




City of Thunder Bay

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Final Report

September 2019

CITY OF Thunder Bay
Superior by Nature

Prepared by IBI Group

IBI

Acknowledgements

The creation of the City's Transportation Master Plan took considerable time, thoughtful debate and commitment from many individuals and groups. I would like to acknowledge their contributions and thank them for sharing their knowledge to improve the City of Thunder Bay.

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1 ABOUT THIS PLAN

1.1 **Purpose**

The Thunder Bay Active Transportation Plan is an action-oriented document intended to chart the network improvements, policies and programs that will encourage and support active transportation over the next 20 years (and beyond). Active transportation includes walking, cycling and other human-powered modes such as wheelchairs, skateboards, scooters, and others.

This plan has been prepared as part of the Thunder Bay Transportation Master Plan (TMP). The new TMP marks a significant evolution from the City's previous TMP from 1989, taking a multimodal approach to transportation planning with policies, projects, and programs for walking, cycling, transit, and driving. The TMP endeavours to fulfill the vision and objectives that have been shaped through consultation with the public and stakeholders under the guidance of the study Steering Committee, and review of other plans and policies enacted by the City of Thunder Bay.

One of the major themes underscoring the TMP is the need for enhanced mobility options, including active transportation (AT), for all residents. In support of the broad initiatives of the TMP, this Active Transportation Plan supplements and supports the work of the TMP by providing additional detail on the pedestrian and cycling networks, and identifying supporting initiatives.

1.2 **What's Inside**

1.2.1 **Plan Development**

The development of the TMP was structured around 4 main stages:

This document is structured around the following chapters:

- Chapter 2 – **Vision and Themes** presents the vision for active transportation in Thunder Bay and the supporting themes.
- Chapter 3 – **Setting the Context** describes the previous planning studies that inform and support the AT Plan and explores trends in Thunder Bay.
- Chapters 4 through 9 describe the projects, policies, and actions in the AT Plan as they relate to **six key themes**:
    - Fostering Walkable Environments
    - Connecting and Growing the Cycling Network
    - Engaging Children and Youth
    - Supporting Year-Round Travel
    - Building Community Capacity and Support
    - Tracking Progress
- Chapter 10 – **Achieving the Plan** – focuses on how this plan will be implemented in a sustainable and accountable manner

2 VISION AND THEMES

2.1 An Active Transportation Vision for 2038

To provide a clear direction for the AT Plan, a specific vision for active transportation was developed. The vision attempts to provide a concise and achievable goal for the City of Thunder Bay that addresses the significant public feedback received through the larger TMP process.

In 2038, active transportation is the preferred choice for short trips in Thunder Bay because it is easy, convenient, and safe.

This vision reflects the desire to "normalize" active transportation in Thunder Bay as a year-round activity that provides the health benefits to support the TMP's broader vision for a healthy community and other City policies and initiatives.

2.2 Key Themes

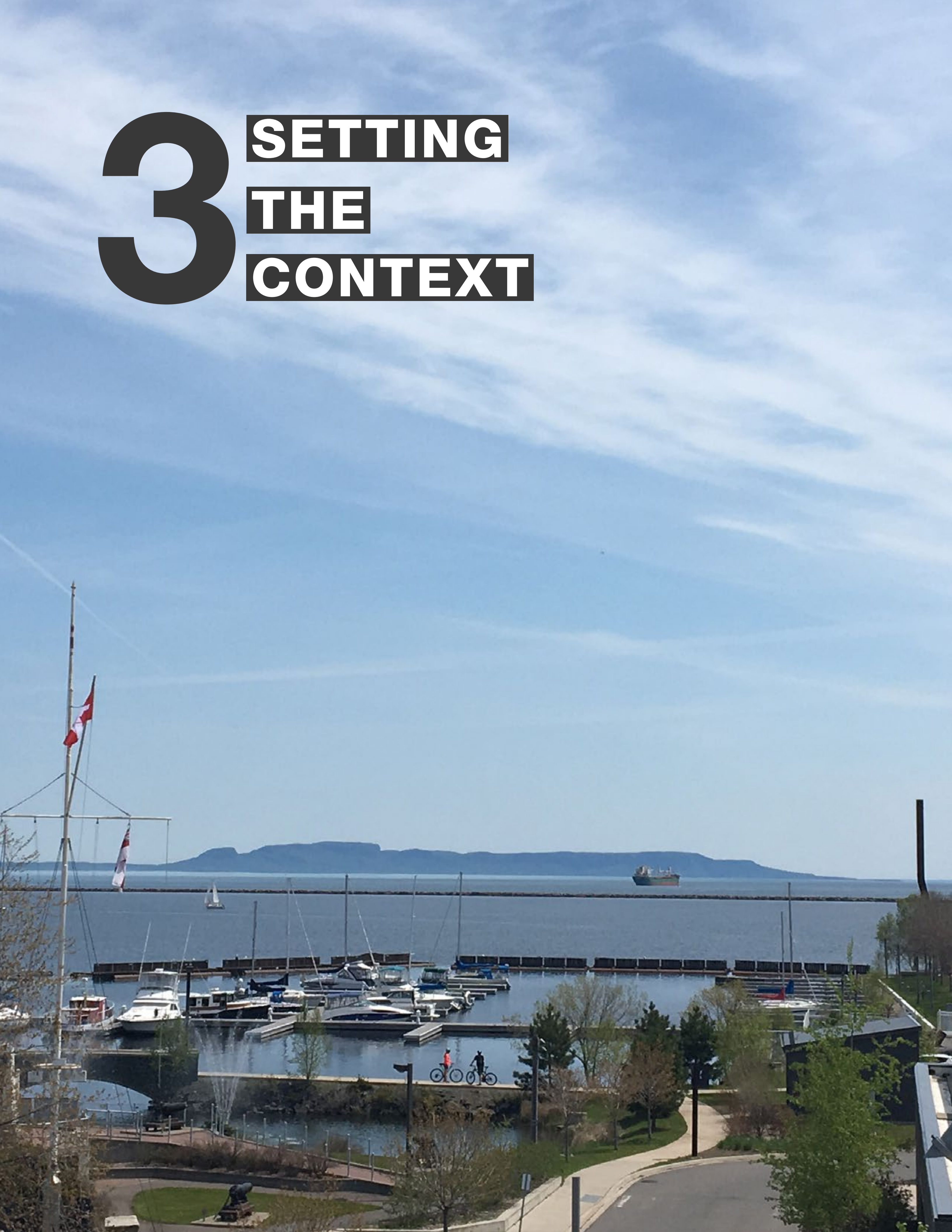
Six key themes in support of the active transportation vision were identified through public consultation and staff input. Each theme identifies targeted actions related to specific improvement areas. These themes also draw on and relate to elements of the overall TMP vision, as summarized in **Exhibit 2.1**.

These themes are not independent activity streams. Action must be made within each of these themes to see the true benefits of individual initiatives. This multi-pronged approach to active transportation is in keeping with the **five 'E's**: recognizing the overall value of an approach which incorporates solutions related to **Engineering, Education, Enforcement, Encouragement**, and **Evaluation and Planning**. For example, the development of new cycling facilities must be coupled with education and awareness programs to both inform and engage with the public regarding the new facilities. Similarly, in order to successfully engage parents and children to encourage them to walk to school year round, there must be appropriate sidewalk infrastructure that is well maintained. This AT Plan offers actions under all five E's within the context of the six themes.

Exhibit 2.1: Summary of AT Plan Themes and Related Elements of the Transportation Master Plan Vision

Active Transportation Plan Theme	Related to TMP Objective
Fostering Walkable Environments	Support a healthy, vibrant and prosperous community
Connecting and Growing the Cycling Network	
Engaging Children and Youth	
Supporting Year-Round Travel	Offer integrated, seamless mobility to individuals and families
Building Community Capacity and Support	
Tracking Progress	Be responsibly and accountably delivered

3 SETTING THE CONTEXT



3.1 Relationship to Transportation Master Plan

Active transportation issues presented within the TMP are generally summarized from the information within this Active Transportation Plan. The TMP outlines projects, programs, policies, and actions for the broader transportation network, while this document details the approach to active transportation.

Both documents can be read as individual plans, but were developed in tandem and are fully integrated.

3.2 Relevant Plans and Studies

The 2019 Active Transportation Plan is not a standalone document. Instead, it builds upon the support for active transportation reflected in many plans and projects in Thunder Bay to date, in addition to the TMP.

A sampling of the key relevant documents is shown in **Exhibit 3.1**. A compilation and summary of key documents is provided in Appendix A.

The City has repeatedly stressed the importance of sustainability, both fiscal and environmental, through its Official Plan and other strategic documents noted above. Enhancing mobility options such as walking and cycling is one way the City can provide sustainable and affordable options for travel in Thunder Bay. Due to the shortfall of funds available for infrastructure investment in Thunder Bay, the emphasis in both the TMP and the AT Plan is on prioritizing strategic improvements that have the most potential within a limited fiscal envelope.

Exhibit 3.1: Summary of Previous Plans/Studies with Implications for the Active Transportation Plan

Context for AT Plan		
Guiding City Documents		
Thunder Bay Official Plan (2018 Council Approved)	Transportation Master Plan (2019)	Becoming our Best 2015-2018 Corporate Strategic Plan
Previous Active and Sustainable Transportation Plans (City)		
Active Transportation Plan (2008)	Waterfront Trail Master Plan (2014)	Transportation Demand Management Plan (2014)
Other Relevant Documents		
Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2013-2018)	Age Friendly City Services Action Plan (2015)	Climate-Ready City: City of Thunder Bay Climate Adaptation (2015)
EarthCare Thunder Bay Sustainability Plan (2014-2020)	Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines; Image Route Guidelines and Detailed Streetscape Designs (2015)	Walkability and Pedestrian Safety in Thunder Bay (2017)

3.3 How Thunder Bay Moves: Walking and Cycling

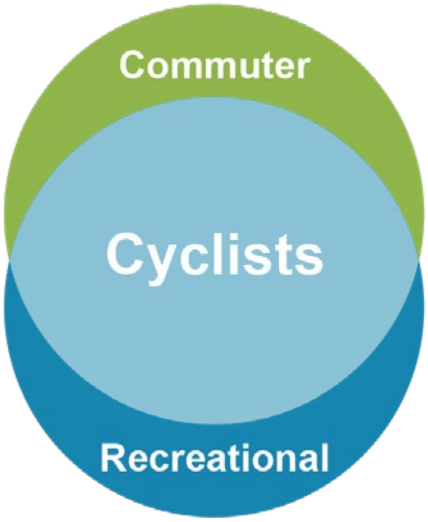
It is difficult to precisely estimate how prevalent walking, cycling and other active forms of travel are in Thunder Bay. The best available data, the 2016 Census, collects information on travel between home and work only. In that regard, there only a small proportion of Thunder Bay residents walking or cycling to work, just 4.6% and 1.3% percent respectively, as of 2016. However, travel to/from work represents only a portion of all travel in the Thunder Bay. Other travel that may be more suited to walking and cycling include trips to school, the corner store, or neighbourhood parks. Walking and cycling are popular recreational activities in Thunder Bay, particularly along the picturesque trails along the waterways and lakes. All of these non-work trips are not accounted for in the Census data. Without a robust and regular travel survey, walking and cycling trips are difficult to quantify.

Thunder Bay does not experience the same transportation challenges that many larger cities in Canada experience. Periods of traffic congestion are short and localized, not extensive enough to motivate people to walk or bike instead of driving.
Much of the desire to promote and encourage active transportation in Thunder Bay relates to health benefits for the community, improved liveability, improved mobility for residents without access to a vehicle, and the potential for reduced automobile dependency which can ultimately result in cost savings for the City through reduced needs for road capacity and infrastructure and offset fuel and vehicle maintenance costs for residents. Motivating people to walk and cycle for some trips will require safe infrastructure and comfortable environments, coupled with education, outreach, and other travel demand management (TDM) programs.

There is tremendous potential to shift some travel to more active modes. Nearly half (49%) of all work trips in Thunder Bay are reported to be less than 15 minutes (2016 Census). Though most of these trips are made by car, most 15 minute or shorter car trips can be made within a reasonably competitive travel time by bicycle, sometimes faster, depending on routing and traffic. The potential to convert a portion of these trips to active modes can be unlocked by making walking and cycling more appealing and more viable.

Perhaps even more telling, the travel demand model developed for the TMP estimates that approximately 17% of all trips during morning peak hour are less than 2 km and 48% are less than 5 km. Trips less than 2 km can be made by most people on foot in 25 or 30 minutes, while trips less than 5 km trips can be made by bicycle in 20 to 25 minutes, assuming a leisurely pace in both cases. These trips have high potential to be made by active transportation and are integral to the objectives of the AT Plan. The plans, projects, and programs in the AT Plan are aimed at making walking and cycling the best choice for these short trips.

3.4 Recreational and Commuter Cycling

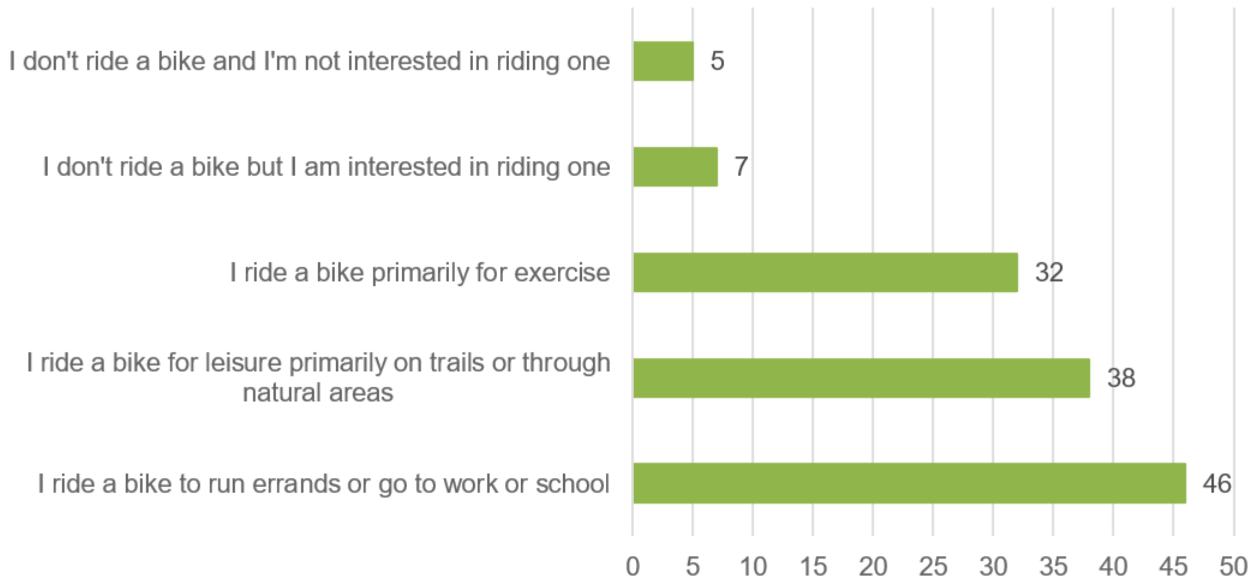


Historically, there has been debate about whether it is better to invest in facilities that benefit recreational cyclists or commuter cyclists. The discussion generally focuses on trade-offs between building off-road multi-use trails and cycling infrastructure on or along City roadways. In reality, however, recreational and commuter cyclists significantly overlap, and network improvements benefit all users.

For example, participants at the City's 2017 Bike Summit were asked to indicate reasons why they cycle as part of the TMP engagement activities. In total, 74 participants provided 128 responses indicating that most respondents selected multiple reasons to cycle. The results (refer to **Exhibit 3.2**) show that there is significant overlap between recreational uses such as riding a bike for exercise or leisure and commuter uses such as running errands or travelling to work or school by bike.

This overlap illustrates the importance of both the on-street network and the off-street network. To make the most efficient use of infrastructure investments, a balanced approach to network development is needed that emphasizes connectivity and convenience. This approach maximizes the value of the network for all cyclists, rather than a specific cyclist type, is reflected throughout this AT Plan and, in particular, Chapter 5.

Exhibit 3.2: Bike Summit Survey Responses – Types of Cycling



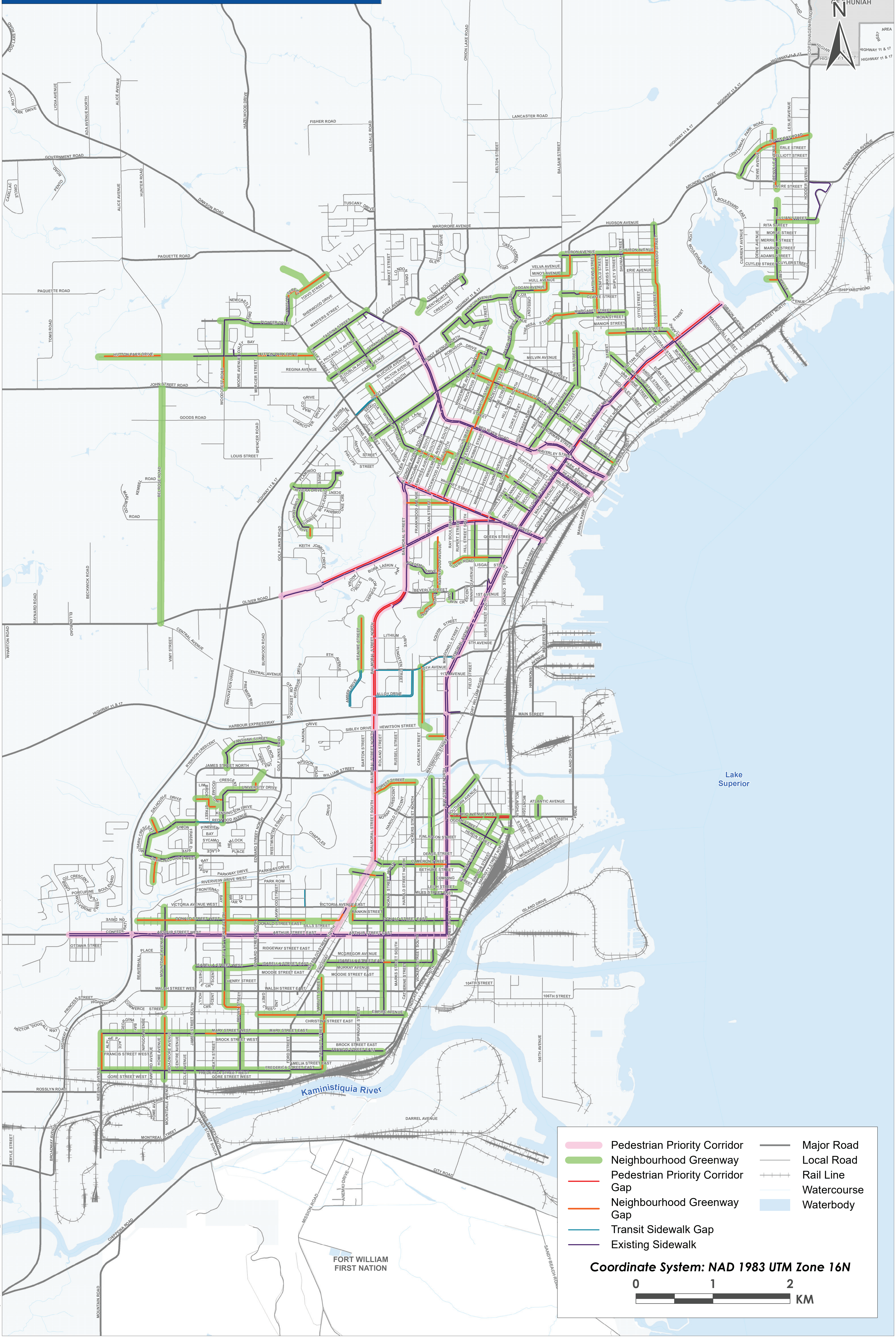
3.5 Public Input on Active Transportation

Through the TMP process, residents identified many ways to improve active transportation across Thunder Bay. The ideas and suggestions of residents and stakeholders who participated in the TMP's engagement activities helped to shape the final AT Plan. Engagement and consultation activities included:

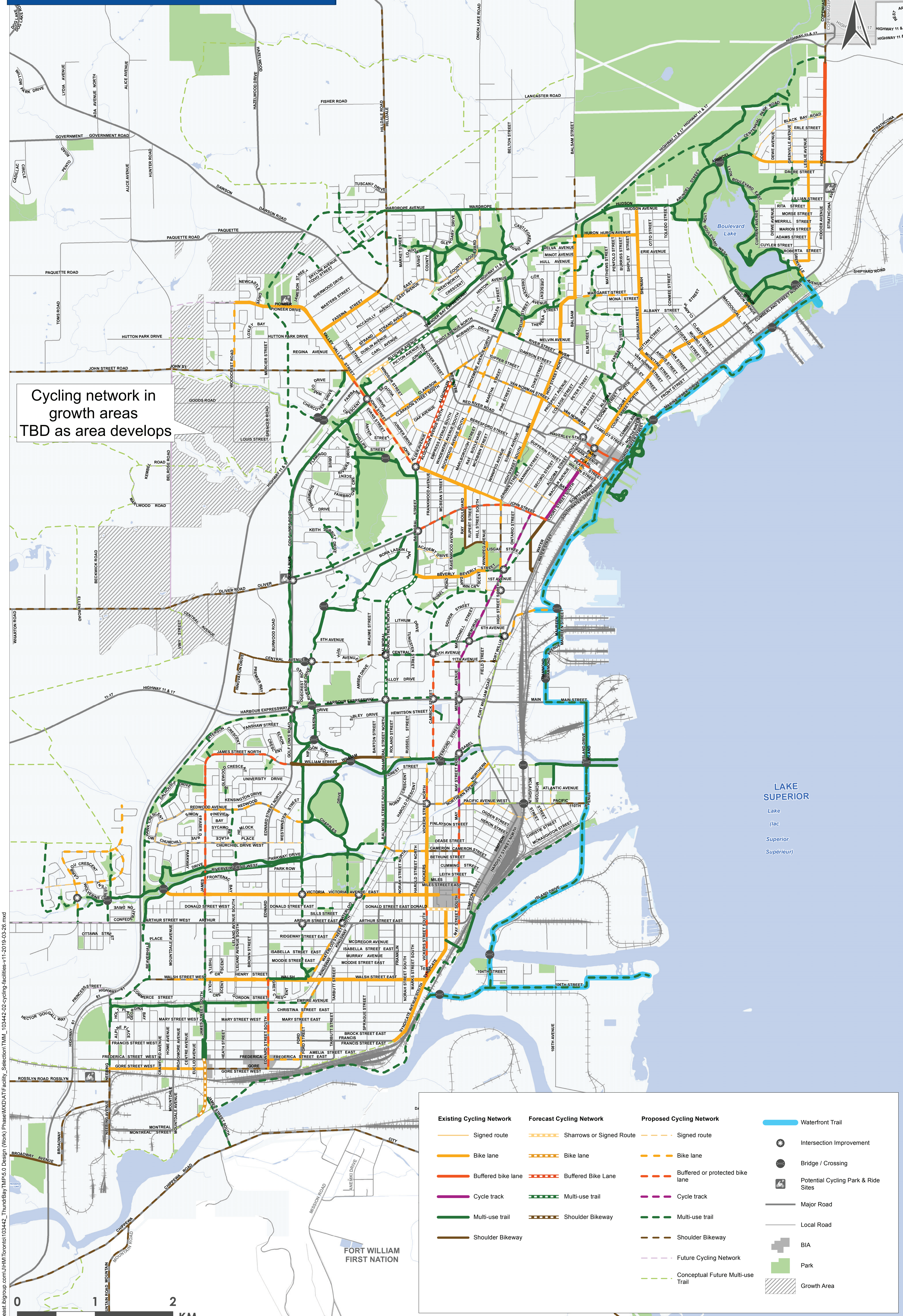
- Three public open houses over the course of the study
- Two online questionnaires
- Listening sessions with Indigenous communities
- Three stakeholder advisory committee meetings
- Information booths at two community events

A sampling of various feedback noted through the TMP consultation sessions, and the corresponding theme in the AT Plan is noted in **Exhibit 3.3**.

Map 2: Sidewalk Gap Program



Map 3: Ultimate Cycling Network



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Map 4: Priority Cycling and Trail Network