

## Building a bridge at Whistle Bend

by Peter Long, April 15, 2015



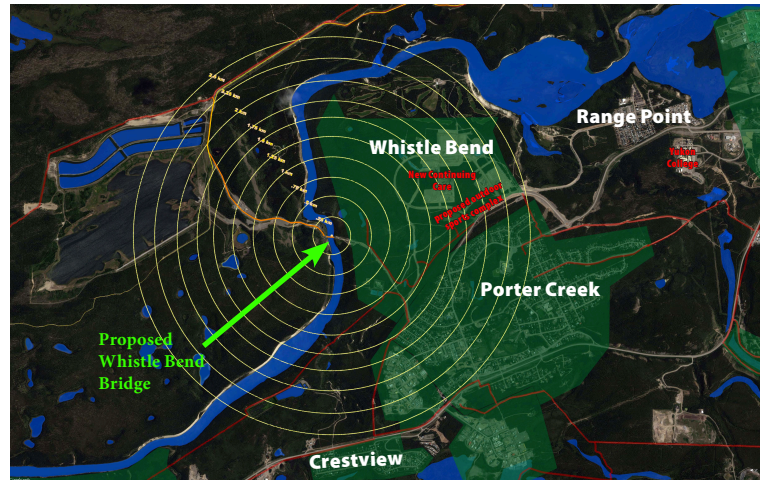
A recent request to consider allowing motorized recreational vehicles to use the Rotary Centennial Bridge came about as motorized recreational drivers feel restricted by only being able to use a few motorized trails on the east side of the river and don't want to have to trailer their vehicles to cross to the west side of the river. But a strong community voice said the bridge was built as part of a vision of a non-motorized peaceful sanctuary in the heart of the city. It became a very divisive topic. However, City Council bravely took a stand and said leave the bridge as is, non-motorized.

As a walker, I'm always looking for ways to make our community better for walking and I see there's an alternative approach here that could be a win-win for all.

First, where do motorized recreational vehicles go? The top Google Earth picture represents an area about 60 km across by 40 km long, and shows some of the hinterland that motorized vehicle users mean when they talk about getting out and away. Within the city limits, the red lines represents the city's designated motorized trails. The red lines also show regional snowmobile trails. They cover a large territory, well outside city limits.

My proposal is to build a bridge at Whistle Bend (red arrow on above map), similar to the Rotary Centennial Bridge, but wider, designed from the outset as multi-use including motorized recreation vehicles. For the motorized community in Riverdale it seems like a good solution to getting across the river, and with a motorized vehicle it really is not that far away and is a nice drive too.

On the east (Riverdale) side of the river, the orange line (top map) shows the access to the proposed Whistle Bend bridge (red arrow) from the Long Lake/Livingstone Trail Road, the city's official motorized trail.



On the west (Whistle Bend) side of the Yukon River, drivers would use existing motorized trails to connect to the proposed bridge.

A bridge at Whistle Bend was shown on the Nov. 8, 2006 Porter Creek Bench charrette concept map\*, although it was shown as for pedestrians.

The small map above uses 250 m concentric circles (2.5 km radius) to give a sense of how many people are close to the bridge site. At Whistle Bend, all of Whistle Bend and almost half of Porter Creek are within 2.5 km of the proposed bridge. The Bureau of Statistics' *Population Report Sept. 2014*, show 3774 residents in Porter Creek/Kulan. Whistle Bend is projected to have 7000-8000 residents when full.

Health studies say we are not active enough. We want people to walk for health and wellness, and to be able to do longer walks. Look at the success of the Millennium Trail and the Rotary Centennial Bridge.

\*Note from an earlier consultation map: "The possibility of a bridge was explored to increase connectivity to the regional trail network. Will need to work with Ta'an Kwäch'än Council to ensure adequate controls are made to protect their land across the river."

Interesting trails become destinations, encouraging people to expand their horizons, to build exercise into their lives.

Whitehorse is a very desirable place to live and feels like it will continue to grow. People love the wilderness-city trail experiences that living alongside a 3,190-km long river can offer. A well thought-out trail network could give that at Whistle Bend.

This bridge would fill a missing link in a Yukon River Corridor Trail with trails along the beautiful high banks on the eastern shore of the river. It would add immensely to walking options in Whitehorse.

Many Whistle Bend destinations are environmentally fragile, or require walking alongside roads or have uses such as the golf course. With today's prairie-like vistas, Whistle Bend walkers may be discouraged.

What will encourage people to walk at Whistle Bend? The proposed bridge will become a destination, likely for many non-Whistle Bend residents as well. Will it be enough to supplement the commercial core planned for Whistle Bend? A café? A pub? Will it make Whistle Bend become a more desirable place to live?

Obviously we need to plan — zoning, land use, trail designations are all critical. While many parts of a river corridor trail exist throughout the city, a trail around Whistle Bend on both sides of the river is only a vision, an opportunity.

Could an active transportation route on the east side of the river provide an alternate way of getting downtown? Could this bridge serve as an emergency crossing for Riverdale? I'd be happy to see a revitalized city Trails Committee be working on a positive forward-thinking community building project like this.

Who will pay for this bridge? Can we afford it? I suggest the bridge can be built with large, experienced trail organizations like the motorized groups and the mountain bike groups spearheading the project. Add in goals of increasing walking tourism, economic development and community health — and solving the problem of getting motorized recreational vehicles across the river — and it should be one we can all get behind.

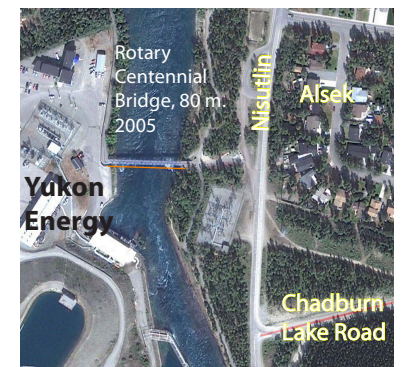
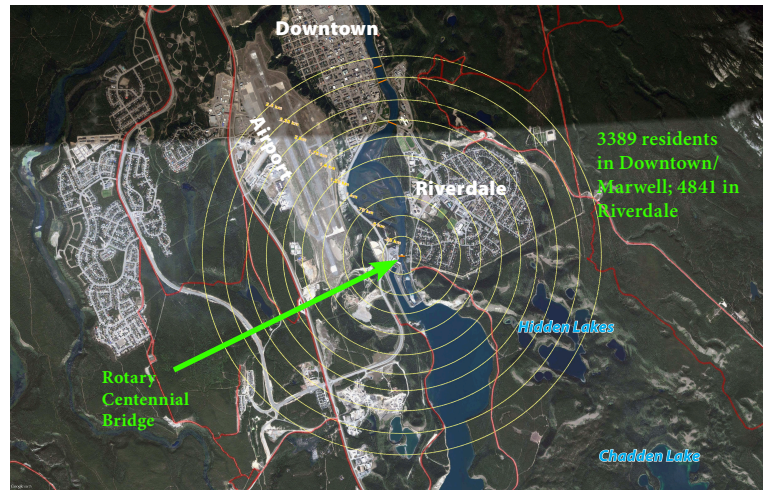
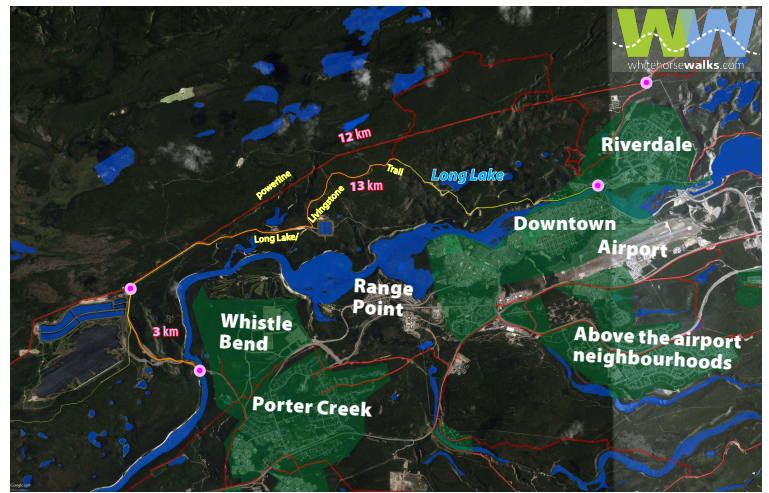
It would seem that a lot depends on the views of the community, and especially the motorized recreation vehicle community.

Such a bridge may qualify for Building Canada Funding. It will certainly require close discussion and buy in with both Kwanlin Dün and Ta'an Kwach'an First Nations. If Whistle Bend had a Community Association, it could work with logical ties to Porter Creek to help look at the bridge. There will definitely be a need for resolving best trail practices along the river. Who should be trail stewards?

We want more people involved in active living. The city's Integrated Community Sustainability Plan recommends a "five minute walking distance to green space from residence." Reports such as Engineering's 2004 City Wide Transportation Plan promoted making our community more friendly related to active transportation for commuting purposes; the 2007 Trail Plan and Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the 2010 Official Community Plan and the Sustainability Plan are documents where the city, with significant input from residents, talks about having a healthy vision for Whitehorse.

The 2015 *Sustainability plan update: Summary of phase 2 engagement* shows active living continues to be a significant priority for citizens:

- *Active living and access to recreation*, was first under stakeholder prioritization of Sustainability Goals.
- Another point was *The focus needs to be on community building rather than community development*.
- Under Visions and Values: *conservation/protection of nature for wildlife as well as humans, recreation (trails)*.
- Under Current city actions *reduced use of private vehicles* was in the second spot under transportation.



Comparing bridge length, same scale

I've been working for a number of years on trying to make walking a topic in all things Whitehorse — active living, community wellness, education, economic development, tourism, trails... We need to encourage both purposeful walking (active transportation) as well as recreational walking. We could have a walking culture and we could become a walking destination.

This situation, this bridge, presents an opportunity of working together on a positive community project. I suggest this is not a frivolous use of tax dollars but a wise look at the future. A healthy Whistle Bend will pay back development costs sooner. Healthy walking citizens will cost less medically. Citizens that get along will cost less in policing. The Trails Committee can focus on other needed walking improvements! A walking city will attract walking tourists.

For other walking viewpoints, read more on my whitehorseWalks.com website, in particular my *Yukon Walking Strategy* and my new full-city coverage *Walking in Whitehorse* and *Making Walking Better* maps.

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