



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

# Staff Report

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**To:** Council

**File No.:** 5335-20

**From:** Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Engineering

**Date:** March 11, 2026

**Subject:** Ryan Road Sidewalk Project – Project Update

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## **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the status of the Ryan Road Sidewalk Project and seek direction to advance the sidewalk-only design into construction in 2026.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Ryan Road is a major arterial corridor between Back Road and Sandwick Road that falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Transportation and Transit (MoTT). As a result, all roadway and roadside improvements are subject to provincial standards, review, approval, and permitting. A key deficiency along this segment is a 350 m gap in sidewalk on the north side of Ryan Road, which has been identified as a pedestrian safety concern.

In 2017, Council directed staff to work with MoTT to improve pedestrian safety along Ryan Road. This direction was reinforced through the Connecting Courtenay Transportation Master Plan (2019), which identified Ryan Road as a priority corridor for pedestrian improvements.

In 2020, the City retained Associated Engineering to develop preliminary design concepts for the Back Road to Sandwick Road segment to support discussions with MoTT. Two options were evaluated: a sidewalk-only option and a combined sidewalk and bike lane option.

In 2021, MoTT reviewed the preliminary concepts and confirmed support for a sidewalk on the north side of Ryan Road, with the inclusion of an expanded bus pull-out to improve transit operations and safety. MoTT did not support the bike lane option, citing provincial roadway standards, the prohibition of buffered bike lanes on MoTT-controlled corridors, and concerns that a bike lane would be discontinuous and orphaned at the project limits, creating potential safety risks.

Based on this feedback, staff refined the project scope to a sidewalk and expanded bus pull-out. On October 25, 2021, Council approved this approach and directed staff to proceed accordingly, subject to budget approval.

Subsequent policy updates and concept work have identified Ryan Road as a long-term cycling corridor; however, any cycling facility within this segment remains subject to MoTT approval. To date, MoTT has not supported a buffered bike lane configuration for this corridor; however, they have indicated they would consider bike facilities provided they are located behind the curb and meet provincial standards. Advancing a bike lane option would therefore represent a departure from prior Council direction and introduce significant approval and delivery risk, without certainty of provincial support.

At the July 16, 2025 council meeting, Council resolved the following:

*THAT Council direct staff to proceed with detailed design of the Braidwood Road infrastructure upgrades and Ryan Road Sidewalk Project and report back to Council;*

*AND THAT Council direct staff to prioritize the Ryan Road Sidewalk Project if there is any delay with the Braidwood Road infrastructure upgrades project.*

**DISCUSSION:**

In 2024, a concept design was completed via existing information and a desktop study to determine the feasibility of including both a sidewalk and a fully protected cycle lane. Initial reviews showed that it was technically possible to fit both functions, but additional site work would be required to confirm. The concept review was undertaken to determine the feasibility of both a sidewalk and fully protected cycle lane within existing corridor boundaries and in relation to the long-term transportation objectives identified in the transportation and cycling network plans.

Ryan Road functions as a provincial highway corridor, and while the City continues to advocate for active transportation improvements, significant changes to the roadway cross-section ultimately require coordination and agreement with the Ministry of Transportation and Transit.

In September 2025, Associated Engineering was engaged to review the concept design and complete site work to further advance the detailed design for the project. Upon further analysis of the concept design, Associated Engineering determined that to construct a fully protected cycle lane as well as a sidewalk, the work would require major fill encroachments in order to fit both the cycle lane and a sidewalk. Because of the existing topography, the sidewalk and bike lane would sit higher than most of the nearby properties, so extra ground would need to be built up and sloped down onto private land to connect safely to existing yards and manage drainage. These slopes extend past the property line in several places. To construct this option, negotiations would be required with six individual property owners to secure the necessary property or easements to construct the cycle lane. This is noted as Option 1 in the rest of the discussion.

The amount of property impacts associated with accommodating both facilities illustrates the corridor constraints identified in long-term planning documents, which note that implementation of protected cycling infrastructure along Ryan Road should occur with future corridor widening rather than incremental standalone improvements.

An alternative concept (Option 2) was also developed to fit the cycle lane, which included the use of retaining walls to avoid the fill slopes. Retaining walls hold back soil so the ground can drop more sharply instead of gradually sloping, reducing the amount of land needed. However, this approach comes with trade-offs. Retaining walls are permanent structures that require ongoing inspection and maintenance, limit flexibility for future changes, and can create tighter, less accessible spaces along the corridor. Additionally, retaining walls require substantial structural design, which would result in additional costs to both the design and construction scopes. The other concern with retaining walls is the operations and maintenance. Operations crews would be required to access private property in order to complete routine

storm system inspections and maintenance, which would result in additional property acquisition and access rights issues around city crews accessing infrastructure through private property.

Given the permanent nature of retaining wall infrastructure, introducing these elements as part of an interim improvement may also limit flexibility for future corridor upgrades associated with planned roadway widening and long-term active transportation improvements.

A third alternative (Option 3) was also developed that consisted only of the sidewalk. This option was determined to not need any retaining walls and only encroached onto two properties. This approach also advances identified Transportation Master Plan priorities related to closing sidewalk gaps and improving pedestrian accessibility along major corridors, particularly where higher traffic volumes create barriers for people walking or accessing transit services.

In addition to the physical and property impacts described above, introducing a protected bike lane within the project limits would result in a short, isolated segment terminating at Sandwick Road without connection to the broader cycling network. A bike lane would end at Sandwick Road without connecting to the broader cycling network, creating an isolated “orphan” segment that forces cyclists to abruptly leave a protected space and merge into live traffic with limited warning. This is inconsistent with the Cycling Network Plan, which identifies Ryan Road as a long-term “spine” route intended for protected bicycle lanes through future road widening, and it raises added safety concerns given the Transportation Master Plan identifies the Ryan Road and Island Highway intersection as a collision hotspot. This abrupt transition reduces predictability for all road users and increases the risk of conflicts, close passes, sudden braking, and collisions, particularly for less confident riders and during peak traffic periods. Maintaining a paved shoulder accommodates cyclists while minimizing property impacts, cost, and permitting timelines. The Cycling Network Plan prioritizes delivery of connected All Ages and Abilities facilities to ensure predictable and continuous operating conditions for cyclists; partial implementation along this corridor would not achieve these intended safety outcomes and may introduce additional user conflict.

An evaluation of the options and their impacts on the project is shown in the table below.

**Design Comparison Table:**

Category	Option 1- Bike Lane Design with Fill	Option 2 - Bike Lane Design with Retaining Walls	Option 3 – Sidewalk Only
<b>Operational Impacts</b>	Major fill encroachments affecting six private properties, requiring access agreements and ongoing maintenance, with steep grading that complicates municipal access and upkeep.	Retaining walls reduce fill spread but introduce ongoing inspection/maintenance obligations, limit future flexibility, and create issues with operational access through private property.	Eliminates cycling facility behind curb, substantially reducing grading spread and encroachments. Simplifies operations and long-term maintenance.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Option 1- Bike Lane Design with Fill</b>	<b>Option 2 - Bike Lane Design with Retaining Walls</b>	<b>Option 3 – Sidewalk Only</b>
<b>Schedule Impacts</b>	Multiple encroachment agreements and SRWs are required, along with MoTT review of the behind-curb cycling infrastructure, creating a high risk of delays to design completion and tender readiness.	Reduces number of required agreements but still requires some SRWs (sidewalk encroachments at two properties). Wall design and approvals add design time. MoTT review still required.	Removes most property impacts. Minimal or no SRW/encroachment needs. Faster design completion and reduced MoTT approval complexity.
<b>Cost Impacts</b>	Fill slopes expand construction footprint, increase material quantities, increase storm infrastructure needs, and trigger property acquisition/compensation.	Retaining walls reduce fill but add wall construction costs (typically higher per metre). Some savings from reduced encroachment-related work.	Narrower cross-section and reduced grading/utility relocations significantly cut construction scope and property-related costs.
<b>Benefits for Pedestrians and Cyclists</b>	Provides protected bike lane + sidewalk with physical separation. However, behind-curb bike lane introduces access and visibility constraints.	Same benefits but with a more compact footprint. Walls may create constrained environments and less forgiving edges.	Pedestrians still gain a safe sidewalk, but cyclists lose protected facilities. Does not support AAA cycling goals or long-term corridor plan.

The evaluation summarized above was used to determine whether protected cycling infrastructure could reasonably be delivered within the scope of the current Ryan Road project while meeting safety, operational, and constructability requirements. While conceptual analysis demonstrated that both a sidewalk and protected cycling facility could technically be accommodated, advancing these options through detailed design identified substantial property impacts, increased construction complexity, long-term maintenance considerations, and heightened approval requirements associated with work occurring within a provincial highway corridor.

In particular, the construction of protected cycling facilities would require significant fill encroachments or permanent retaining wall structures extending beyond the existing roadway footprint. This work would introduce impacts comparable to those typically associated with full corridor widening projects and would require multiple property agreements as well as coordination and approval from the Ministry of Transportation and Transit. These findings are consistent with the City’s adopted Cycling Network Plan, which identifies Ryan Road as a long-term corridor intended for protected cycling infrastructure delivered through future roadway widening and comprehensive corridor redesign.

Through this review, it became clear that the options are not simply different design choices within the current project. Including protected cycling infrastructure would require work on a scale similar to a full roadway widening, including property acquisition, major structural works, and provincial approvals that extend beyond the scope and timeline of this project. As a result, advancing cycling infrastructure at this time would likely require deferring the project until broader corridor improvements are led and undertaken in partnership with the Province. In contrast, the sidewalk-only option allows the City to move

forward now by closing an important gap in the pedestrian network and improving safety within the limits of work that can realistically be delivered.

As a result, the decision before Council is whether to proceed with achievable pedestrian and transit improvements at this time or defer works pending future corridor redesign undertaken in partnership with the Province.

**Schedule**

A schedule for the sidewalk only option is shown below. Archaeological and environmental approvals remain critical path items, and construction is anticipated to proceed in summer 2026 following completion of detailed design.

SCHEDULE – SIDEWALK ONLY	2026					
	Jan - Feb	Mar - Apr	May - Jun	Jul - Aug	Sep - Oct	Nov - Dec
MoTT Stakeholder Engagement						
Permitting						
Detailed Design						
Tender Process						
Construction						

**Permitting**

The table below outlines the status of the major permits required as well as their lead times.

Permit Required	Current Status
1. Heritage Inspection Permit – Province of BC Archaeology Branch	Permit In Place
2. Site Alteration Permit – Province of BC Archaeology Branch	Permit In Place
3. Changes in and about a stream – Notification to Ministry of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship	Underway (4 Months)
4. Cultural Heritage Investigation Permit – K’ómoks First Nation	Underway (1 month)

The project overlaps recorded archaeological site DkSf-26 near the RCMP station and 925 Braidwood Road. Any ground disturbance within the site boundary will require the appropriate Heritage Conservation Act permits and a K’ómoks First Nation Cultural Heritage Investigation Permit (CHIP), with archaeological monitoring during construction. The current design affects approximately 50 m of the site area. The required archaeology permits have been obtained and are valid until December 31, 2027.

Environmental permitting is required due to the work being within the drainage pathway to Glen Urquhart Creek. Project runoff and ditch/catchment flows are conveyed through the existing culverts and ditches to the creek, and the culvert replacements form part of a culverted, fish-bearing watercourse. The installation, maintenance, or removal of a culvert for a road, trail, or footpath crossing requires a notification to the Ministry of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship under the Water Sustainability Act. During construction, the contractor will be required to prepare a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).

**POLICY ANALYSIS:**

The Ryan Road Sidewalk (Back Rd to Sandwick Rd) Project is guided by:

- City of Courtenay Official Community Plan (OCP)
- 2023 Cycling Network Plan Update
- 2019 Transportation Master Plan
- 2019 Cycling Network Plan

With both the Cycling Network Plan (CNP) and the Transportation Master Plan (TMP), Council has consistently endorsed policies that support walking and cycling as important pieces of Courtenay’s transportation system. The Official Community Plan, TMP, and CNP all establish a vision for a safe, connected, and accessible active transportation network serving users of all ages and abilities. These plans recognize that expanding walking and cycling infrastructure is necessary to support growth, improve accessibility, while at the same time, they acknowledge that implementation should occur in phases due to corridor conditions, safety priorities and jurisdictional constraints.

The Transportation Master Plan places emphasis on improving walkability by addressing gaps in the sidewalk network and removing barriers along major roads where traffic speeds and volumes create uncomfortable or unsafe conditions for pedestrians, like on Ryan Road. Public engagement undertaken through the TMP highlighted strong community support for investments that improve everyday walking conditions, especially along arterial corridors and transit routes. Completing the project with a sidewalk only advances these objectives by closing a missing sidewalk connection and improving pedestrian accessibility along Ryan Road, which aligns with the near-term priorities identified in the TMP.

Both the 2019 and 2023 Cycling Network Plans identify Ryan Road as an important long-term “spine” route within the City’s ultimate All Ages and Abilities cycling network. However, the plans note that protected cycling facilities along this corridor are intended to be delivered in conjunction with future roadway widening and broader corridor reconstruction and coordination with the Ministry of Transportation and Transit, as Ryan Road functions as a provincial highway. Although staff have consistently advocated for the inclusion of protected cycling facilities, this type of corridor reconstruction is entirely within MoTT’s decision making authority.

Technical analysis completed through the ongoing design confirmed many of the challenges anticipated in the master plans. The decision not to include protected cycling infrastructure within the current project is in alignment with master plans and reflects timing/sequencing rather than a departure from the City’s active transportation goals. The project advances identified pedestrian priorities today while preserving the opportunity to deliver a continuous, high-quality cycling facility along Ryan Road as part of future corridor improvements.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The capital budget for this project is \$2,558,500 and is based on a Class D cost estimate. Staff still do believe that the approved budget will be adequate to fund construction, but some emerging risks are noted below.

2026	Reserve - SIIP	DCC	Debt	Total
2,558,500.0 0	400,000.0 0	158,500. 00	2,000,000. 00	2,558,500.0 0

Development Cost Charge (DCC) reserves are proposed to fund a portion of this project using existing allocations. However, should the DCC bylaw be amended, available funding and eligibility may change.

From a design perspective, staff and consulting team are seeing the most risk around coordination of the electrical scope. In order to construct the sidewalk, the existing streetlights, which are MoTT owned, will need to be removed and reinstalled in a location that does not conflict with the new sidewalk while still providing adequate lighting for all users. This work will also include the removal and replacement of electrical conduit that connects the streetlights.

Another financial risk staff are monitoring is the presence of a Fortis gas main in close proximity to the proposed sidewalk. Staff and design team are actively working with Fortis to develop contingency plans that could include relocation or other measures that may impact project financials.

**ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:**

Engineering staff will continue to manage the consultant, coordinate permitting, and lead inter-agency engagement with MoTT and BC Transit. Archaeological, environmental, and highway use permits remain critical path items and will be advanced as part of detailed design.

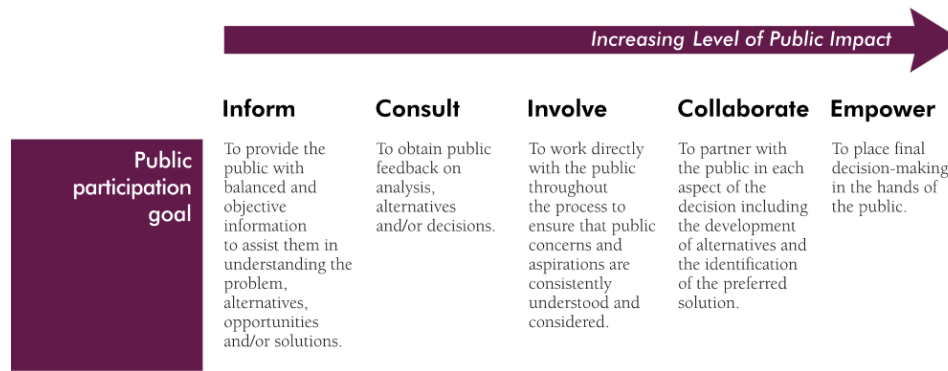
Design completion is targeted for early 2026, followed by procurement and construction anticipated in summer 2026, subject to approvals and budget confirmation. No additional staffing resources beyond those already assigned are anticipated.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:**

Although this project does not address any strategic priorities, the Ryan Road Sidewalk Project supports Council’s strategic direction by delivering a practical, safety-focused improvement that is achievable within the project constraints.

**PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:**

Staff would inform the public based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



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**OPTIONS:**

1. THAT Council direct staff to proceed with the sidewalk only, complete detailed design and begin construction as soon as possible within 2026.
2. THAT Council direct staff to pause the project until a time when agreement is reached between City of Courtenay and Ministry of Transportation and Transit on the future of Ryan Road.
3. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

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