



Report to Council

Department: Development Services
Division: Planning
Date: March 18, 2024
Prepared by: Corinne Chiasson, Senior Planner
Report Number: Planning-2024-07
Subject: County Wide Active Transportation CWATS Annual Update
Number of Pages: 15 pages

Recommendation(s)

That PLANNING 2024-07 entitled County Wide Active Transportation CWATS Annual Update prepared by Corinne Chiasson, Senior Planner, dated March 18, 2024 be received.

Purpose

To provide Council with an overview of the County Wide Active Transportation System (CWATS) program, highlight past successes, provide a brief summary of current Town of Essex projects, outline partnerships and funding models, and forecast objectives into the next 5 years.

Background and Discussion

The County Wide Active Transportation System (CWATS) program builds infrastructure and provides education opportunities regarding the benefits of active transportation. This program strongly supports the *Town of Essex Strategic Plan* objective "3.3 – Expanding opportunities for healthy living and recreation" as well as "accomplishes community

engagement and partnership objectives". CWATS programs also support the *Climate Ready – Adaptation Plan*, regarding "the enhancement of health, safety, and quality of life for the Town of Essex Community as well as the promotion of climate change awareness and adaptation opportunities".

CWATS is a network of on- and off-road trail systems that supports cycling, pedestrian, and mobility for all members of the community. This trail network supports the option of low carbon active transportation over typical vehicle use, and connects communities and neighbourhoods to employment lands, municipal service facilities, schools and recreation areas.

Creation of the CWATS network originated from the leadership role of the County of Essex and great collaboration efforts of all seven (7) lower tier municipalities who adopted the County Wide Active Transportation Master Plan in 2012. This Master Plan identified planning policies, design standards, and operation guidelines that set the principles for this program. The Plan's objectives are to enhance the culture of healthy active living, connect rural and urban areas, bridge neighbourhoods to community amenities and employment lands, and to entice tourism and economic benefits to our region. *Figures 1. And 2.* Below identify the regional and local CWATS routes.



Figure 1. – Regional CWATS Network

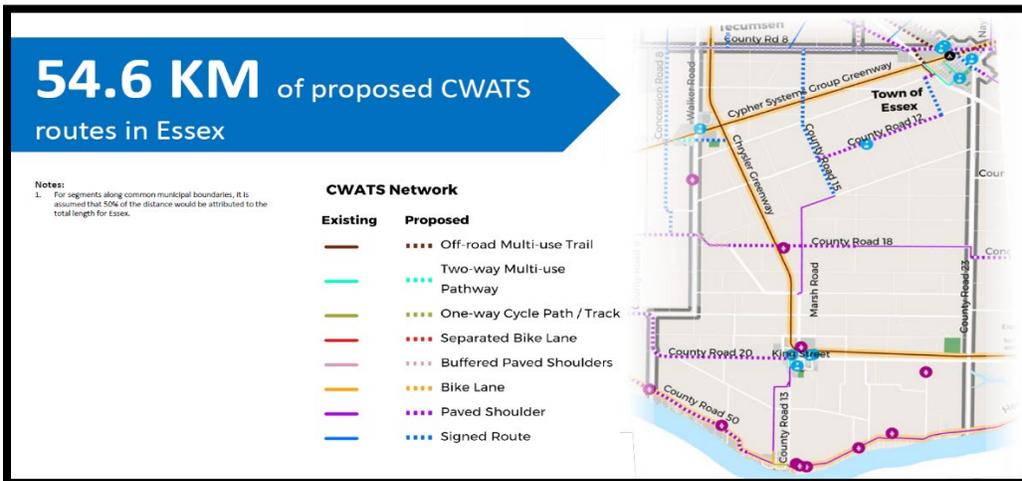


Figure 2. Town of Essex CWATS Routes

The CWATS Master Plan includes a partnership cost-sharing model that supports municipalities with funding initiatives and sets a timeline to ensure successful implementation of the plan for future generations. The CWATS programs is integral in

promoting active healthy living, but strongly encourages benefits of tourism, community connectivity, and climate adaptation objectives.

The 2012 CWATS Master Plan sets the framework for the network, and the establishment of the CWATS Committee, which includes a representative from each of the lower tier municipalities and is chaired by the County's Active Transportation Coordinator. This program also includes strong partnerships with the Essex Region Conservation Authority, Windsor Essex County Health Unit, Ministry of Transportation Ontario, the City of Windsor, Municipality of Chatham-Kent, Great Lakes Waterfront Trail Regeneration Trust, Bike Windsor Essex, Trans Canada Trail, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island, Ontario Active School Travel, Share the Road Essex County, and Ontario by Bike.

Since 2012, there have been updates to transportation and roadway standards under the Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO), as well as excellent public feedback which needed to be incorporated into CWATS network and master plan. From 2022 to 2024 the County and municipal partners, along with the public and stakeholders completed the review of the 2012 Master Plan. This update included new chapters such as a year-round maintenance program, best practices and guideline standards, and assurances of equity for all members of the community for mobility, social factors, and updated safety measures. It is expected the updated Master Plan will be endorsed by County Council in 2024.

Structure of the CWATS Program:

The CWATS Master Plan directs all programs and projects to fall within one of the following three (3) categories:

1. Core Infrastructure,
2. Paved Shoulder Program, and
3. Municipal Partnership.

Each category is described below, and municipal projects must meet a set-criteria to qualify for cost sharing support:

1. Core Infrastructure:

Core Infrastructure projects are identified as the physical construction of bike lanes, on-road paved shoulders, off-road multi-use trails, and multi-use urban paths (and any associated services: drainage, culverts, utilities) and be in accordance with the objectives and maps identified in the CWATS Master Plan. *Figure 3* provides examples of these active transportation facility types.

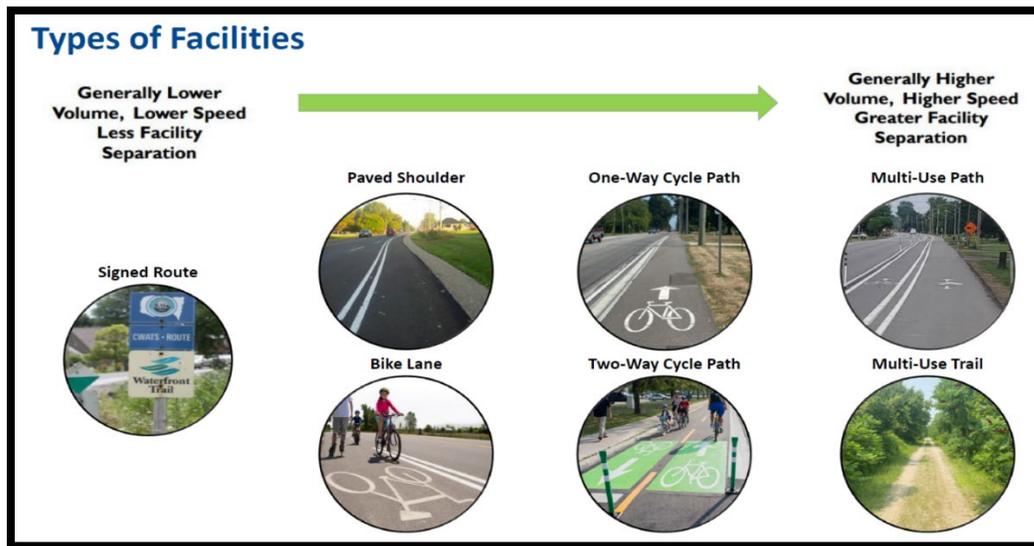


Figure 3. Types of CWATS Facilities

In order for a Municipality to move forward with a CWATS Core Infrastructure project, an application must be submitted to the County of Essex CWATS Committee with designs and funding details. Core Infrastructure projects are typically proposed to the Committee in July for early consideration in the County's draft budgets the following year. The Committee will deliberate and vote on projects in accordance with available funding. Works accepted through this process are awarded cost-sharing in accordance with the chart below *Figure 4*.

Facility Type	County of Essex Share	Local Municipality Share	ERCA Share
On Street Bike Lanes / Paved Shoulder / Context Sensitive Solution - on a County Road in a Rural Area	100%	0%	0%
On Street Bike Lanes / Paved Shoulder / Multi-use Trail with or without separation/ Context Sensitive Solution - on a County Road in an Urban Area	40%	60%	0%
On Street Bike Lanes / Paved Shoulder / Multi-use Trail with or without separation/ Context Sensitive Solution - on a Local Road anywhere.	0%	100%	0%
Signed Routes - anywhere on the AT Network	100%	0%	0%
Sidewalks - anywhere on the AT Network	0%	100%	0%
Multi-Use Trails - outside of County and/or Local Right-of-way	0%	0%	100%
Multi-Use Trails - outside of County and/or Local Right-of-way and owned by Municipality	0%	100%	0%
Note: Cost sharing is applied to the design, construction and maintenance of facilities. However, the maintenance on County Roads within urban areas is the responsibility of the host municipality.			

Figure 4. – Cost Sharing Chart for Core Infrastructure Projects

The Town of Essex has completed several projects under the Core Infrastructure program since the 2012 CWATS Master Plan was adopted. The most notable include:

- 8.6 km stretch of paved shoulders/bike lanes along County Road 50 East that creates a south shore cycling/wineries route (*Figure 5*),
- 3.9 km length of bike lanes along historic Dunn Road linking Harrow with Colchester Village (*Figure 6*)
- 2.3 km Green Link - Erie Road connection that connects the Chrysler Canada Greenway-Trans Canada Trail from Harrow to the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail along County Road 50
- green sidewalk/bike lane project through Colchester Village, with CWATS amenities at Colchester Park, beach, and marina.



Figure 5. County Road bike lane – winery route from Erie Rd to Arner Townline



Figure 6. Dunn Road bike lanes – Connecting Harrow to Colchester Village

Currently the Town of Essex has an exciting Core Infrastructure project underway in Essex Centre – the Maidstone Multi-Use Path (MUP). This MUP will be an important active transportation route linking: the Cypher Systems Greenway, CASO Rail line Corridor, County Road 8 commercial and industrial district, and will provide a safe route for residents of the Essex Town Centre Subdivision to school facilities, public amenity areas, and main street Talbot. In December 2023, County and Town of Essex administration secured the services of WSP Consulting to undertake a design feasibility study to determine the detailed design, alignment, and costs for this MUP installation. The design feasibility study is expected to be completed in Spring of March 2024 with construction planned for the 2025-2026 budget years. This MUP project will follow along the south side of Maidstone Avenue from South Talbot Road to Essex District High School and then flip to the north side of Maidstone Avenue to Talbot Street North (Main Street), as shown in Figures 7 through 9. S.



Figure 7. Scope of Maidstone Multi-use path



Figure 8. Scope of Maidstone Multi-use path



Figure 9. Scope of Maidstone Multi-use path

Future projects under the Core Infrastructure program include the extension of bike lanes along County Road 34 to Talbot Street South, Essex Centre (Figure 10 and 11.). A design feasibility study is planned for 2024, with construction to be determined based on the findings of the study. County Road 34 is identified as a scenic route along the historic Talbot Trail that stretches from Essex to Niagara Falls. This route is very popular regionally and provincially as a scenic cycling tourism byway. This 0.8 km section of Talbot Street South/County Road 34 is one of the last local sections that is void of bike lanes. For the safety of our residents and our cycling community this segment has been identified as a priority project by the CWATS Committee, WSP Consultants, public and stakeholders in

the updated 2024 Master Plan. This project would fall under the 40/60 cost share with the County of Essex and Town of Essex respectively.



Figure 10. – Talbot Street South at County Road 34 – deteriorated road conditions and no paved shoulders.



Figure 11. – Talbot Street South at County Road 34 – deteriorated road conditions and no paved shoulders.

2. Paved Shoulder Program

The County aligns their annual road rehabilitation program with the objectives of the CWATS Master Plan. If a County Road is located along a CWATS identified route, the road rehabilitation project is evaluated for adding paved shoulders. This active transportation feature enhances user safety for both vehicles and cyclists, but also extends the lifespan of roadway surfaces by protecting from edge deterioration. Coordination of these initiatives saves costs to the CWATS program, municipal partners, and the County of Essex because materials and labour can be calculated in bulk and be completed all at once.

In the Town of Essex, the majority of County Roads fall within the rural areas and therefore paved shoulders are 100% installed and costed to the County of Essex. However, where County Roads intersect an urban settlement boundary, municipalities partner and participate in a cost share ratio of 40:60 because active transportation facilities mostly

benefit settlement area residents. These areas are described as Connecting Links and only undertaken when budgets permit for both the County and the municipality.

The Town of Essex is currently working with the County of Essex towards rehabilitating County Road 50 West with new paved shoulders from County Road 41 to the Village of Colchester (Figure 13.). This section of County Road 50 is in a deteriorated state and was identified by the County as a priority for road rehabilitation (Figures 14. to 15.). In 2023, a 2 km stretch of roadway was rehabilitated with paved shoulders (Figure 16. and 17.), and the final 4 km stretch of County Road 50 will be completed with same in 2024. These improvements will enhance our growing agri-tourism sector, connect multiple shore beach communities together and include much needed safety measures for pedestrians and cyclists.

As the south side of County Road 50 West is identified as a Secondary Settlement area, the Town of Essex is responsible for 60 percent of the paved shoulder costs which amounts to \$2,268,444. In 2022, Administration successfully applied for and was granted the Government of Canada’s Active Transportation Fund for the full amount of \$2,268,444. This project would have originally taken three (3) years of budgeting commitment to be paid fully, but this grant has allowed all parties to fast tract this project, as well as allowing spin-off benefits for other Town of Essex projects in 2023 and 2024.

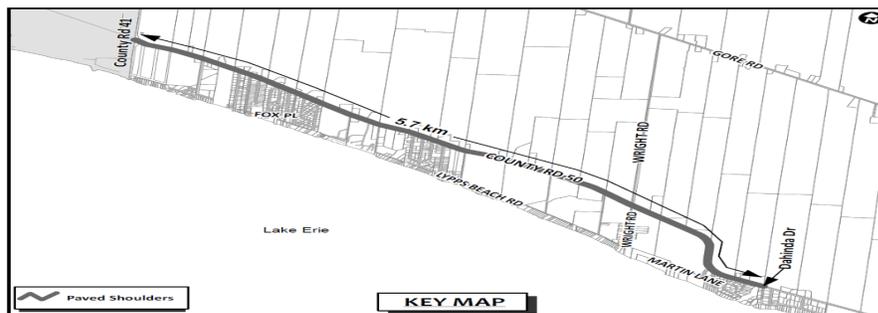


Figure 13. – Extents of County Road 50 W paved shoulder project



Figure 14. – County Road 50 West – road deterioration – rehabilitation in 2024



Figure 15. – County Road 50 West – road deterioration - rehabilitation in 2024



Figure 16. – County Road 50 West – paved shoulders completed in 2023



Figure 17. – completed paved shoulders County Road 50 -2023

3. Municipal Partnership Program (MPP):

The Municipal Partnership Program (MPP) is a supportive tool for implementing education programs that encourage the use of the active transportation system, and provide

funding for amenity features along the network. Examples of network amenities added through this system include:

- Non-infrastructure related facilities such as: bike repair stations, bike racks, wayfinding signage, water refill stations, comfort stations
- Education programs for adults and children - bike camps and rodeos
- Social media campaigns and promotions
- Positive cycling reinforcement and safe riding initiatives
- Bike valet at Town-hosted events

These initiatives invite the public to learn about active transportation to reduce carbon impacts and have healthier lifestyle options. These programs are an excellent opportunity to engage the public bringing awareness to climate change initiatives and municipal initiatives.

Projects proposed for this program require an application to be submitted to the CWATS Committee with cost quotes, designs and confirmed budgets. The cost-sharing model for Municipal Partnership Program (MPP) is a 50:50 ratio between the County and the Municipality, respectively. The County allocates a total amount of \$100,000 annually towards MPP initiatives and is shared between all seven (7) lower tier municipalities dependant on projects proposed. The Town of Essex budgeted \$30,000 towards this program in 2024 and receives a 50% reimbursement of this cost. This program has a high return for a relatively low-cost commitment.

Since 2012 Essex has been the front runner for providing excellent cycling and active transportation education events through the Communities Service Department. Annual education programs provide: bike rodeos, bike safety camps, fix it and get lit pop up events, organized glow rides and a chance to discover local parks and trail systems for families. This program helps to train staff as instructors on bike safety, and purchases positive reinforcement incentives such as bike helmets, bicycles, and bike lights.

The MPP program also supports purchases of equipment for the CWATS network system to support users such as: secure bike lockers, fix it stations, water refill stations, comfort stations, charging locations, wayfinding signage, benches, bike shelters, and lighted pedestrian and cycling crossings (*Figures 18 and 19*).



Figure 18. Chrysler Canada – Trans Canada Trail Harrow Community Entrance, lighted pedestrian crossing, stamped concrete, benches, facilities.

As part of our 5-year plan, Administration wishes to establish CWATS regional hub stations at Colchester Park, McGregor COAN Park, Essex Heritage Gardens, and the Harrow Greenway Community Entrance. These Hub stations will support CWATS trail users with amenities as they travel throughout the network.



Figure 19. Examples of amenities and wayfinding

CWATS Network Updates and Timelines

The new updated CWATS Master Plan (through consultations with the public, stakeholders, and municipalities) has identified network phasing to identify priority projects and focus on connecting links. *Figure 20.* highlights the routes intended in phases over the next 10 years.

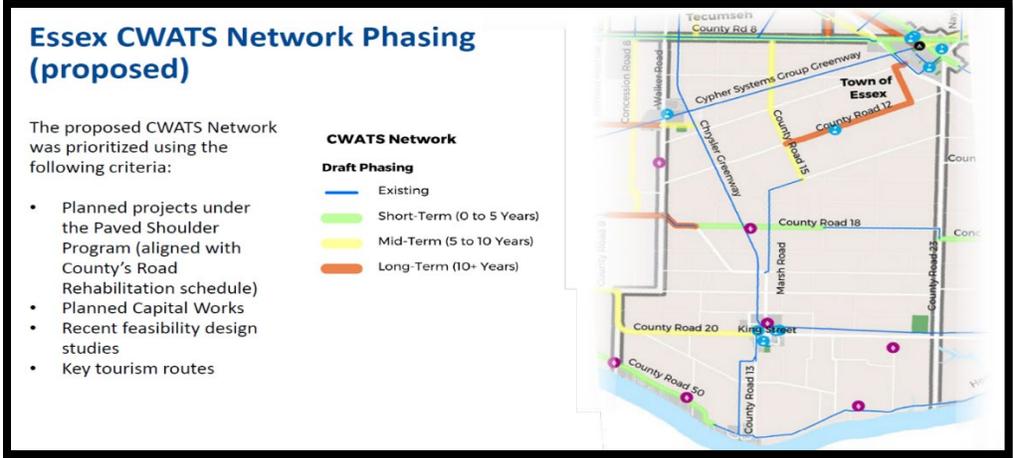


Figure 20. Phasing of CWATS projects in accordance to updated Master Plan

The CWATS Master Plan also provided an updated cost table (Figure 21.) that allows municipalities to align objectives with forecasting budgets. These tables are approximate estimates only, a functional design study would be typically undertaken to detail costs prior to initiating a project.

Essex CWATS Network by Phase (Draft)

FACILITY TYPE	SHORT 0 TO 5 YEARS		MID 6 TO 10 YEARS		LONG 10+ YEARS		TOTAL	
	KM	\$	KM	\$	KM	\$	KM	\$
Multi-Use Trail	0.9	\$453,693	1.2	\$2,002	0.7	\$1,199	2.9	\$456,894
Multi-Use Path	0.0	\$0	0.2	\$106,352	0.0	\$0	0.2	\$106,352
Separated Bike Lane	0.0	\$0	0.0	\$0	0.0	\$0	0.0	\$0
Cycle Track	0.0	\$0	0.0	\$0	0.0	\$0	0.0	\$0
Buffered Paved Shoulder	7.3	\$2,454,720	0.0	\$0	1.8	\$605,081	9.1	\$3,059,800
Paved Shoulder	15.6	\$4,215,035	6.6	\$1,772,277	6.6	\$1,793,424	28.8	\$7,780,736
Bike Lane	0.4	\$30,425	0.0	\$0	0.0	\$0	0.4	\$30,425
Signed Route	1.6	\$2,653	9.5	\$15,386	2.1	\$3,398	13.2	\$21,436
Total	25.8	\$7,156,526	17.5	\$1,896,017	11.3	\$2,403,101	54.6	\$11,455,644
% of Total Network		38%		27%		35%		100%



Notes:
 1. Costs subject to change following further CWATS Network refinement. Costs represent the network as of November 2021.
 2. Some projects are cost shared and are based on the cost share arrangement based on the approved 2012 CWATS Master Plan (40% County of Essex and 60% local municipality). These cost sharing agreements have also been applied to the lengths.
 3. For segments along common municipal boundaries, it is assumed that 50% of the distance would be attributed to each of the local municipalities.

Figure 21. Cost estimates for phases of CWATS network.

CASO Railway Corridor Acquisition Update

The CASO abandoned rail corridor extends from Windsor, St. Thomas, and Niagara Falls, Ontario. In September of 2023, the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA) with support from the County of Essex, successfully purchased the Windsor-to-Comber segment and is

working in partnership with neighbouring municipalities to transform the CASO line into a natural public greenway trail. The CASO corridor passes directly through Essex Centre and, although only 2 km falls with our municipal jurisdiction, the impacts to Essex Centre are extremely important. This trail will run through the heart of the Heritage Gardens, link perfectly to the Cypher Systems Greenway and link with the Maidstone Multi-use path. There are preliminary discussions with the Binational Trail and Trans Canada Trail to link the CASO into the network. These affiliations will offer tourism, and active transportation spin off benefits to Essex Centre, similar to the Chrysler Canada Greenway system for McGregor, Harrow and for the region. The CASO Corridor has been highlighted as a short-term priority project within the Town of Essex, however no design or construction commitments have been included in the 2024 budget.



Figure 22 – CASO Line future greenway (dark green), Maidstone MUP (Blue), Cypher Systems Greenway (light green), Historic Talbot Trail (Yellow)

Financial Impact

This report is for information purposes only, no financial impacts are as a result.

Consultations

Infrastructure Services

Corporate Services

Development Services

Link to Strategic Priorities

- Embrace asset management best practices to build, maintain, and continuously improve our municipally owned infrastructure.
- Leverage our Town's competitive advantages to promote jobs and economic investment.
- Take care of our natural environment and strengthen the sense of belonging to everyone who makes Essex "home".
- Deliver friendly customer service in an efficient, effective, and transparent manner while providing an exceptional working environment for our employees.
- Build corporate-level and community-level climate resilience through community engagement and partnership and corporate objectives.