



SIMCOE COUNTY **TRAILS STRATEGY**

In association with Dunbar and Associates



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4	2.5 Trail Organizations	21
Foreword: Simcoe County’s Never-ending Trail	7	~ Bruce Trail Conservancy	21
Preface	9	~ Simcoe County Trails	21
Chapter One – Introduction and Direction	10	~ Ganaraska Hiking Trail Association	21
1.1 Introduction	10	~ Oak Ridges Trail Association	21
1.2 Trails Strategy Vision	10	Chapter Three – The Strategy	22
1.3 Goals	10	3.1 Goals, Strategic Objectives and Outcomes	22
1.4 What is Included in this Strategy	10	Chapter Four – The Path to Achieve the Strategy	24
1.5 What is not Included in this Strategy	11	4.1 Support a variety of users through an accessible, connected trail network	24
1.6 Trails Benefits	12	~ A Well-Connected Trail Network	24
~ Health Benefits	12	~ Encourage Trail Development on Public Lands, Existing Corridors and New Developments	28
~ Environmental Benefits	12	~ Accommodate a Variety of Trail-Users	28
~ Economic Benefits	13	Compliment the Simcoe County Transportation Master Plan (2014)	28
~ Cultural Benefits	13	4.2 Maximize trail investments	28
1.7 Planning Policy Context	13	~ Trails Connecting Communities Program	29
1.8 Consultation	14	4.3 Enhance Trail-User Experience	29
Chapter Two – Simcoe County Trails Context	15	~ Trail Design Guidelines	29
2.1 A Brief History of the County	15	~ Develop Consistent Way-finding and Signage Guidelines	30
2.2 Connecting the Dots	15	~ Map Development	31
2.3 Rails to Trails	17	4.4 Effective Collaboration with Trail Partners	32
2.4 Existing Simcoe County Trails Context	17	~ Establish an Inter-Municipal Trails Advisory Committee	32
~ Trans Canada Trail	17	~ Simcoe County Trails Forum	30
~ Bruce Trail	17	4.5 Promote Awareness of Simcoe County Trails	32
~ Ganaraska Hiking Trail	17	~ Increase Awareness of County Trails	33
~ Municipal Trails	18	~ Promote Simcoe County as a Trails Tourist Destination	31
~ National Parks	18	Chapter 5 – Summary	34
~ Provincial Parks	18		
~ Other Provincial Lands	19		
~ Conservation Authorities	20		
~ Simcoe County Forests	20		



Executive Summary

The *Simcoe County Trails Strategy* was written to assist with the development of a County-wide network of passive use trails (i.e. those that are intended for non-motorized uses). Many municipalities, trail organizations, and government agencies already have excellent trail networks in place; however, there has been little coordination aimed at a connected County-wide network. This document outlines a vision and the necessary goals and objectives for a regional trail system that spans the entire County and connects communities.

The concept for the *Simcoe County Trails Strategy* stems from recommendations of the *Simcoe County Transportation Master Plan, 2008*, which called for the County to take a more active role in the development and co-ordination of active transportation infrastructure. Since then the County has undertaken an update to the *Transportation Master Plan*. This strategy complements the *Simcoe County Transportation Master Plan, 2014*, which outlines a strategy for a broader active transportation network, both on-road and off-road.

This document focuses on aspects of trail development and management in which the County can play a strong role. The County has a limited role in trail development since the majority of trails within the County are owned and managed by municipalities, trail organizations, or other government agencies.

The County is an effective facilitator of County-wide issues, including trail development. Although the

majority of trails are managed by other organizations, the County has a variety of tools that can be used to develop a County-wide trail network.

The vision of the *Simcoe County Trail Strategy* is “To create a world class network of multi-purpose passive-use trails that connects the County’s communities while providing linkages to natural, cultural, and tourism assets to increase visitation, recreational and active transportation opportunities, thereby improving the quality of life for County residents and visitors.”

In order to achieve this vision, the document outlines five goals:

1. Support a variety of passive trail uses through an accessible, connected trail network that links communities and places of interest
2. Maximize trail investments
3. Enhance trail-user experience
4. Collaborate with stakeholders
5. Promote awareness of Simcoe County trails

These goals are in turn supported by a number of strategic objectives and outcomes that outline the actions that are required to achieve the overall vision.

There are many well-established trails in Simcoe County, including the Bruce Trail, Ganaraska Trail and Trans Canada Trail. Such existing trails will be the backbone of a potential County-wide network; however, key gaps between existing trail networks must first be addressed.





Through stakeholder consultation, many of these key gaps have been identified and included in the *Simcoe County Trails Strategy* as a development priority.

In addition to addressing key gaps between existing trails, this strategy also encourages the development of new trails throughout the County. A conceptual map of the proposed trail network highlights areas within the County currently under-represented with respect to trail infrastructure. One objective of this document is to address these areas by proposing logical trail corridors.

Another objective of this document is to outline

opportunities for Simcoe County to capitalize on the growing recreational tourist market, while also providing recreational benefits to County residents. This strategy proposes the development of two large loop trails in the northern portion of the County, connected to the south by the Trans Canada Trail. The concept for these two large loops trails is based on successful trail

models elsewhere in the world. The length of each loop is approximately 150 km (two days by bicycle), which has been determined to be the ideal length for marketing purposes. These loops would allow trail users to access food, shelter and other places of interest along the way. The Trails Connecting Communities Program (TCCP) is one of the most effective tools the County of Simcoe has to help achieve the vision of this document. Since this

program's establishment in 2009, more than \$800,000 has been provided to local municipalities to construct trails. TCCP funded projects are subject to certain conditions, including design standards to ensure accessibility.

This document proposes to use TCCP to target funding to trail projects that meet the objectives and the vision of the Simcoe County Trails Strategy. A positive user experience is crucial in ensuring trails are enjoyed by residents and visitors.

The *Simcoe County Trails Strategy* proposes initiatives aimed at increasing the overall quality of experience for trail-users. It is recognized that the County's role is somewhat limited in this realm given most trails are not managed by the County of Simcoe. The County can, however, play a role in coordinating regional initiatives aimed at enhancing trail-user experience. The development of consistent way-finding and signage guidelines across the County will assist in increasing the quality of experience for trail-users. Likewise, ensuring trail accessibility

for persons with disabilities and the provision of amenities, such as appropriately located benches throughout the network, will also help create a quality trail experience.

Effective collaboration among all trail stakeholders is key to ensuring the success of the proposed County-wide trail network. *The Simcoe County Trails Strategy* proposes to establish an Inter-Municipal Trails Advisory Committee, composed of representatives from each member municipality to provide guidance on regional trail issues. Recognizing there are numerous stakeholders involved with trail development in Simcoe County, the strategy also calls for the establishment of a Simcoe County Trails Forum to offer an opportunity for all stakeholders to collaborate.

A great trail network alone will not ensure its success. The proposed County-wide trail network requires

promotion to make both residents and visitors alike aware of its many benefits. The County of Simcoe can leverage its existing promotional assets to increase awareness of trails within the County and to market the area as a trails destination. This will complement efforts related to Regional Tourism Organization 7 to showcase the County's history and cultural features, its unique community and natural environment.

There are many tasks that must be completed to achieve the vision of this strategy. While challenges are inevitable, it is clear trail infrastructure is wanted in communities across the County of Simcoe.

Working together with its member municipalities, trail organizations and countless other stakeholders, the County of Simcoe is a natural facilitator of regional trail issues.





Foreword: *Simcoe County's Never-ending Trail*

This introduction was written by Greig Stewart, author, trail supporter, and former Regional Consultant for the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

Trails and greenways enthusiasts often muse that a trail has really no beginning or ending, but rather is a continuous link connecting people to places, spaces and destinations.

Trails have become so popular in recent years and, to some, they represent recreation facilities of the future. Fitness and Lifestyle Canada continuously tells us that, of the 10 current most popular recreation activities, four are directly related to using trails (walking, bicycling, jogging\running, and cross-country skiing). As well, trails and greenways are unique within the nation's sports and recreation facility infrastructure because:

- They are inexpensive and easy to build and maintain
- They are one of the few facilities that encourage family participation where minimal equipment is required
- No bookings or schedules are required to use them
- They are multi-seasonal, multi-activity facilities accessible to people of various ages and abilities
- They can be outdoor learning centres (education, nature and science) while acting as natural wildlife corridors
- They attract tourists, who spend money and time
- They increase the property values of those living adjacent
- They provide safe, walkable transportation routes connecting and linking communities and

neighbourhoods

- They become heritage corridors providing linkages with the past

Trails and greenways have always been part of the historical fabric of Simcoe County since the early 1800's. The well known Nine Mile Portage, for instance, was built as a supply route to Fort Penetanguishene (Discovery Harbour) nearly 200 years ago. Historian Andrew Hunter consistently refers to "Indian trails", mail and stagecoach routes in his epic work the "History of Simcoe County."

But in the end it was a series of unrelated events that contributed to Simcoe County becoming known as the unofficial "trails capital of Canada." The first event had to do with the railroad, or rather the abandoning of them. Strange that an entity that historically tied many Simcoe County communities together with rails, would continue to tie them together with trails.

In 1940 Simcoe County was home to more than 500 km of railway lines. By 1990, the number had shrunk to 400 km. By 2010, it is estimated that less than 200 km of track remains. Of the 16 municipalities that currently make up the County, more than half currently have, or soon will have, an abandoned rail line running through them. Many of these abandoned lines run through the 31,000

acres of county forest making for a natural amenity. Many former railway station sites (Wyevale, Phelpston, etc.) have become outdoor recreation facilities.

The second event was the arrival of the Trans Canada Trail. Simcoe County is the gateway that brings the Trans Canada Trail from eastern Canada to western Canada. Currently, several hundred kilometres of existing trails sprinkled across Simcoe County with such names as the Georgian Trail, the North Simcoe Rail Trail, The Lightfoot Trail, the Uthoff Trail and others will feed into the Trans Canada Trail as the trail moves north and west.

The third event had to do with a vision. In 1978, the rural municipality of Tiny Township (population 10,000) did the unheard of when they purchased 22.5 km of abandoned rail line from CN for the princely sum of \$10,000 to create what later became known as a “linear park.” That linear park today is jointly used by walkers, skiers, snowmobilers and horseback riders and is called the Tiny Trail.

The fourth event emanated from the Province of Ontario. In 1990 the Province awarded the Town of Collingwood a grant of \$110,000 to create the Georgian Trail on an abandoned rail line running between Collingwood and Meaford. This was the first time a grant had ever been awarded by the province to create a trail. Much more provincial funding would follow over the years to many other municipalities and trails organizations.

As Simcoe County’s trails infrastructure continues to develop, issues surrounding the development of trails

and greenways continue to change. Ten years ago some of the issues surrounding trail development included:

- Selling the local municipal council on the benefits of trails
- Dealing with the unwritten policies of the railway companies when they abandoned an existing rail line
- Dealing with adjacent landowners
- Construction, surfacing, uses, signage, maintenance, management and operation, and funding

While these issues still remain, a number of new issues have surfaced presenting new challenges to trail builders. They include:

- Connecting existing trails
- Looped trails
- User conflicts
- New relationships between municipal planning, engineering and municipal parks and recreation departments
- Establishing municipal trails advisory committees

Trails and greenways played an important role in the County’s past, and they play just as an important role in the County’s future. At last count there are more than 13 named trails running through Simcoe County managed by 12 different trails organizations and municipalities. This myriad of trail activity has been the determining need for the County to undertake this Simcoe County Trails Strategy. The plan is intended to be a “help” document to assist municipalities and volunteer trail organizations to continue to initiate, expand, loop and connect their trails within Simcoe County and beyond.

After all, a trail really does have no beginning or ending.



Preface



Several years ago, the County of Simcoe Planning Department and the Huronia Trails and Greenways Association (now called Simcoe County Trails) determined a collective research project, to investigate the manner in which trails within Simcoe County could advance, was required. This trails strategy is a result of those efforts.

There are several reasons why a trails strategy for the County of Simcoe is timely.

- The *County of Simcoe 2008 Transportation Master Plan* and *New Official Plan* determined that the County

needs to play an active role in coordinating and supporting trail networks in the interests of building active transportation routes and healthier residents

- Planning initiatives, such as walkable communities and active transportation plans, are gaining momentum in municipal planning
- The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit is promoting active and healthy lifestyles
- The restructuring of local tourism agencies into a Regional Tourism Organization provides an opportunity to promote regional trail/tour packages

- The *2014 Transportation Master Plan Update* will demonstrate the need for active transportation infrastructure, including the important role of trails

There are significant opportunities to be realized and many ongoing benefits can occur as a result of well-established, well-marketed and well-supported trails in Simcoe County. Municipalities will need to work together to encourage the development of the necessary infrastructure and business services required by trail-users and tourists.



Chapter One: *Introduction and Direction*

1.1 Introduction

The County of Simcoe has prepared the Simcoe County Trails Strategy with assistance from Dunbar & Associates, the National Trails Coalition, Simcoe County Trails, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit and municipal staff. This document is intended to communicate the strategy for achieving a County-wide network of passive-use trails and greenways. It provides a trails vision to stakeholders, including municipalities and trail groups, and outlines how the County of Simcoe can leverage its resources to facilitate the development of a world-class regional trail network spanning the entire County.

The County of Simcoe has a tremendous network of existing trails. A common voice of trail advocacy and continuity is required to propel Simcoe County's trails network to a world-class level. A well-connected regional trail network will be a catalyst for healthier lifestyle opportunities for residents, as well as an asset to enhance tourism. With its lens focused on the big picture, the County is a natural facilitator to work with all municipalities and user groups to coordinate future trail growth.

Coordination and network planning by the County and support from municipal staff will help each area of the County focus its unique natural and cultural features while connecting with the larger trails network. With a plan for a trails network in place, municipalities, land developers, and other partners can work together using

trails to meet the goals of healthy lifestyle planning, active transportation, regional tourism and other initiatives.

1.2 Trails Strategy Vision

To create a world class network of multi-purpose passive-use trails that connects the County's communities while providing linkages to natural, cultural, and tourism assets to increase visitation, recreational and active transportation opportunities, thereby improving the quality of life for County residents and visitors.

1.3 Goals

1. Support a variety of passive trail uses through an accessible, connected trail network that links communities and places of interest
2. Maximize trail investments
3. Enhance trail-user experience
4. Collaborate with stakeholders
5. Promote awareness of Simcoe County trails.

1.4 What is Included in this Strategy

The Simcoe County Trails Strategy is intended to provide a framework through which the County of Simcoe can support trail development on a regional basis. The primary focus of this strategy is to present a vision for a County-wide network of multi-purpose

passive-use trails (intended for human-powered use). Given a vast majority of trails are managed and developed by municipalities and trail organizations, this document provides guidance in areas where it was determined the County of Simcoe can play a strong role in trail development while being mindful of the impact that can be reasonably expected.

1.5 What is not Included in this Strategy

Trail planning and management is a complex matter given the range of trail types and the issues involved. A universal definition of what constitutes a trail is difficult to determine. Trails come in a variety of forms and are used for many different purposes, ranging from hiking and cycling, to off-road motorized vehicle (ORMV) uses and everything in between.

It is outside the scope of this document to provide a comprehensive strategy for all trail types and uses, including the various types of off-road motorized vehicle trails. The County of Simcoe is supportive of ORMV trail groups, however, the issues associated with such uses require greater consideration and more in-depth stakeholder consultation. ORMV routes should be sensitive to the local context and are therefore best addressed by local municipalities. The County intends to work with ORMV stakeholder organizations to further determine strategies through which the County can enhance its support of these organizations.

Some other areas that the Simcoe County Trails Strategy does not provide direction on include the following aspects of trail development and management:



- Trail design standards are not provided. Minimum design standards are required for trail projects funded through the Trails Connecting Communities Program, however, beyond this, if municipalities and trail organizations require design guidance, they can look to the *Simcoe County Transportation Master Plan (2014)* and other best practices documents, in particular Ontario's Best Trails, Guidelines and Best Practices for the Design, Construction and Maintenance of Sustainable Trails for All Ontarians
- Guidance for motorized uses, equestrian uses, water routes and mountain bike trails and other uses that are generally not aligned with passive-use trails
- Strategies for risk management, insurance and

liabilities issues. While this is recognized as an important aspect of trail management, it is yet unclear how the County can support its trails partners in this respect. The County of Simcoe will continue to work with municipalities and trails organizations to better determine what role it can play in this area

- Direction on an active transportation network. Although it is recognized that trails play an important part of an overall active transportation network, this Simcoe County Trails Strategy focuses specifically on off-road passive-use trails. Going forward, further guidance related to an overall County active transportation strategy is planned

1.6 Trails Benefits

There are a number of noteworthy benefits associated with a well-connected trail network, including health, environmental, mobility, economic, and cultural benefits. The following section provides a brief overview of these benefits.

Health Benefits

The overall health of Canadians has been in decline in recent years as evidenced by some alarming statistics. Rates of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, osteoporosis and depression have all increased over the past two decades. Canadians now live a much more sedentary lifestyle than in the past. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada reports rates of high blood pressure have skyrocketed by 77%, diabetes 45% and obesity 18%, affecting young and old in the last two decades. Diseases associated with inactivity are estimated to cost the Canadian health care system \$5.1 billion annually.

Locally, the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) reveals alarming health statistics for Simcoe Muskoka residents. Notable highlights from this survey include:

- In Simcoe County, 36% of adults over the age of 18 are overweight and 21% are obese, which was similar to what was observed in the province as a whole in the same time period. (CCHS, 2011-2012)
- One-quarter of Simcoe Muskoka youth (12-17) are overweight or obese, which was similar to what was observed in the Province as a whole for the same time period. (CCHS, 2009-2012)
- Almost half (40%) of adults aged 20 years and older in Simcoe County were considered to be inactive in

their leisure time compared to more than half (60%) of adults who were active or moderately active. (CCHS, 2011-2012)

- 76% of Simcoe County youth between 12 and 19 years of age had active to moderately active leisure time physical activity. (CCHS, 2011-2012)
- Three-quarters of Simcoe County youth (12-17) reported spending 15 or more hours per week on screen time which includes watching TV, computer, video games and reading. (CCHS, 2011-2012)

With health outcomes and activity levels recognized as linked, policy makers have recognized the important role infrastructure plays in promoting an active lifestyle. Trails represent an important piece of community infrastructure that can help facilitate this trend. Furthermore, trails-related activities such as hiking, running and cycling represent some of the most affordable opportunities for residents to be more active, thereby removing a significant barrier that prevents some at-risk groups from being more active.

Environmental Benefits

Trails provide many environmental benefits. Trails act as outdoor classrooms, providing place-based sensory learning opportunities, leading to a deeper appreciation of the environment and the world we live in. Likewise, non-motorized trails offer alternative transportation modes and routes, thereby reducing reliance on fossil fuels and pollution-producing automobiles, thus reducing greenhouse gases. Well-designed, constructed and maintained trails are considered low-impact transportation infrastructure.



Economic Benefits

Trails contribute many economic benefits to local communities, providing business to restaurants, retail stores, tour operators, accommodation providers and other local businesses. Moreover, trails are ideally aligned to capitalize on the growing global adventure-based tourism sector. Many regions around the world have already capitalized on trail-related tourism. For example, La Route Verte cycling route in Quebec generated an estimated \$136 million in economic impact to the province in 2006. Locally, the Huronia Food Trail connects trail-users to farmers, restaurants, accommodations and other retailers within the towns of Midland and Penetanguishene and the townships of Tay and Tiny. While not the focus of this strategy, motorized trail-users also contribute significantly to the local economy. In total, snowmobiling-related activities contribute around \$1 billion annually to the Ontario economy. With an abundance of natural amenity features and a strong agricultural sector, Simcoe County is situated to further capitalize on trail-related tourism.

Cultural Benefits

The cultural benefits associated with trails should not be discounted. An effective trail network not

only connects people to places, but enhances the overall livability of a community. Trails provide opportunities for people to experience the natural and cultural heritage landscape of an area, allowing them to gain a better understanding of an area's local history. Often trail development assists in conservation efforts of historic place and trade routes, such as former railway corridors.

1.7 Planning Policy Context

Many influences, from various sectors such as planning, transportation, tourism, health and the environment, are simultaneously coming together to create an even more supportive trail environment, full of new opportunities for growth and development. Both the Province of Ontario and the County of Simcoe have developed policies and regulations that support the development of trail networks as a means of building strong, healthy communities. The information presented below provides some context of the policy framework that supports trail development and the Simcoe County Trails Strategy.



Ontario Trails Strategy (2005)

- Establishes a provincial trails vision and a set of goals.
- Provides high level guidance on trail development.
- *Growth Plan for the Golden Horseshoe (2006)*
- Requires planning for a balance of transportation choices.
- Encourages development of complete communities with a range of housing types high-quality public open space and easy access to local stores and services; essentially, places where people can live, learn, work and play.
- Changes to the *Planning Act (2007)*
- Promotion of development that is designed to be sustainable, to support public transit and to be oriented to pedestrians.
- Lands required for pedestrian pathways, bicycle pathways and public transit rights-of-way may be dedicated to municipalities through development approvals.
- *County of Simcoe Transportation Master Plan (2008)*
- Identifies an increased role for the County in the development and coordination of active transportation opportunities.
- Adopted *New County of Simcoe Official Plan (2012)*
- Encourages pedestrian friendly design.
- Encourages Active Transportation Plans for primary settlement areas.
- Promotes establishment of County-wide trail network.
- *Ministry of Transportation Simcoe Area Multimodal Transportation Strategy (2014)*
- Provides a 30-year outlook of transportation needs and deficiencies.
- Identifies multi modal solutions to forecasted transportation trends in the Simcoe Area.

- *County of Simcoe Transportation Master Plan Update (2014)*
- Focuses on active transportation routes, including trails.
- Provincial Policy Statement (2014)
- Promotes pedestrian and non-motorized activity facilities.
- Requires provision for publicly accessible parks and recreation areas, including trails.

1.8 Consultation

This document is the result of extensive consultation and feedback from a variety of stakeholders. The consultation process for the Simcoe County Trail Strategy provided opportunities for input and participation from the general public, trail users, organized trail groups, municipalities, planners, provincial agencies and other levels of government. The intent of the consultation process was to solicit feedback, ideas and comments to provide direction to this document.

Hundreds of responses were generated from a Simcoe County-hosted website as well as a blog which included a survey to solicit input into the Simcoe County Trail Strategy. Simcoe County also hosted five public open house sessions in Bradford, Wasaga Beach, Springwater, Innisfil and Penetanguishene in the winter of 2011. The sessions included a visual presentation, a question and comment period and a written survey. Overall, the public open house sessions were well attended and

generated excellent comments for the Trails Strategy.

The vast majority of open house participants indicated support for the development of a County-wide trails strategy. Questions were raised pertaining to the role of the County, specific trails or links and how the trails would join into the overall network.

All input received through the open house sessions and other means was reviewed and carefully considered. Draft versions of the Simcoe County Trails Strategy were written and presented again to the public for comment. Subsequent drafts were circulated to stakeholders for review and comments prior to release of the final version.



Chapter Two: *Simcoe County Trails Context*

It is the intent of this chapter to demonstrate the rich, diverse culture and network of connections in Simcoe County. Many of these connections have been left to us by our ancestors and predecessors, and have laid the foundations for existing and future trails in the County.

2.1 A Brief History of the County

The Huron-Wendat of Wendake originally came from the Georgian Bay region, specifically south-eastern Ontario (Penetanguishene and Midland). Their vast territory stretched as far south as present-day Oklahoma and east into Quebec. Until 1634, it is estimated that the Huron population was approximately 20,000 to 30,000 people. But by 1650, epidemics and wars involving Hurons and Iroquois, French and British reduced the population to a few hundred.

In the 17th century, French Jesuits and Recollets set up missionary camps in Simcoe County. Trading routes and military settlements followed. Early in the 1800s came the first wave of agricultural settlers, including the first group of Scots and Black settlers. At about the same time, His Majesty's Royal Navy was securing timber in Simcoe County for masts and spars.

This led to more cleared land, more agriculture, more mills and settlements and eventually, in 1853, the first Canadian rail line that went from Toronto to Collingwood via Bradford and Barrie. Some settlers followed the first Canadian transcontinental railroad as

it opened up Canada's west, but many stayed in Simcoe County and farmed. Simcoe District was proclaimed on January 11, 1843 with 19 townships and included the islands in Georgian Bay and Lake Simcoe.

2.2 Connecting the Dots

The rich history of Simcoe County has laid the foundation for the development of this strategy. Often we need to understand the past to comprehend what we have today and to celebrate future potential. From its early beginnings, Simcoe County offered a natural setting and a favourable environment to its first inhabitants. The availability of watercourses, lakes, prolific forests and habitats enabled people of the First Nations to thrive. They created villages, trails and trade routes.

European settlers followed these initial routes, building settlements and enhancing existing transportation corridors with roads and eventually rail lines for the efficient movement of people, goods and services. Early settlement patterns show Simcoe County was a vital link in a much larger rail system for cargo and passengers travelling west across Canada and the United States.

As time passed, airplanes and vehicles became more popular forms of travel and many rail lines were gradually retired. The hardships of the early settlers were giving way to the notion of recreation and taking time to rest and rejuvenate. Community halls and recreation programs started to spring up in the County.

Today, trends in the recreation, health, environment, and planning sectors are encouraging more active lifestyles while decreasing dependency on the automobile. There is a growing demand for biking and hiking trails. Municipalities, recreation and health professionals are recognizing the role of greater collaboration in providing trail networks, not only for residents, but for tourists, too. We have come full circle, connecting our past to our future, reclaiming old trails and corridors once the lifeblood of early settlements.

In Simcoe County, our historic network of properties, waterways, roads, natural resources and rail lines provide a truly exciting opportunity for a trails network. By linking historic routes and creating new ones, the Simcoe County Trails Strategy not only preserves our culture and heritage, but brings communities together for a healthier, more active, sustainable future.



Figure 1: Historic Huron and Petun Villages and Trails (1645 – 1651)



Figure 2: Historic Road and Rail Lines of Simcoe County



2.3 Rails to Trails

Historically people and cargo in Simcoe County were transported along an increasingly complex network of ancient waterways and pathways, portage routes, explorer and trade routes, military and settlement roads, and then rail lines. Bygone roads, trade routes and rail lines were abandoned for newer, improved transportation corridors. Beginning in the 1960s in the United States, and shortly thereafter in Canada, there has been a movement to revisit those historic routes and reclaim them as trail ways for public enjoyment, green transportation, and recreation.

Already there are numerous examples of this trend in Simcoe County, where trails have been established based on the rich culture and history of significant settlement sites connected by historic pathways, including the Nine-Mile Portage, Georgian Trail, Uthoff Trail, and Tiny Trail. Opportunities to develop trail infrastructure within railway corridors, both inactive and active, still exist within Simcoe County, however, success will require willingness from all stakeholders involved and resources.

2.4 Existing Simcoe County Trails Context

Existing trails and the trail organizations that support them form the backbone of any potential County-wide trail network. The following section outlines the existing trail context within Simcoe County.

Trans Canada Trail

The Trans Canada Trail is the world's longest network of trails. When completed in 2017, it will be more than 24,000



kilometres long. Currently, it covers 17,000 km, of which 164 km run through Simcoe County. The Trans Canada Trail in Simcoe County is comprised of several sections managed by local municipalities and trail associations.

Bruce Trail

The Bruce Trail is a long-distance hiking trail that provides the only continuous trail access to the Niagara Escarpment, a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. It is one of only 15 such reserves in all of Canada. The trail section that runs through Simcoe County is known as the Blue Mountain section (Pretty River Valley to Lavender), which features high bluffs, scenic lookouts and deep wide valleys.

Ganaraska Hiking Trail

The Ganaraska Hiking Trail begins in Port Hope, on the north shore of Lake Ontario. The trail passes through a

variety of scenery from Lake Ontario, north through the Ganaraska Forest on the sand hills of the Oak Ridges Moraine and past the lakes and drumlin fields of the Kawarthas to the rugged wilderness of the Canadian Shield.

The unique wilderness section of the Trail is on the Precambrian shield and connects the southern and northern parts of the trail. The trail enters Simcoe County east of Orillia and continues west through the rolling hills of Simcoe County where it meets the Bruce Trail at McKinney's Hill, near Glen Huron in Clearview Township. A cairn marks the end of the Ganaraska hiking trail. The trail continues from the Niagara Escarpment through Wasaga Beach to the Tiny Trail. A second branch of the Trail runs from north of Horseshoe Valley to near Midland.

Municipal Trails

Several of the municipalities within Simcoe County have already developed extensive trail networks. Some trails, often former railway corridors, traverse long distances and connect municipalities. One goal of this trail strategy is to identify the gaps in the existing longer-distance trails to be included as a part of the proposed County trail network.

Communities in the southern areas of the County are less connected by off-road multi-purpose trails due to the lack of abandoned corridors, development pressures, the prevalence of agricultural operations, and less publicly owned land.

Municipalities in Simcoe County have a long history of building trails for residents and visitors alike. Some of the larger, more notable trail corridors include the following:

- Georgian Trail (Meaford-Collingwood)
- Shore Lane Trail (Wasaga Beach)
- Tiny Trail (Tiny/Springwater Townline-Penetanguishene)
- Ramara Rail Trail (Atherley to Rama)
- North Simcoe Rail Trail (Centre Vespra-Tiny/Springwater Townline north of Elmvale)
- Midland-Penetanguishene Trail
- Tay Shore Trail (Midland-Waubaushene)
- Uhthoff Trail (Waubaushene-Orillia)
- Lake Country Oro-Medonte Rail Trail (Orillia-Barrie)
- North Shore Trail (Barrie)
- Nine Mile Portage Trail (Barrie to Fort Willow at North Simcoe Rail Trail)
- New Tecumseth Rail Trail (Highway 9 to Tottenham)

- Essa and Innisfil, Thornton-Cookstown TransCanada Trail
- Collingwood and Clearview Trail

Maps of above trails available on simcoetrails.ca/maps

National Parks

Georgian Bay Islands National Park visitor centre is located in Midland. It is comprised of 63 islands with the main facility on Beausoleil Island (in the District of Muskoka), which is accessible by water taxi or private craft from Honey Harbour.

Provincial Parks

Provincial parks offer a variety of trails within and provide connections to other networks. The Ganaraska Trail runs through Wasaga Beach Provincial Park and Springwater Provincial Park. The provincial park system often provides water access and camping facilities, which add another dimension to the trail-user's experience.

Simcoe County is home to a number of provincial parks:

- Awenda
- Bass Lake
- Devil's Glen
- Springwater
- Wasaga Beach
- Mara
- McRae Point
- Earl Rowe
- Noisy River





Other Provincial Lands

In addition to provincial parks, the Province of Ontario also owns large amounts of land in the County managed largely for natural heritage & resource preservation.

Copeland Forest Resource Management Area

The Copeland Forest Reserve Management Area, which covers an area of 1,787 hectares, is in the central part of the Township of Oro-Medonte. The property contains steep valley slopes of the Oro Hills and three provincially significant wetlands which form the headwaters of the Coldwater and Sturgeon Rivers. The Copeland Forest is managed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and contains a network of forestry roads and multi-purpose trails. Trails in the forest connect with the Ganaraska Trail. Motorized use is not allowed in the Copeland Forest.

Nottawasaga Lookout

This Provincial Nature Reserve, south of Collingwood, provides representative examples of Niagara Escarpment cliff and ravine habitats, including forested slopes and wetlands. A number of rare or uncommon plant species are found here, including an outstanding variety of ferns, some of which are restricted in their Ontario distribution to the Niagara Escarpment. The park offers hiking and nature appreciation opportunities, including access to the Bruce Trail. No facilities are provided for visitors. Camping, off-road vehicles, mountain biking, rock climbing and hunting are not permitted.

Tiny Marsh

Located just north of Elmvale, the Tiny Marsh is Ontario's first provincially owned and managed

wetland. This Provincial Wildlife Area is home to an abundance and variety of wildlife, including over 250 species of birds. Spanning 600 hectares of marsh and 300 hectares of meadow and woodland, visitors can either enjoy the year-round interpretive centre or more than 15 kilometres of trails.

Matchedash Bay

On the south shore of Georgian Bay, north of the community of Coldwater, the Matchedash Bay Provincial Wildlife Area contains 1,840 hectares of combined wetland and upland habitats. It is well known as a staging area for waterfowl and migratory birds and is also home to 32 species of mammals, including moose, black bear, and river otter. Main activities at the site include bird-watching, photography, botany, hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, canoeing and boating.

Marl Lake

Classified as an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) or provincially significant, Marl Lake is in the southeast area of the Town of Wasaga Beach. It attracts migratory waterfowl and other species, including bald eagles and other significant or rare species.

Wye Marsh

The Wye Marsh is a provincially significant wetland in Tay Township covering an area of 1,214 hectares. It contains over 25 kilometres of hiking, ski and snowshoe trails that traverse woodland and wetland wildlife habitats. Bikes are allowed on some trails.

Conservation Authorities

Three Conservation Authorities have jurisdiction and manage lands within Simcoe County: Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, and Toronto Region Conservation Authority. Conservation Authorities own and manage areas which offer trails and water features and contribute to the overall trails network. These areas provide facilities for parking, gathering or resting areas, connections to other trail networks and in some cases, camping and canoeing. Motorized use is typically not allowed on conservation authority properties.

Most of the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority's 4,453 hectares are considered wilderness or natural lands. They include the areas called Fort Willow, New Lowell, Petun, Edenvale, Elba Wetlands, Glencairn, Minesing Wetlands, Nottawasaga Bluffs, Osprey Wetlands, Tiffin, Tottenham and Utopia.

The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority has two conservation areas within Simcoe County – Scanlon Creek and the Luck Property.

The Toronto Region Conservation Authority owns two properties within the Township of Adjala-Tosorontio that are primarily used for forest management and conservation purposes, but also contain hiking trails.

Simcoe County Forests

The County manages more than 31,000 acres of forests which provide excellent trail opportunities for a variety of motorized and non-motorized use. For example, the Museum Loop Trail provides connections to the



Ganaraska Trail. There are staging areas (i.e. rough graded areas) to gather, park or rest at the Baxter Tract, Hendrie Tract, Williams Tract, Oro Main Tract, Brentwood Tract, South Barr Tract and in Strachan Tract. It should be noted while both passive recreational trail users and motorized trail users (by permit only) enjoy

the County Forest system, the primary role of these tracts is forest management. Activities associated with timber harvesting and thinning take precedence over other uses, such as recreational uses and existing trails that may be impacted by lumber operations and equipment.

2.5 Trail Organizations

There are a multitude of trail organizations that promote the development of trails, preserving the environment and encourage trail use and recreation in Simcoe County. They provide necessary expertise in trail planning and operation. They also play a key role in marketing and promoting trails by organizing walks, brochures, websites and trail maps and guides. The following section is by no means exhaustive, but it does outline several of the key

hiking and recreation-related trail organizations in Simcoe County.

Bruce Trail Conservancy

The Bruce Trail Conservancy has a mandate to establish and maintain a conservation corridor containing a footpath along the Niagara Escarpment in order to protect natural ecosystems and promote environmentally responsible public access. The Niagara Escarpment is a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve containing the

890 km Bruce Trail. Nine clubs are responsible for trail maintenance, stewardship and promotion of various spans of the Bruce Trail. In Simcoe County, responsibility for the Bruce Trail falls under the Blue Mountains Bruce Trail Club, which maintains the stretch of the trail from Lavender to Craighleigh.

Simcoe County Trails

Simcoe County Trails, formerly Huronia Trails and Greenways, is a registered charitable corporation, dedicated to promoting and enabling the development and use of a sustainable network of trails and greenways in Simcoe County. The organization's representatives have been involved in the development of the many trails that exist in Simcoe County today. Although not affiliated with the County of Simcoe government, this group will be a key partner in the implementation of the Simcoe County Trails Strategy.

Ganaraska Hiking Trail Association

The Ganaraska Hiking Trail Association is a registered charity dedicated to the conservation of our natural resources. The objectives of the Association are to establish and maintain a hiking trail for public use from Port Hope to the Bruce Trail near Collingwood. Additionally, the Association develops and maintains side trails and loop trails with the objective of accessing places of scenic interest or to connect to other trails.

Oak Ridges Trail Association

The Oak Ridges Trail Association (ORTA) maintains approximately 10 km of trail in the southwest portion of Simcoe County. This trail association includes 10 chapters, each of which has responsibility for a section of the trail.



Chapter Three: *The Strategy*

Having provided the context and rationale for the development of a well-connected and coordinated trail network within Simcoe County, the remainder of this document will outline the strategy required to achieve such a network.

3.1 Goals, Strategic Objectives and Outcomes

The following goals, strategic objectives and outcomes have been developed through extensive collaboration with Simcoe County trails stakeholders. Together they

represent the framework through which the *Simcoe County Trails Strategy* will be realized.

The goals for the *Simcoe County Trails Strategy* are:

1. Support a variety of passive trail uses through an accessible, connected trail network that links communities and places of interest
2. Maximize trail investments
3. Enhance trail-user experience
4. Collaborate with stakeholders
5. Promote awareness of Simcoe County trails



Table 1: Simcoe County Trails Strategy Goals, Strategic Objectives and Outcomes

Goals	Strategic Objectives	Outcomes
Support a variety of passive trail uses through an accessible, connected trail network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Facilitate a sustainable and connected trails network using existing trails as a foundation b) Encourage trail development on public lands, existing corridors and new developments c) Accommodate a variety of users d) Complement the <i>Simcoe County Transportation Master Plan, 2014</i> through the development of an Active Transportation network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop trails that connect people to communities and places of interest 2. Develop large County-wide trail loops and connections to destinations 3. Explore other possibilities to expand trail network by using existing corridors and collaborating with land conservancies and Crown agencies 4. Identify and plan towards the implementation of a network of Active Transportation routes in conjunction with the TMP, 2014
Maximize trail investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Use Trails Connecting Communities Program (TCCP) funds to develop trails network b) Ensure trail investments are aligned with construction and maintenance requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure TCCP funding supports the vision of the Simcoe County Trails Strategy 2. Explore possibility of enhancing TCCP funding
Enhance trail-user experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Provide design guidance for TCCP projects b) Ensure consistent way-finding and signage on trails c) Provide easy to interpret trail mapping d) Ensure trail accessibility e) Ensure suitable trail amenities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop trail design guidelines for TCCP funded projects 2. Develop consistent way-finding and signage guidelines 3. Develop accessible and understandable maps 4. Incorporate technology into way-finding 5. Ensure TCCP funded projects meet provincial accessibility standards
Collaborate with stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Enable a formal stakeholder engagement structure b) Collaborate with trails stakeholders regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish an Inter-Municipal Trails Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from lower-tier municipalities 2. Create a forum for collaboration among all trails stakeholders in Simcoe County
Promote awareness of trails in Simcoe County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Increase awareness of trails in Simcoe County b) Promote Simcoe County as a tourist destination for various trail-users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a communication strategy to effectively employ marketing tools, including social media 2. Collaborate with Simcoe Tourism to promote trails-related tourism. 3. Include trails in local strategies and initiatives promoting the area

Chapter Four: *The Path to Achieve the Strategy*

Achieving the goals presented in the previous chapter will be a challenge given the complexity of the existing trails network currently in place in Simcoe County.

With sixteen member municipalities, two separated cities, three conservation areas and numerous trails organizations representing various user types, as well as other stakeholders, it will be an ambitious task to implement such a broad-ranging strategy. The road map outlined in this chapter details the steps necessary to make the *Simcoe County Trails Strategy* a success.

In order to realize the goals presented in this Strategy, considerable effort is required from all stakeholders. When achieved, the result will be a County-wide network of trails, offering health, recreational and active transportation benefits to residents and visitors alike.

4.1 Support a variety of users through an accessible, connected trail network

A Well-Connected Trail Network

Trails come in a variety of forms and serve a variety of users for many different purposes, ranging from recreational uses to utilitarian uses associated with active transportation. There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to trail development given the often competing interests among trail-users. The County of Simcoe recognizes that trails can be characterized by using various criteria, such as location, function and distance. With this in mind, this Strategy envisions a trails network that supports a variety

of passive uses, including, hiking, running, cycling, snow-shoeing and cross-country skiing.

The current trail network within Simcoe County, depicted on the next page in Figure 3, is characterized by a series of different trail planning and management approaches administered by a number of municipalities and trail organizations. The result of which has been a series of exceptional trails, albeit one that is discontinuous and uncoordinated in sections.

One consequence of an uncoordinated approach to trail planning at a regional level has been a lack of strategic trail linkages that connect communities and other existing trails. The County of Simcoe will work with municipalities and trail organizations to identify strategic linkages that connect communities and existing trails, with the overall goal of creating a connected regional trail network suitable for passive trail uses.

A primary objective of this document is to develop two regional loop trails in the northern part of Simcoe County, connected to the southern part of the

County by the Trans Canada Trail, as shown on the next page in Figure 4.

Large regional loop trails, typically requiring two days to complete by bicycle, have been successfully created in other regions around the world. The proposed loop trails were determined to be ideally positioned to capitalize on the tourism and promotional objectives of this strategy. Much of infrastructure for these loop trails is already in place; however, there are many sections that must still be constructed in order to complete the loops. Due to the presence of fewer abandoned rail corridors, development pressures, the prevalence of agricultural operations and fewer publicly-owned expanses of land, communities in the southern areas of the County are not as well suited for large regional loop trails.

Gaps exist in key portions of the existing trails network within Simcoe County. The County-wide trail network would be greatly enhanced if such gaps were closed. The following list of key trail gaps is by no means definitive, as trail development is fluid and always changing. However, through consultation, this list identifies the primary existing gaps.



Figure 3: Existing Simcoe County Trail Network

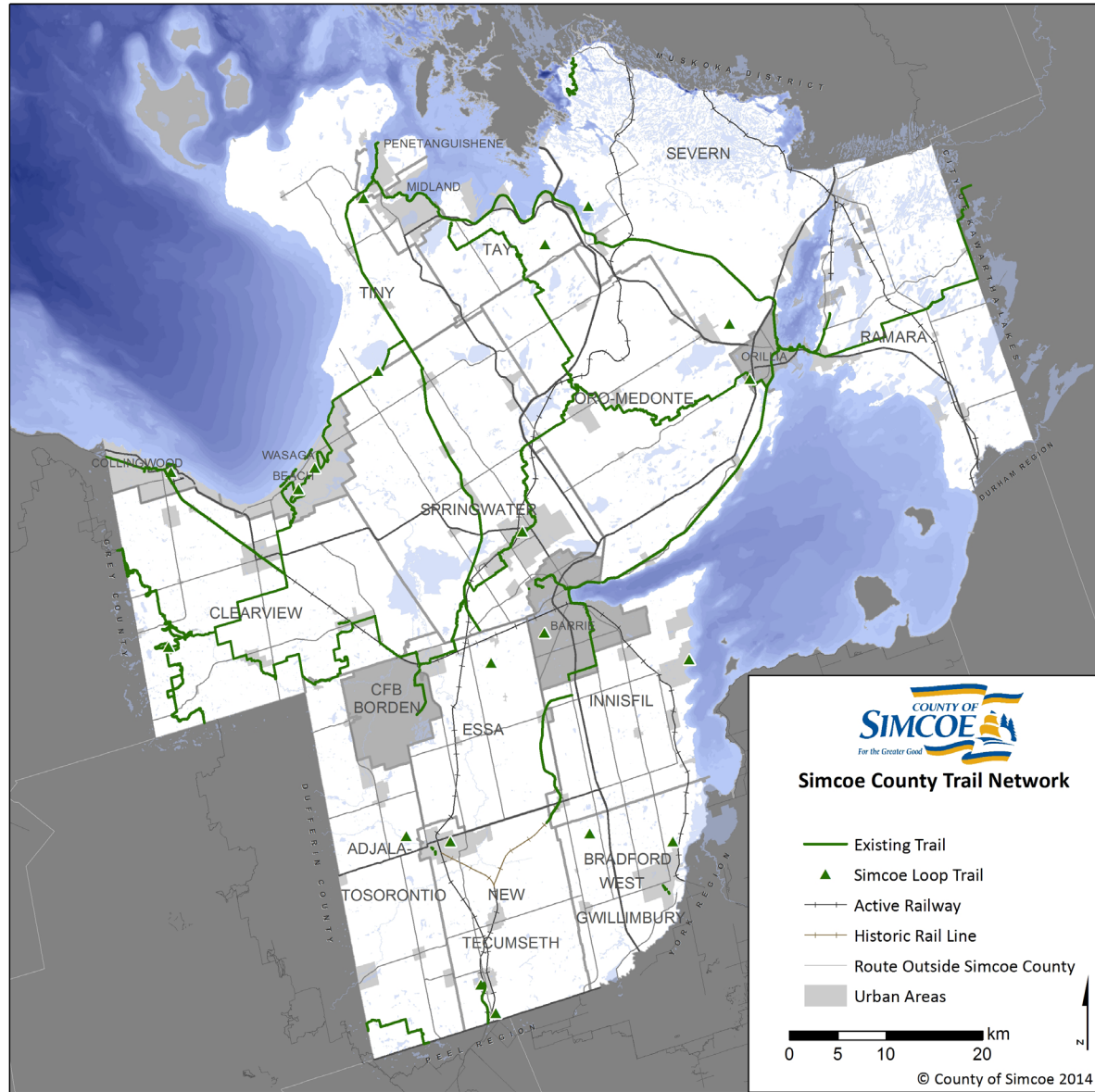
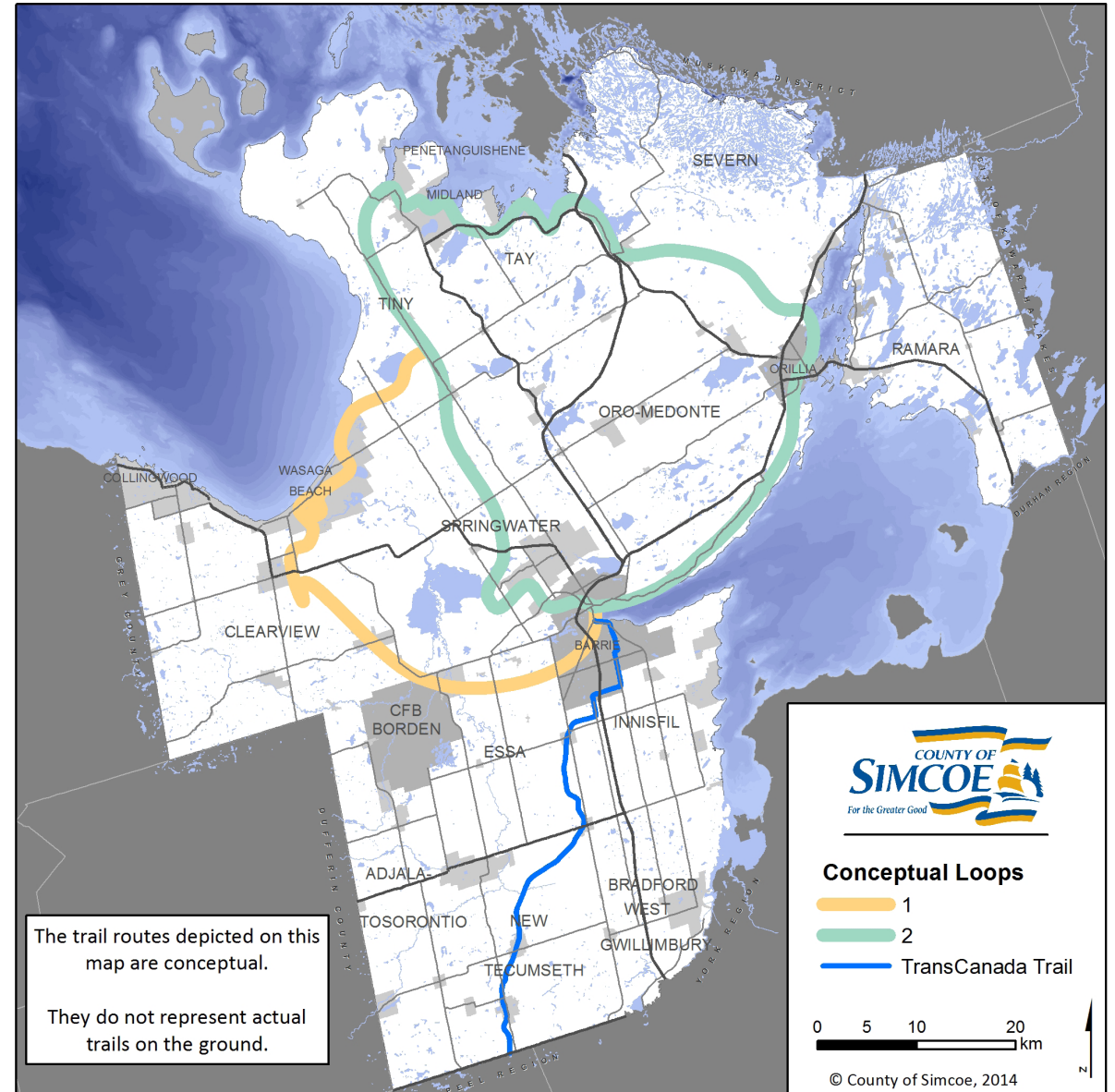


Figure 4: Conceptual Regional Loop Trails



A two-phased process is recommended to develop a network of passive-use trails in Simcoe County. It is based on an assessment of all existing trails and potential links and begins by making logical connections to create trail loops and extensions to other trails, including those beyond the boundaries of Simcoe County. The proposed trail plans are shown in Figures 5 and 6.

Phase 1 will focus on short-term objectives aimed at increasing the overall connectivity of the trail network throughout the County, as well as completing two large regional loop trails. Two large gaps in the Trans Canada Trail will also be closed in the first phase. One gap is Ramara Township and will link the Simcoe County trail network to City of Kawartha Lakes. The other gap is in New Tecumseth and will connect York Region and the Greater Toronto Area to Simcoe County, including the regional loop trails. Both Trans Canada Trail gaps are anticipated to be closed ahead of the Pan Am Games in 2015.

Phase 2 will build on the momentum of the first phase by focusing on more challenging trail corridors that require a longer time frame to plan. Trails located within utility corridors are logical locations for lengthy trails, however, the development of such trails requires coordination and permissions from the appropriate authorities. The dialogue and planning involved to obtain these approvals requires a longer time frame.

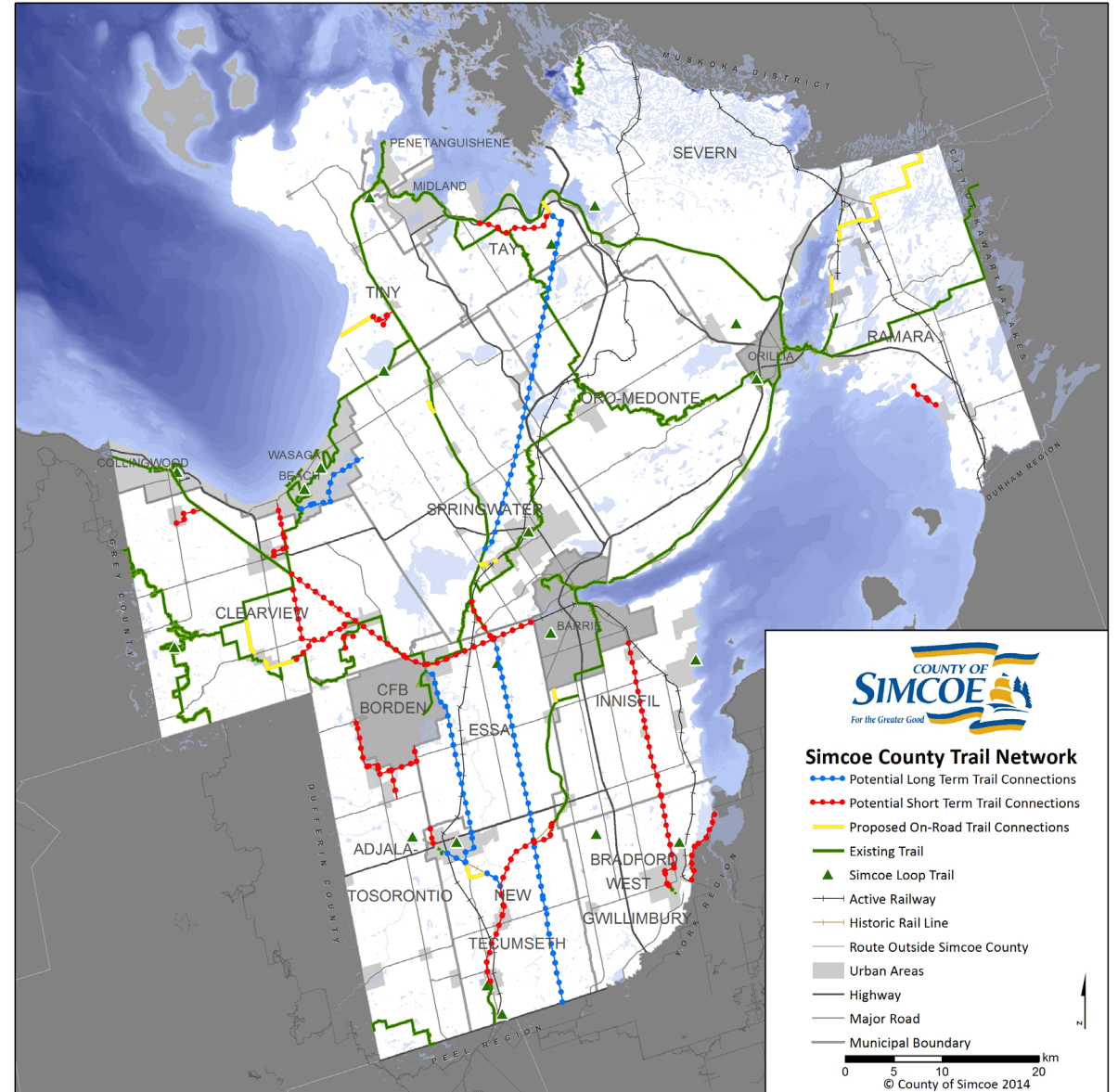
Table 2: Key Gaps in Current Simcoe County Trail Network

Segment	Trail	Municipality	Details
Flos Rd. 7-Flos Rd. 8	North Simcoe RailTrail	Springwater	Property purchase/easements required
Elmvale North Link to Tiny Trail	North Simcoe RailTrail	Springwater	Property purchase/easements required
Snow Valley Road trail	Links NSRT with Midhurst	Springwater	Roadside route
East Wasaga-Tiny	Wasaga Shore Lane Trail	Wasaga Beach	Shoulder route; signage required
Wasaga-Wyevale	New Trail	Tiny	Off-road route & roadside route
Warrington Rd.-New Lowell	Clearview TrainTrail	Clearview	Trail to be built beside railway
Angus-Utopia	Extends trail from Clearview	Essa	Trail to be built beside railway
Alcona-Municipal Complex	Links Alcona with municipal complex along CR21	Innisfil	Roadside trail
Tottenham-Beeton	Extends trail from Peel Region	New Tecumseth	Trail to be built beside railway
Perkinsfield-Midland	Links Tiny Trail with Midland	Tiny	Roadside route
Beachwood Drive	Links Collingwood & Wasaga Beach	Collingwood, Wasaga Beach	Initially a shoulder route; future roadside route
Rama Road (CR44)	Rama Road Trail	Ramara	Complete missing sections of roadside trail

Figure 5: Proposed Phase 1 Trail Development



Figure 6: Proposed Phase 2 Trail Development



Encourage Trail Development on Public Lands, Existing Corridors and New Developments

Trail development can be an expensive task given the high cost of land and the challenge of incorporating new trails into an established land use pattern. Developing trails on private land can also be challenging because of perceived liability issues and other factors. The Simcoe County Trails Strategy recognizes the potential for trail development on existing corridors and other public lands. Simcoe County has numerous public agencies that own land within the County, along with land trusts that may be suitable for trail development. Consultation with appropriate agencies should be sought once potential trail routes have been established.

Other possible locations for trail development that should be explored include existing easements and rights-of-way along, roads, hydro, pipelines, railroads, and drainage courses.

The County of Simcoe will work with municipalities to encourage conditions for appropriate pedestrian circulation and trail integration are applied to new plans of subdivision and other development applications.

Accommodate a Variety of Trail Users

Trails are used for a variety of purposes that may sometimes conflict with each other. The focus of this document is the development of trails suitable for passive uses, such as walking, cycling, skiing and snowshoeing. Although it would be desirable to separate conflicting trail uses from one another, it is not always practical to do so. The County of Simcoe recognizes municipalities and trail organizations are responsible



for determining which uses are permitted on their trails. Municipalities are sensitive to the local context in which they are operating with respect to trail-users. The County of Simcoe does not intend to get involved with local decisions related to trail uses, however, through the Trails Connecting Communities Program, the County will ensure trails constructed through this grant program

will safely accommodate non-motorized trail users. Mitigation efforts to minimize conflict between certain trail-user types will be a key component of the way finding and signage guidelines discussed in Section 4.3 of this document.

Complement the Simcoe County Transportation Master Plan Trails are only one aspect of an overall active transportation and recreation strategy. While the Simcoe County Trails Strategy has largely focused on off-road trails suitable for non-motorized forms of transport, it is recognized the overall effectiveness of a trails network requires connectivity with other forms of transportation. Accordingly, the forthcoming *Simcoe County Transportation Master Plan (2014)* will complement this document by outlining strategies to improve active transportation within the County, including strategies to integrate trails into the broader County transportation network. It is anticipated that the *Transportation Master Plan (2014)* will also provide guidance through the development of active transportation design guidelines and specifications for County corridors and trails.

4.2 Maximize trail investments

Trail development and maintenance can be costly for municipalities at a time when demands for well-designed and located trails are an increasingly important aspect of strong healthy communities. However, trails are often considered a low priority among the numerous programs competing for limited municipal funds. Nevertheless, many municipalities understand the importance of an effective trails network. Despite the funding challenges associated with trail development

and maintenance, various funding strategies are available to municipalities. The *Simcoe County Trails Strategy* encourages municipalities to explore innovative funding strategies and partnerships for trail development. In addition, the County of Simcoe funds municipal trail development through its Trails Connecting Communities Program.

Trails Connecting Communities Program

The Trails Connecting Communities Program was established in 2009 by the County of Simcoe to develop trails in municipalities across the County. Since this time, over \$800,000 has been provided to local municipalities to assist in the development of active transportation and recreational trail opportunities, with a focus on enhancing and/or expanding trail networks for non-motorized uses.

Currently the Trails Connecting Community Program funding is provided on a matching basis with the local municipality. Project proposals must meet the following eligibility criteria:

1. Projects will enhance an existing trail or establish a key trail linkage to improve network connectivity;
2. Projects will be constructed to specifications that improve trail accessibility to people with disabilities;
3. Projects will work towards linking local municipalities and/or settlement areas;
4. Projects must be completed within a specified timeframe;
5. Pre-consultation with the County is required prior to application submittal; and
6. Project design is satisfactory to the County, including access, signage, etc.

Although the Trails Connecting Communities Program

has been successful in meeting its objectives, this program has not been utilized to its fullest potential in some years as evidenced by uncommitted funding.

Given the substantial need for trail network enhancement throughout Simcoe County, the under-utilization of the Trails Connecting Communities Program in the past suggests it can be enhanced.

The County of Simcoe will determine what steps are required to ensure budgeted funds are fully allocated each year. Steps to be explored may include increased outreach to municipal partners to promote the program and revising the eligibility criteria to broaden the scope the program.

4.3 Enhance Trail-User Experience

A positive trail-user experience is a crucial element of a successful trail network. The County of Simcoe recognizes it can take steps to facilitate enhanced trail-user experience. It is also recognized municipalities and trail organizations are ultimately responsible for trail management and the County of Simcoe’s role is somewhat limited in what trail-user enhancements are implemented. Nevertheless, the County of Simcoe can support this goal through the initiatives outlined below.

Trail Design Guidelines

Creating a coherent and sustainable trail network is based on consistent trail design that provides users with predictability. Furthermore, well designed trails can mitigate conflicts among trail-users, while ensuring an adequate level of safety and accessibility. It is also





necessary to have procedures in place to maintain trails and identify maintenance issues.

It is recognized trail design is the responsibility of local municipalities and trail organizations, but the County of Simcoe can facilitate a common design standard for projects funded through the Trails Connecting Communities Program. Trail project approvals under this program will be subject to meeting a minimum design standard to ensure accessibility and multi-purpose trails are supported. Each year the County of Simcoe distributes a request for applications from municipalities for potential trail projects. This request outlines project funding criteria, including minimum trail design standards. Implementation of updates to current minimum design criteria for Trails Connecting Communities Program projects will be administered on an annual basis through the program's request for applications.

The County of Simcoe *Transportation Master Plan* (2014) will also contain trail design guidance for trails located within County road corridors when this document is released. Municipalities are encouraged to use this document as a reference for guidance on trail design. There are many design guidelines currently in existence, most notably Ontario's Best Trails, Guidelines and Best Practices for the Design, Construction and Maintenance of Sustainable Trails for All Ontarians. This document is an excellent resource for municipalities and trail managers, as it provides detailed design guidance for

numerous scenarios.

Develop Consistent Way finding and Signage Guidelines
Currently each of the various trail networks within Simcoe County has its own signage guidelines. For example, the Ganaraska Trail has its signage system, while the Tay Shore Trail and municipalities have other systems. This becomes an issue for connecting trails and promoting them as an integrated County network. Trail-users need to understand the signage system and not be confused. County-wide signage is not intended to replace existing local trail signage, but rather supplement it and ensure each trail is recognized as being part of a much broader network.

The design and location of signs is very important to trail safety. All signs need to identify the off-road trails are designed for certain, identified recreational uses. Where appropriate, the signs should also identify any challenges (i.e. steep slopes). Most trails can be divided into several types depending on trail type and permitted uses and location. Each trail type requires different levels of sign information. It is also essential to create locators and directional signs.

The signage system must be easy to understand and clear to trail-users, particularly if they are travelling long distances and crossing numerous jurisdictions. A standardized sign system also makes the whole network easier to market and promote as a complete package or product.

Details related to signage and way-finding for a County-wide trail network should be determined through the



completion of a signage, way-finding and branding program developed by the County in collaboration with County trail partners. To ensure consistency and eligibility for future funding opportunities, the *Tourism Way-finding Signage Standards and Specifications Manual*.

Map Development

Accurate and easy to understand maps are an important aspect of a County-wide trail network. Currently, individual trail organizations and municipalities develop their own trail maps and employ different mapping approaches. The County of Simcoe should support the development of a standardized mapping approach for a County-wide trail network. Such an approach should employ the use of traditional mapping, such as paper maps and trailhead maps, as well as incorporate current technology to improve mapping products.

Ensure Trail Accessibility and Suitable Amenities

The Ontario government implemented the Accessibility Standard for the Design of Public Spaces in 2013 under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This standard sets out accessibility requirements for various public spaces including recreational trails. Standards apply to new construction and planned redevelopment of the public space. As it relates to recreational trails, some requirements outlined in the Accessibility Standard for the Design of Public Spaces are very specific, whereas others require consultation with the public and persons with disabilities.

The Standard applies to recreational trails only, which are defined as those public pedestrian trails that intended for

recreation and leisure purposes and are maintained. The standard does not apply to trails solely intended for cross-country skiing, mountain biking, the use of motorized snow vehicles or off-road vehicles or wilderness trails, back-country trails and portage routes.

People with disabilities may be particularly affected by multi-purpose trails, like those advocated by this strategy, if they do not have the ability to quickly detect or react to other users, hazards or sudden changes in the environment. To improve the trail experience for users, including people with disabilities, engineers, designers and planners should be aware of potential trail conflicts and try to minimize the probability conflicts will occur by employing effective design solutions.

The County of Simcoe will ensure projects funded through the Trails Connecting Communities Program comply with Accessibility Standard for the Design of Public Spaces.

Ensure Suitable Trail Amenities

Proper trail amenities contribute to a better quality of experience for trail users. Amenities such as parking and staging areas, properly spaced rest areas, benches and trailhead facilities, like washrooms or portable toilets, all increase the quality of experience for trail-users. A favourable trail-user experience is crucial to increasing trail usage and promoting a County-wide trail network. The County of Simcoe will work with municipalities to identify potential enhancements to trail amenities and will ensure funding is available for such enhancements through the Trails Connecting Communities Program.

4.4 Effective Collaboration with Trail Partners

It is essential trail administrators collaborate effectively to ensure the success of the County-wide trail network. The County of Simcoe will help ensure there is ongoing collaboration on trail issues with municipal partners and trail organizations. The trail network in Simcoe County will continue to evolve in the coming years in response to user requirements. Trail administrators must ensure they work with one another to provide an effective trail network throughout the County. In order to achieve this goal, this Strategy calls for the creation of an Inter-Municipal Trails Advisory Committee. This committee will be comprised of representatives from each municipality in the County. In order to ensure other trail partners are included in discussions regarding trails, this Strategy also proposes to establish a regularly scheduled forum in which the broader trails community within Simcoe County can participate.

Establish an Inter-Municipal Trails Advisory Committee
Trail partners must make strong connections among professionals to promote a unified effort. In order to properly implement the Simcoe County Trails Strategy, a formal structure should be established to allow municipal partners to effectively collaborate.

This Strategy envisions an Inter-Municipal Trails Advisory Committee comprised of staff from the County of Simcoe and representative municipal staff from each municipality within the County. Following the release of the Trails Strategy, the County proposes to work with municipalities to develop a terms of reference that will provide guidelines for the Inter-



Municipal Trail Advisory Committee, including the roles and responsibilities of both the County and member municipalities.

Simcoe County Trails Forum

Simcoe County is fortunate to have a number of organizations related to trail development and promotion, representing trails that support both

motorized and non-motorized uses. In order to facilitate effective collaboration among the various trail organizations, the County of Simcoe will host regular trails forums with trail organizations to discuss trail issues and best practices.

4.5 Promote Awareness of Simcoe County Trails

To be recognized as a regional trail leader, it takes more than developing a world-class trail network. Effective marketing and promotion are also an essential element in positioning Simcoe County as a trails leader. Just as other regions across the globe have positioned themselves to take advantage of trail-related tourism, it is the aim of this Strategy to position Simcoe County as a world-class trails destination. There are also social and health related benefits associated with an effective marketing and promotional program. Increasing recognition of recreational opportunities by County residents will result in increased usage of area trails, which will in turn result in healthier, more active communities.

A well-connected Simcoe County trails network will be positioned to attract tourists from all over the world. With local tourism agencies having been restructured into Regional Tourism Organizations (RTO), it is timely to create tour packages that feature Simcoe County trails, history and culture, communities, and natural environment. The County of Simcoe is now part of RTO7, along with the County of Grey and the County of Bruce. Significant funding and collaboration opportunities through RTO7 and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport either already exist or are on the horizon.

Tourism Simcoe County staff are presently working with both organizations and will be positioned to provide marketing and promotional guidance as the Simcoe County trails network is developed.

Increase Awareness of County Trails

This Strategy calls for the development of a communications strategy to increase awareness of the trail network in Simcoe County for both residents and tourists. The communications strategy will be developed in conjunction with Tourism Simcoe County and will provide guidelines for various marketing tools, including the County of Simcoe website and social media in an effort to achieve maximum outreach. A significant emphasis of the communications strategy will be consistency of experience, which this Strategy has previously noted as an important feature of the Simcoe County trails network.

Promote Simcoe County as a Trails Tourist Destination

Using the communications strategy as a foundation, the County of Simcoe will promote the region as a trails-related tourism destination. A well-connected County-wide trails network would attract tourists and local residents. It would complement the efforts of the RTO7 by promoting tour packages that showcase Simcoe County's history and cultural features, communities, and natural environment.

Some opportunities for tourism success include:

- Developing 2- to 3-day (or 150-kilometre) loop trails is ideal. Businesses providing meals, accommodation, other services such as shuttle services and support adventure companies are needed to complete the full



experience are beginning to develop. There are lots of success stories around the world built on this model

- To coordinate a bike/train schedule that would bring GTA residents to trails in Simcoe County. Train travelers would arrive in Barrie via the GO Train, then head off in various directions on cycling trails, for the day or extended trips. This is being done in other areas of Ontario as part of The Bike Train Initiative. This initiative puts bike racks on selected passenger rail trains, making cycling holidays easy and accessible. The Bike Train initiative is a project of Transportation Options that is a non-profit

organization. Bike Trains currently travel to and from Toronto to Windsor, Niagara Falls, Montreal and the train stops on route; (www.biketrain.ca)

- Coordinate with the events of trail associations (i.e. Bruce Trail Association) which organizes many walking trips on their and nearby trails
- Approach many of the trails from a four-season perspective. Simcoe County is known for its snowfall which provides for many snow-related activities/resorts. Snowshoeing, Nordic skiing, and hiking are winter activities that could be accommodated on many trails within the County network.

Chapter Five: *Summary*

The foundation for a connected regional trail network in Simcoe County is already well-established. However, the current trail network can be enhanced to better serve residents and visitors to our beautiful area. Key gaps in the network need to be addressed to connect communities and places of interest to one another. Strategic investments are necessary to bolster current trail infrastructure and to build new trails.

Trails must be built to a standard that supports multiple users, while also being accessible to persons with disabilities. Trails must link with other transportation infrastructure to enhance active transportation options within the County. Users need to feel comfortable navigating trails and be provided with consistent way-finding guidance. All stakeholders must coordinate with one another to develop a trail network that spans multiple jurisdictions and understand issues that impact different trail user types. Simcoe County must be promoted to showcase the remarkable trail opportunities that exist for both residents and visitors.

There are many tasks to be done to achieve the vision, goals and objectives outlined in the Simcoe County Trails Strategy. While the path ahead is sure to have challenges, it is evident from the input received from many stakeholders who participated in the development of this document, there is overwhelming support for this strategy to succeed.

The County of Simcoe is committed to facilitating the success of this strategy in partnership with its stakeholders. The County of Simcoe will apply its resources in the most appropriate manner to fulfill the vision of the Trails Strategy.

In addition to being a natural facilitator of regional trail issues, the County of Simcoe is well-suited to leverage its resources in areas such as tourism promotion and

trail funding to support the Trails Strategy, alongside its municipal partners and other trail stakeholders.

In doing so, Simcoe County will position itself as a world-class trails leader.





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