

Creating a Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls  
Proposal for a Niagara Falls Bicycle Master Plan



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Prepared by:

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## A VISION FOR NIAGARA FALLS

The Niagara Falls Bicycle Master Plan envisions a vibrant and welcoming city—one where all residents and visitors can access the global assets and local character of a community reinventing itself for a powerful new future.

A [Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls](#) builds on the foundations that have supported the community for generations: the neighborhoods, parks, schools, local businesses, and attractions that provide starting points, destinations and experiences that make up the lifeblood of the city.

A [Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls](#) connects these assets through both welcoming [Greenways](#) along the water and within neighborhoods. A central [Cycle Circuit](#) forms a loop tying the heart of the local business community to the jewel of the city's park system to the tourism mecca downtown. [Community Connectors](#) provide the tributaries and branch lines to fuel these currents, providing the critical mass of energy that makes these core pieces flow day in and day out, year-round.

A [Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls](#) shows the way to connect the tourism economy with the neighborhoods around the city, providing an infusion of visitor spending while also providing residents with reliable and inexpensive access to jobs in the core.

A [Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls](#) creates a new framework for thinking about streets as central to the social life of the city. Reimagined [Social Streets](#) and [Neighborhood Greenways](#) will return these places to their position as the city's most important public spaces. Cycling, walking, transit and autos will share these outdoor venues but, like Old Falls Street, people will come first. These streets aren't just for getting from A to B but making an experience of all points in between.

A [Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls](#) is a people-friendly Niagara Falls. A [Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls](#) is a resident-friendly Niagara Falls. A [Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls](#) is a family-friendly Niagara Falls, a know-your-neighbor Niagara Falls; and a there's always-something-new-around-the-corner Niagara Falls; a stay-another-night Niagara Falls; a you-gotta-see-this Niagara Falls.

A [Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls](#) is an I'm-proud-to-call-this-home Niagara Falls.





Extensive public outreach directly shaped the Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls plan the bike network.

Members of the public:

- completed 250+ community in-person and online surveys
- attended four public meetings at Niagara Falls Main Street Library, Niagara Falls Amtrak Station, African Heritage Food Co-Op, and Niagara Falls LaSalle Library
- gave input and feedback at multiple public events in every neighborhood in the city
- participated in stakeholder interviews and presentations
- hosted GObike and others in a community-led panel discussion, “Imagining a More Livable Niagara Falls – Exploring Solutions for the Future of the City” at the Niagara Falls Amtrak Station;
- helped develop and implement a pop-up complete streets event at Niagara Street Elementary School and Centre Avenue;
- hosted a Slow Roll Bike Stampede bicycle ride to ride the Cycle Circuit and other elements of the proposed network; and
- completed online and in-person mapping to provide input on where they’d like to see bicycle infrastructure.

## A PLAN BUILT WITH AND FOR THE COMMUNITY

What kind of city do you want to live in? What kind of city do you want to visit? When we ask this question in Niagara Falls, the response is clear.

***We want a city that is lively, friendly, healthy and vibrant. A city where everyone has easy ready access to the natural beauty, jobs, recreation, education and unique neighborhoods that make this place special.***

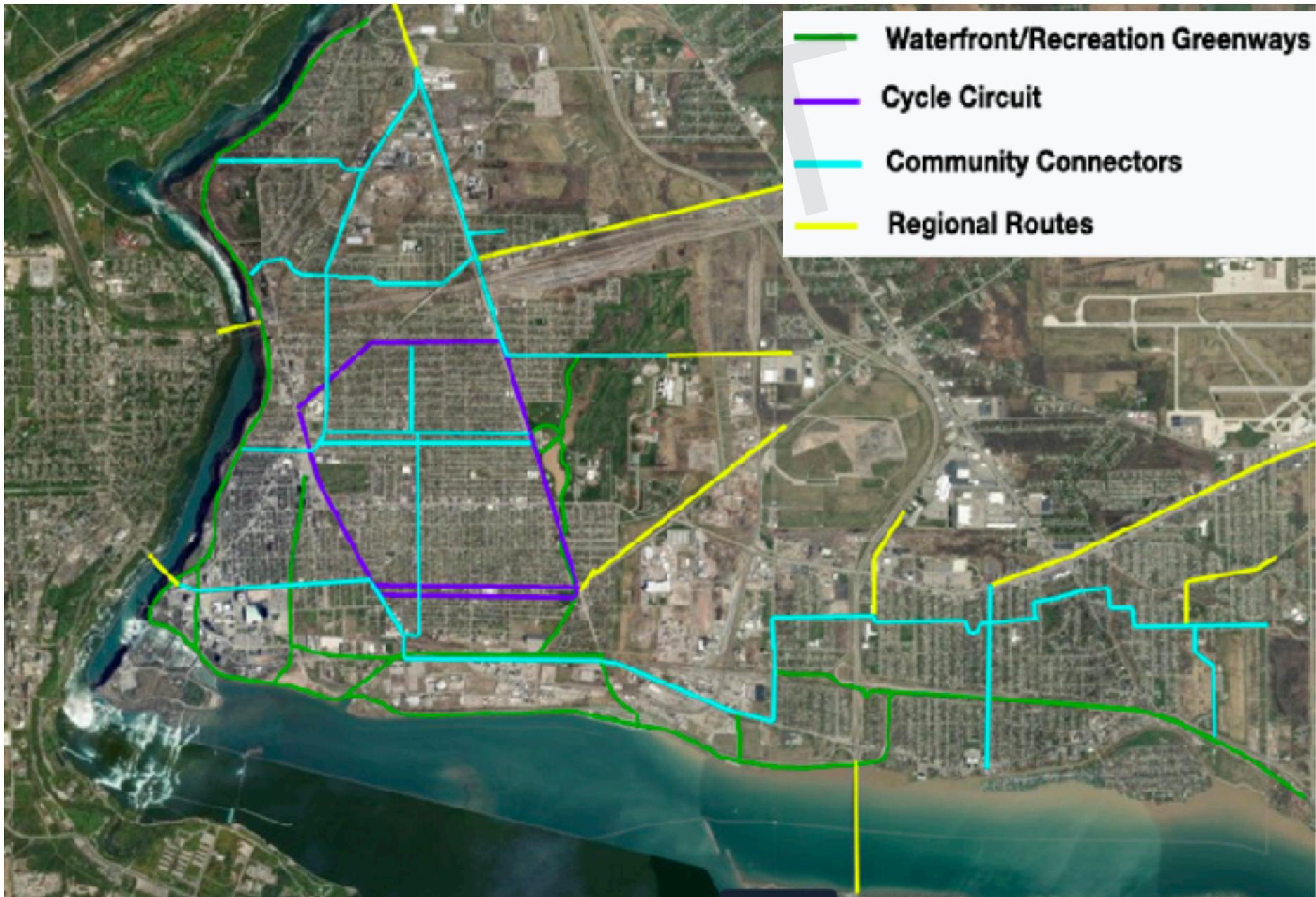
Through an extensive public outreach, residents of Niagara Falls identified these shared **goals** to achieve a Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls:

- ***Create connections within Niagara Falls and beyond***
- ***Improve quality of life in the city***
- ***Increase economic opportunity***
- ***Develop a culture that celebrates people-first transportation***
- ***Build mutual accountability for safe streets***





Figure 1: Priority Routes





## Priority Routes.

The priority network is divided into four main elements: Waterfront and Recreational Greenways, the Niagara Falls Cycle Circuit, Community Connectors and Regional Routes. Each of these frameworks will offer various facility types and implementation strategies, all of which place an emphasis on protected infrastructure and user comfort.

## Waterfront and Recreational Greenways.

The Niagara River Greenway is the jewel of cycling in the bi-national Niagara Region. With in-progress reconstruction of the Niagara Scenic Parkway, cyclists will be able to enjoy an auto-free 10 mile route between the northern to eastern edges of the City of Niagara Falls. The Niagara River Greenway in the city is the spine of the bicycle network, will be a crucial piece of the Lake Erie to Lake Ontario Greenway, and will be tied directly into the emerging Empire State Trail. Additional waterfront and recreational greenways are envisioned in and around Hyde Park and Gill Creek.

## Community Connectors.

One of the more common community feedback themes received was to ensure resident access to the Niagara River and State Parks by way of the Niagara River Greenway. Residents also wanted to ensure access to parks, schools, shopping districts, transit, and other neighborhoods and towns. Community Connectors provide these linkages from every neighborhood in Niagara Falls on high-priority, high-quality designated cycling routes.

## Niagara Falls Cycle Circuit.

The heart of the Niagara Falls Bicycle Network is the Niagara Falls Cycle Circuit, the center of a robust system of neighborhood linkages. A high priority bicycle route which circulates people from the Downtown core, to Hyde Park, and into the neighborhoods north and South of the Pine Avenue commercial corridor. The Circuit is anchored by Niagara Boulevard to the north and Falls Street in the south, providing an easy and marketable corridor for residents and visitors to remember.

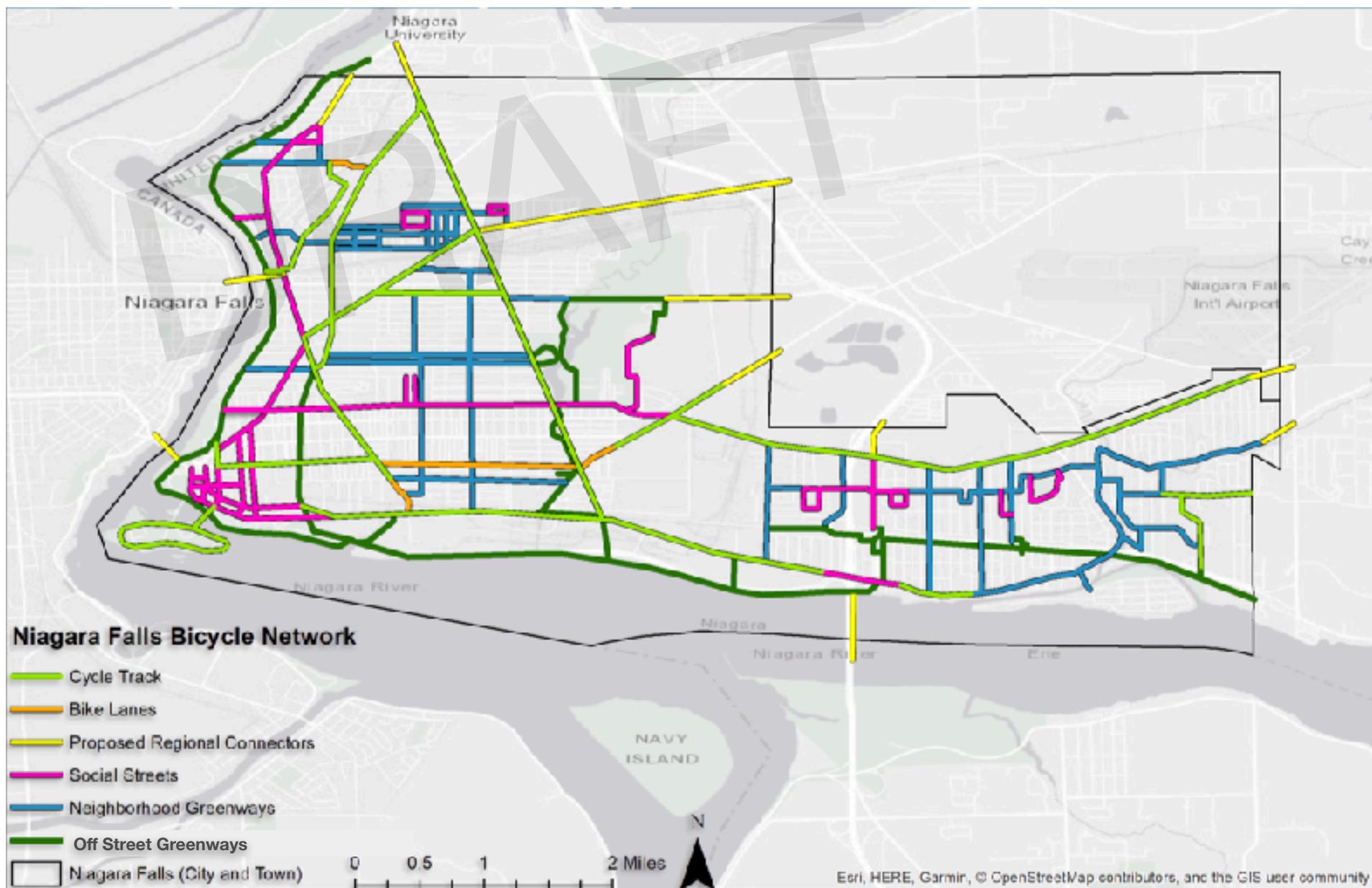
## Regional Routes.

Regional Routes provide the most direct access to other cities and towns in the region. As these roads will require cooperation from multiple invested partners, it is recommended that these roadways provide the most protected bicycle infrastructure possible given the existing right of way width and conditions. Additionally, the community connectors over the United States and Canadian border should examine operations and policy considerations as well. Stakeholders should continue to work together to ensure cycling (and pedestrian) access that is safe, convenient and comfortable across each international bridge.





Figure 2: The Complete Network



\* Regional Routes do not have facility designations, as these lie outside of the scope of this planning process.





**FACILITY TYPES.**

In order to fulfill the community’s vision of a Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls, some cycling facilities will be built from scratch, but most will retrofit existing streets and right of ways. Because of the different opportunities presented by the current infrastructure as well as underutilized land, challenges and constraints in the city, different facility types are recommended for different routes.



**Cycle Track:** provide space to be primarily used for bicycles, and are separated from motor vehicle travel lanes, parking lanes, and sidewalks.



**Social Street:** designed with pedestrians and bicyclists as top priority using speed and volume management, and pedestrian/bike amenities.



**Off Street Greenway:** physically separated from roadways; designed for two way bicycle travel, pedestrians and other non-automotive users.



**Neighborhood Greenway:** low motorized traffic volumes and speeds, designed to give bicycle travel priority.





**Greenways.** Off Street Greenways are also often known as multi-use trails. The Niagara River Greenway is prime example of this type of facility at its best. These are places that families, kids, older residents and beginners and casual cyclists of all ages feel welcome and comfortable on their bikes. The plan incorporates and builds on this existing component of a bicycle friendly Niagara Falls. In addition, this plan introduces Neighborhood Greenways to Niagara Falls. Also often known as bicycle boulevards, these are routes within neighborhoods that calm traffic and prioritize cyclists and pedestrians, so that the same broad cross-section of the population feels welcome and encouraged to ride. Lower speed limits, increased greenery, shortened crossings, curb bump outs, benches and additional infrastructure enhancements improve conditions for non-motorized traffic and neighborhood residents alike.

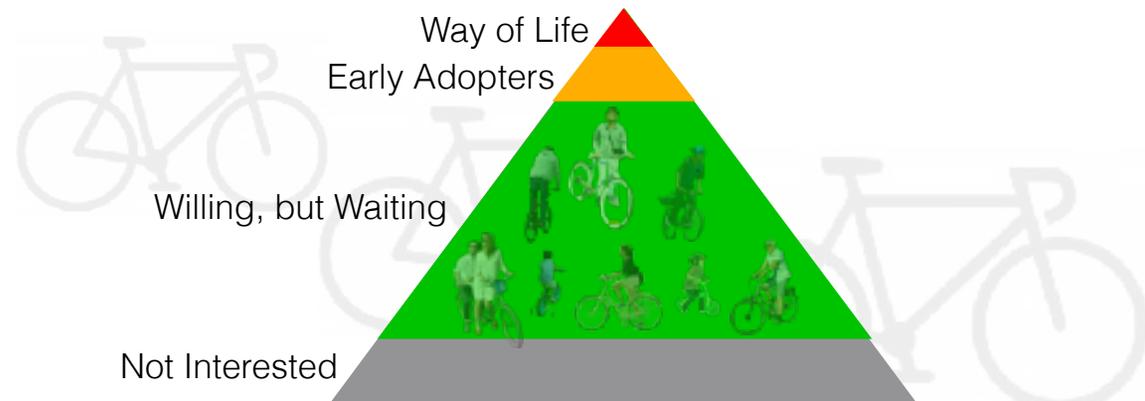
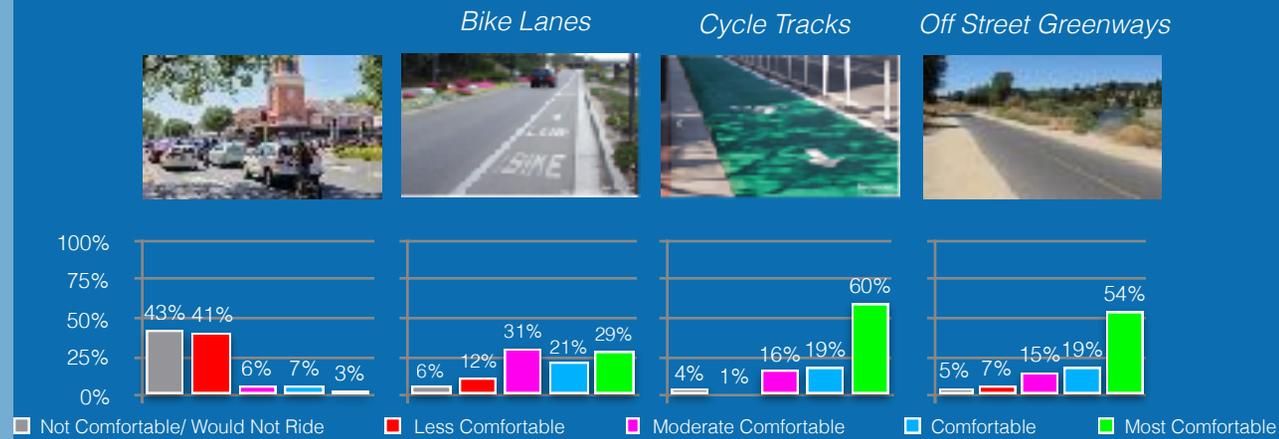
**Cycle Tracks.** Cycle tracks go beyond painted bicycle lanes to provide greater separation, clarity and protection for cyclists on city streets. Often they are separated from car traffic and pedestrians by curbs, vertical bollards or rubber delineators. Many are also painted green along their length, or at a minimum whenever there is a crossing or conflict with auto traffic. Cycle tracks have been given credit for helping to increase ridership in countries across the country, by bringing a safe a predictable ride experience into even the busiest urban areas.

**Social Streets.** Social Streets aim to put the public back into this public space. By concentrating on placemaking, these streets tame traffic speeds and increase other forms of access. Beyond access, though, these street treatments actually create a new kind of demand; attracting people to visit, to linger and talk, to play, and to support local restaurants and businesses. In areas where pedestrian activity is heaviest, including commercial streets and streets around schools and parks, the concept of a social streets should apply throughout Niagara Falls.

## A ROUTE FOR EVERY RIDER / A RIDER FOR EVERY ROUTE

This plan aims to build a cycling network for every resident. Based on community outreach and best practice research, this plan acknowledges that creating this network means putting an emphasis on greenways, cycle tracks and social streets. These are cycling facilities that are welcoming and inviting to the majority of the population. The map on the preceding pages represents the route types that can be implemented across the city to achieve the vision of a vibrant and connected Niagara Falls. Just as important is creating wayfinding, signage, experiences and resident and visitor knowledge about the routes and destinations available throughout the cycling network.

### Niagara Falls Resident Survey Responses to Comfort in Various Cycle Facilities



Adapted by GObike from Four Types of Cyclists by Roger Geller. Other studies have suggested ~1% of the population – by choice or by necessity – will ride anywhere (“Way of Life”); ~5% will ride if there are conventional bike lanes (“Early Adopters”), and ~60-65% of the population would ride if bicycle facilities separated from auto-traffic existed (“Willing, but Waiting”).





PRIORITY PROJECTS

Immediate Priorities:

As the Niagara Gorge Corridor Parkway Removal Project comes to completion, ensuring neighborhood connections to the Parkway is a critical immediate step to achieving the goals of a Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls, as is planning for further connections to neighboring towns and regional assets. The full network of community connectors will be built over time but the following are low cost, immediate term steps that can be taken to improve neighborhood access to the spine of the network:

Neighborhood Projects

**Deveaux:** Multiple connections planned with Parkway Removal Project, however, clear and frequent crosswalks and crossing treatments will be necessary to link residents across Whirlpool Street.

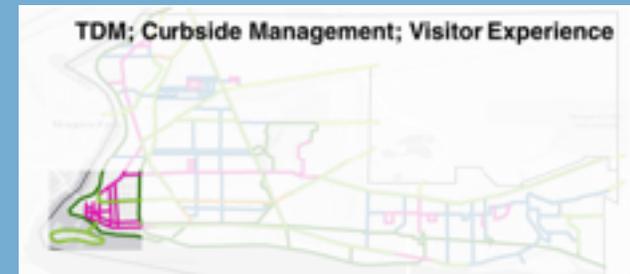
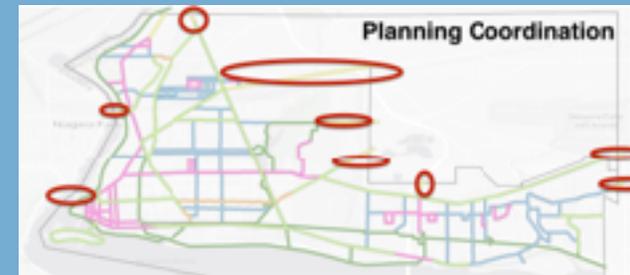
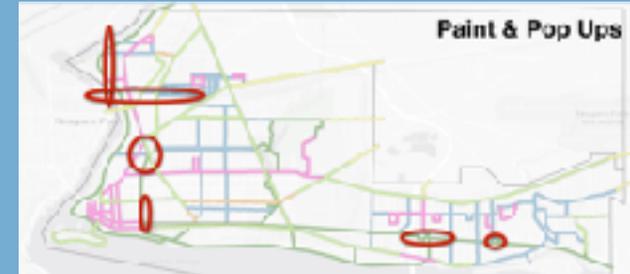
**Downtown:** The gaps in the multi-use path on John Daly Blvd connecting to the waterfront pathways at Niagara Falls State Park can be closed utilizing Quay Street with paint and bollards south of Rainbow Boulevard, while the too-wide radius of the southbound right-turn lane to Rainbow Boulevard can also be closed with paint and bollard to provide a safe terminus to the pathway and a safe crossing of the street. Improved signage downtown can also help connect cyclists to various entrances to the State Park pathway system.

**Highland:** From Highland Avenue, crossings are needed to facilitate movement over the railroad tracks that separate the neighborhood from Deveaux and the greenway. Immediate term priority routes include linkages to Garden Avenue at D’Amelio Park through Chasm Avenue/ Monteagle Street or 9th to Depot and across Main Street at Bath, providing the most direct route with the fewest street reconfigurations and treatments necessary. These efforts should be coordinated with New York State’s Downtown Revitalization Initiative to ensure integration with economic development activity and access.

**LaSalle:** A Niagara River Greenway extension is currently under development in the LaSalle Neighborhood. In order to complement this work and expand cycling access to the greenway, low-cost immediate improvements can be made to the existing network of multi-use paths criss-crossing the LaSalle Expressway, including cutting ramps into existing curbs, improved directional signage and painting over existing graffiti with murals or solid colors.

**North of Pine Avenue:** North of Pine Avenue, the largest barrier that exists to the new greenway, are the Portage Road and Main Street crossings. The center of activity where this cluster of roads meets from 11th Street to Lockport Street provides a wealth of amenities, but the current infrastructure is daunting as a pedestrian or cyclist. Pop-up street treatments on 11th and at the Portage Road intersection, sharrows, crosswalks and painted bulb-outs as interim measures on Ashland Avenue, Whitney Avenue and LaSalle Avenue can facilitate ready access to the greenway.

Short Term Implementation and Next Steps





Hyde Park Boulevard Road Diet—the Niagara Falls Cycle Circuit, including Hyde Park Boulevard, should be a priority network improvement for the next three years.

**South of Pine Avenue:** The hardened infrastructure challenges south of Buffalo Avenue present immediate challenges to opening ready access to the waterfront greenway. For this reason, an emphasis on interim Neighborhood Greenway treatments (sharrows, crosswalks and painted bulb-outs) on 19th Street can provide an easier access to the routes north of Pine Avenue. Emphasis should be placed on feasibility and engineering studies to create a more permeable edge between Buffalo Avenue and the waterfront to the south. Currently, NYS DOT is redesigning Niagara Street west of Portage Road, which will include a cycle track. An additional option for immediate interventions is to plan for extending this cycle track to Portage Road with safe and accessible crossings to both Niagara and Falls streets.

**Ongoing Initiatives:**

**Niagara River Greenway:** Niagara Falls stakeholders across all sectors must remain engaged in the final stages of greenway construction to Findlay Avenue, including ensuring adequate, safe, and attractive connections to the greenway from adjacent neighborhoods, and those neighborhoods proposed to be connected through neighborhood greenways. Additionally, stakeholders should spearhead efforts to complete the connections further north to the city line and Niagara University.

**Regional Routes:** The City of Niagara Falls should ensure it remains heavily engaged in the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) regional bicycle plan, which kicked off in spring 2019. This plan will set the course for regional planning of on- and off-street cycling infrastructure for the two county region, and integration of the connections and routes outlined in the Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls plan will be critical to ensuring a regional system that works for Niagara Falls residents and visitors. Stakeholders must continue to work with the Niagara Bridge Authority to solve the confusing and incongruent crossing rules and regulations that limit access between the United States and Canada for pedestrians and cyclists. Permitting crossings at the Whirlpool Bridge, and rationalizing expectations and process at the Rainbow Bridge are critical to access for local residents and just as critical for tapping into the potential for cycle tourism. Newly offered regular GOTrain service from Toronto makes this issue more pressing than ever.





**Short-Term Priorities:**

While immediate term infrastructure priorities build on the existing Niagara River Greenway, short-term priorities begin to build out critical aspects of the plan: the Niagara Falls Cycle Circuit, Waterfront Greenways and Social Streets.

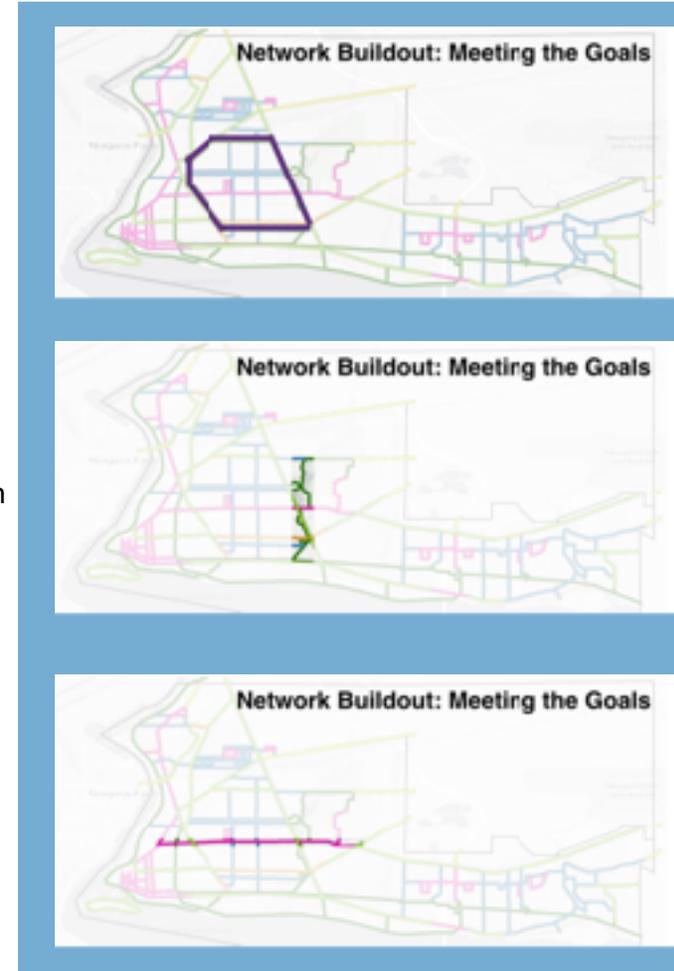
**Niagara Falls Cycle Circuit.** The Niagara Falls Cycle Circuit is key to engaging residents in the downtown tourism industry and drawing tourism into core Niagara Falls neighborhoods and can encourage greater physical activity for Niagara Falls residents, and encourage greater utilization of non-motorized transport to reduce auto traffic at these key trip generators. Currently, pieces of the Circuit are among the most dangerous places to ride in Niagara Falls. These areas, such as Pine Avenue east of Hyde Park Boulevard and the Boulevard itself, should be early targets for intervention, even if they are interim measures. These measures could include ‘pop-up’ infrastructure to reduce lanes and erect protected bikes lanes and crosswalks while phased redesign of these over built streets can be accomplished. These streets are particularly critical due to the proximity to both Hyde Park and the Niagara Falls High School and its athletic facilities.

**Gill Creek Greenway.** The Gill Creek Greenway has been in the planning stages for a number of years and would expand the existing greenway system and more closely tie the neighborhoods south of Pine Avenue to in-city waterways and Hyde Park. Though there are existing challenges in connecting south to the River’s edge, completing the planned portion of the Gill Creek Greenway while planning for proposed connections south of Buffalo Ave are also near term priorities for linking the City to the Niagara River Greenway.

**Social Streets.** Niagara Falls should strive to increase holistic and inviting street usage beyond the downtown tourism core, using opportunities to create short- and medium-term interventions such as parklets, outdoor patios, games, planters, innovative seating, interactive play spaces, and public art on both commercial corridors and school and park adjacent streets. Though major infrastructure overhauls are very expensive and time consuming, day, weekend, week, month or season-long interventions and activities can provide a vision of a vibrant future streetscape for relatively little cost.

**Long-Term Initiatives**

Additional planning work will continue to create a Bicycle Friendly Niagara Falls by impacting modes and methods people use to access the city, its neighborhoods and attractions. These planning needs are magnified in a city like Niagara Falls, where the seasonal influx of visitors creates peaks and valleys in demand. Initiatives include transportation demand management, curbside management, and tourist bus management and remote parking. The network provides ample opportunity for return trip routes that connect residents and visitors to a wealth of experiences Niagara Falls has on offer. Working with local tourism and promotion agencies, a series of branded routes should be created and advertised to further connect residents with a cycling lifestyle as well as broaden and deepen the city’s tourism potential.





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