Trails budgets.

In the section on Support Amenities (let's call them necessities), there is a reference to waste bins, and an allowance for such to be "one waste receptacle or separate receptacles for recycling and waste." It would be appropriate here to specify that waste bins should accommodate a range of recycling types as well as organic waste.

Transition Sooke Response to the Sooke Transportation Master Plan

All active transportation routes/pathways should be marked by blue, orange or red pavement. Different materials could be used to build these routes. Colouring the cycling/e-cycling routes sets them apart as special, favoured, and both socially conscious and healthy, and will encourage use.

Cycling

The TMP does not acknowledge that Sooke is not a safe place to cycle and it's hard to easily get to places where it is safe to cycle.

Central to this would be safe bike corridors along Otter Point, Grant, and Sooke Road. (all roads listed in the plan as needing work for cycling/active transportation) and the link up over the Sooke River to the Galloping Goose. This must NOT be simply a cleaning up of a shoulder to be used by cars for emergency and parking — but proper protected separated bike lanes.

It would be useful for the District to consider roads and pathways as cultural corridors, as a canvas for artists and the community to express and reveal itself. There are many ways that this could assist in building community spirit and help to brand Sooke as a centre for art and innovation.

Facility Selection

The plan sets a benchmark of 1,000 vehicles a day before dedicated bike lanes will be considered. That's an average of 41 cars an hour. With many roads having inadequate shoulders and lanes narrowed by on-street parking, this benchmark is too high to ensure that all users of all ages and abilities feel safe. A network that does not provide safety for all users will fail in the goal of privileging pedestrians and cyclists over cars. This benchmark is a great example of the “business as usual, car-centric lens” used to visualize the TMP: the quality of cycling facilities is determined by the number of cars on the road.

Given that we must urgently reduce transportation GHGs, how about we make the walking, rolling, cycling, complete street network absolutely safe for users, with the definition of safety being that provided by cyclists? How about ensuring that all streets of the network have a painted, dedicated bike lane, at minimum, regardless of the number of cars using them? Some jurisdictions narrow car lanes to achieve this. How about dedicating some streets as car-free?

Public Transit

The portion of the TMP dealing with transit references BC Transit's Sooke Local Area Transit Plan (SLATP) 2020, citing service improvements with a frequency of every 15 minutes at peak and up to every 45 minutes at other times for regional (commuting) routes. New planned local and rural routes would make it possible to travel around Sooke by bus. While the SLATP is an improvement on existing service for existing bus commuter users, it is probably not enough to shift drivers from their cars for the long commute.

The SLATP suggests an implementation plan of short-term improvements for local routes and commuter routes in years 1-3 and medium-term improvements in year 5. However, due to losses

Transition Sooke Response to the Sooke Transportation Master Plan

sustained during the COVID pandemic, BC Transit is not able to commit to a timeline for implementation at this time. This delay will make it difficult to foster new transportation habits by residents of new developments under current construction.

Perhaps the District could consider a short- to medium-term investment in a local bus business to provide electric bus service levels locally and regionally off-peak times until BC Transit can take over the load. This could provide local employment and provide increased service more quickly.

Other suggestions the TMP makes to support transit-use include linking roadways to simplify routing and thus reduce trip duration and providing complete streets to allow pedestrians and cyclists safe access to the bus network. These are useful by-products of the planned network but aren't innovative approaches to supporting increased transit-use.

An innovative approach to increasing transit use would be achieved by embracing fare-free transit. Car commuters currently paying upwards of \$400 per month for gas and parking would likely embrace the saving—increasing demand for transit and driving quicker service improvements from BC Transit.

Bus Stops

The TMP lists amenities to accompany bus stops, for some reason suggesting that less frequent local routes don't really need a boarding platform (necessary for wheelchair and scooter users to board), seating, bike parking, garbage and recycling bins, or shelter, noting these are desirable but not required. In fact, the TMP suggests that even on regional routes only a sign, a boarding platform, a seat and schedule information is required.

So essentially, the TMP is saying that standing in the dark in the rain for 45 minutes or more is fine for transit users in Sooke. This is not an approach that prioritizes transit-use or makes it attractive. Such an approach will serve to ensure more single-use automobiles on the road. Instead, Sooke must make a choice that truly supports transit-use and ensure that **all** bus stops feature at minimum, boarding platform, seats, shelter, garbage and recycling bins and lighting.

The TMP suggests that all Sooke homes should be within 400 metres of a bus stop. That's almost half a kilometre; a considerable distance for those with mobility challenges or saddled with kids and shopping bags facing roads without shoulders or pathways. Transit must be practical and safe.

Further, Sooke must ensure that all neighbourhoods have bus stops within 150 meters of residences.

Transit Exchange

The TMP suggests that lot A on Wadams Way be used for a new transit exchange. This site is currently under consideration by Sooke for affordable housing and other services. While a transit exchange close to higher density affordable housing could increase convenience for low-income residents, there could be some concern regarding noise and air quality from bus exhaust, for those residents. This speaks to the need for District of Sooke to advocate with BC Transit to act quickly to electrify its fleet.

Transition Sooke Response to the Sooke Transportation Master Plan

Existing Park and Rides

The TMP and SLATP inaccurately state that a new park and ride will be part of Hwy 14 improvements at Connie Road. According to MOTI, the park and ride will be located at 17 Mile, and the two bus-stops at Connie Road will be removed.

Complete Streets

Aside from the visible car-centric bias of the phrase “. . . complete streets . . . continue to facilitate vehicles while better accommodating other travel modes” (pg. 38), the TMP makes a good case for the complete street model that is popular in many jurisdictions. Complete streets, done well, can positively transform the transportation experience for all users. However, complete streets and mobility hubs could be more effectively designed at intersections with Hwy 14, if MOTI updates its road standards for highways.

Traffic Volumes

This transportation planning document aspires to transforming local transportation by prioritizing walking, cycling and transit over the motor vehicle, but does not address measures to reduce traffic volumes. The TMP is doesn't question the wisdom of maintaining an increase in traffic volume in lock-step with a 2% increase in population. This is yet another example of the car-centric approach this plan has taken. Traffic Impact Assessments (TIAs) are all about vehicular traffic. Rather than trying to predict “anticipated traffic generated by . . . land uses,” how about boldly restricting vehicular traffic volumes and finding ways to support that limitation?

Street Network

The TMP points out the need for upgrading many streets from their existing classification in order to make room for bike lanes and pathways. Connectivity is also pointed out as a challenge that prevents circulation of traffic of all kinds, throwing cars, bikes and pedestrians back to Hwy 14 and generating longer than necessary Transit routes. Connecting roads, such as Grant and Throup Roads through to Phillips road (The Grant Road connector) is advocated to alleviate this. This will serve car users well, and may facilitate cyclists and pedestrians; however, Council could consider privileging cyclists and pedestrians over cars, and begin making the connections with a multi-use pathway first.

Network Connections

The TMP recommends that cul de sacs “be discouraged in future development, wherever possible.” It would be heartening to see stronger language here — perhaps along the lines of “cul de sacs and dead ends will no longer be approved in new development.” Subdivisions laid out with circuitous street routing are part of the car-centric values of the last century and have been proven to be deleterious to residents.

Transition Sooke Response to the Sooke Transportation Master Plan

As to making connections between other roads, the TMP advocates creating street dedications through development re-zoning and subdivision. This, again, makes the build-out of the network dependent on growth, rather than prioritizing it for its own sake.

Particularly concerning is the comment that long-range connectivity could be acquired through removing land from the ALR for development and road building. The removal of any more land from the ALR is completely unacceptable, as it would undermine long-term food security goals. References to the possibility of paving farmland, however far in the future, should be removed from the TMP. However, unpaved multi-use active transportation trails, through ALR land, in partnership with local farmers should be considered.

Parking

The TMP assumes an increase in parking demand, rather than exploring ways to reduce it.

There are challenges assessing the need for parking because illegal secondary suites do not usually provide parking space. District of Sooke could, through the OCP, require that all secondary suites be permitted from now on, and that currently unpermitted ones must be permitted within a specified timeframe. This would not only serve tenants well by ensuring safe residences, but would also provide accurate transportation data and keep on-street parking to a minimum. On-street parking where there are no sidewalks is a major hazard for pedestrians, particularly children.

The TMP misses an opportunity to put forward ideas to significantly reduce the need for automobile ownership and parking issues in neighbourhoods. Planning for the provision and promotion of car-sharing and ride-sharing in both existing and new neighbourhoods would have gone further to reduce the plan's car-centric nature and reduce, rather than accommodate, traffic and parking increases. This part of the plan does not support a "new approach to decision making related to transportation policy" (p. 12).

Streetlights

Operation of streetlights can represent 60 to 80% of the electricity cost for municipalities. There is no mention of utilizing innovative solutions that are both good for the pocketbook and the environment. Consider using motion sensor street lighting control systems with radar type sensors throughout the town including any new bike pathways.

New Mobility and Integration

Public EV Charging Station Network

EVs are popular in Sooke, and there are five level 2 charging stations already. A priority now is several level 3 stations. Level 3 is best because most people want to charge quickly whether they have a short- or long-range EV.

Transition Sooke Response to the Sooke Transportation Master Plan

Everyone who has an EV in Sooke is likely to have a home charging station. Putting charging stations in Sooke primarily encourages people from other communities to come and spend money in Sooke and enhances the economic viability of local small businesses.

Level 2 charging at park and rides makes no sense. People with electric cars will more than likely have a home charging station so if they then drive to the park and ride, they won't need to charge. People parking in the park and ride and commuting for a full workday would reach their time limit on the charging station and end up "hogging" the equipment.

Charging stations should be near restaurants, cafés, walks, etc. in the core.

District of Sooke Fleet Vehicles

The TMP should contain more assertive language in this section. All DOS fleet vehicles should be replaced by electric vehicles as soon possible. Let's not waste time considering it.

E Bikes

The TMP says that the District "cannot directly influence the purchase price of E Bikes." If Sooke embraced a program similar to that of the Town of Nelson, they could in fact, make E Bikes much more affordable to Sooke Residents (See Coming Soon - City to Roll out E-bike Program to Residents (nelson.ca/civic_alerts))

In this section of the plan, reference is made to the Galloping Goose Regional Trail, which connects with Langford and Colwood. Unfortunately, the plan misses the opportunity to envision an alternate, more direct bikeway into the Westshore that does not detour through Metchosin.

Ride-sharing

The term "sharing society" has been seriously co-opted by business, but its origins are much more personal and community-based. Ride-sharing saves energy, money, and greenhouse gases, reduces congestion and probability of accidents, and promotes connectedness and community. In fact, car-pooling, as it used to be known, is not a new concept. Watch the cars on the Sooke Road each day and see how many of them are single occupant. There are several online platforms already available at an affordable cost that Sooke could invest in and then promote for people to connect with others in order to ride-share.

The TMP makes a reference to ride hailing (Uber, Lyft, and others). This reference should be removed. Ride hailing has no place in Sooke and if implemented, it would result in the demise of Sooke's existing local taxi companies.

Conclusion

Most items in the TMP's action plan are listed as "short-term" initiatives. With political will, and adequate funding all actions could be completed in 3-5 years. Such an accelerated pace of implementation would better serve the residents of Sooke. It is imperative that, rather than awaiting

Transition Sooke Response to the Sooke Transportation Master Plan

opportunities to transform Sooke's transportation network while reducing car use and GHGs, Sooke seize the initiative and create the network quickly. It is essential for our collective well-being.

The District of Sooke lost an opportunity to create a more robust and effective plan by not involving the Climate Action Committee (CAC) in the production of the TMP. In future, particularly as the District embarks on an Official Community Planning process, it is vital that the CAC be involved. Further, the District should hire a Climate Emergency Coordinator who would champion transportation, green building, parks and more through:

- Education and outreach
- Securing grants and other funding models
- Ensuring all the planning processes incorporated a "climate emergency lens"