DECISION/DIRECTION NOTE

Title: Evaluation of Transportation Changes in Response to COVID-19

Date Prepared: July 29, 2020

Report To: Regular Meeting of Council

Councillor and Role: Councillor Sandy Hickman, Transportation & Regulatory Services

Ward: N/A

Decision/Direction Required:
Direction is required on how to proceed with the sidewalk expansion projects that have been made to date in response to COVID-19.

Discussion – Background and Current Status:
As of early July 2020, the City of St. John's had implemented expanded sidewalk spaces in three areas:

a. Elizabeth Avenue - Portugal Cove Road to Torbay Road:
   The curb lane on both sides of the street is reallocated to active space. Shown as a purple line in Figure 1.
b. Parade Street - Lemarchant Road to Merrymeeting Road:
   Street space on the eastern side of the street would be reallocated for active use. Shown as a red line on Figure 2. Due to local constraints this area was no able to serve the dual purpose of a cycling facility as well as an expanded sidewalk.
c. Newtown Road - Merrymeeting Road to Elizabeth Avenue:
   Street space on the eastern side of the street would be reallocated for active use. Shown as a purple line on Figure 2.

A project on Harbour Drive was originally approved but then removed with the implementation of the Water Street Pedestrian Mall.

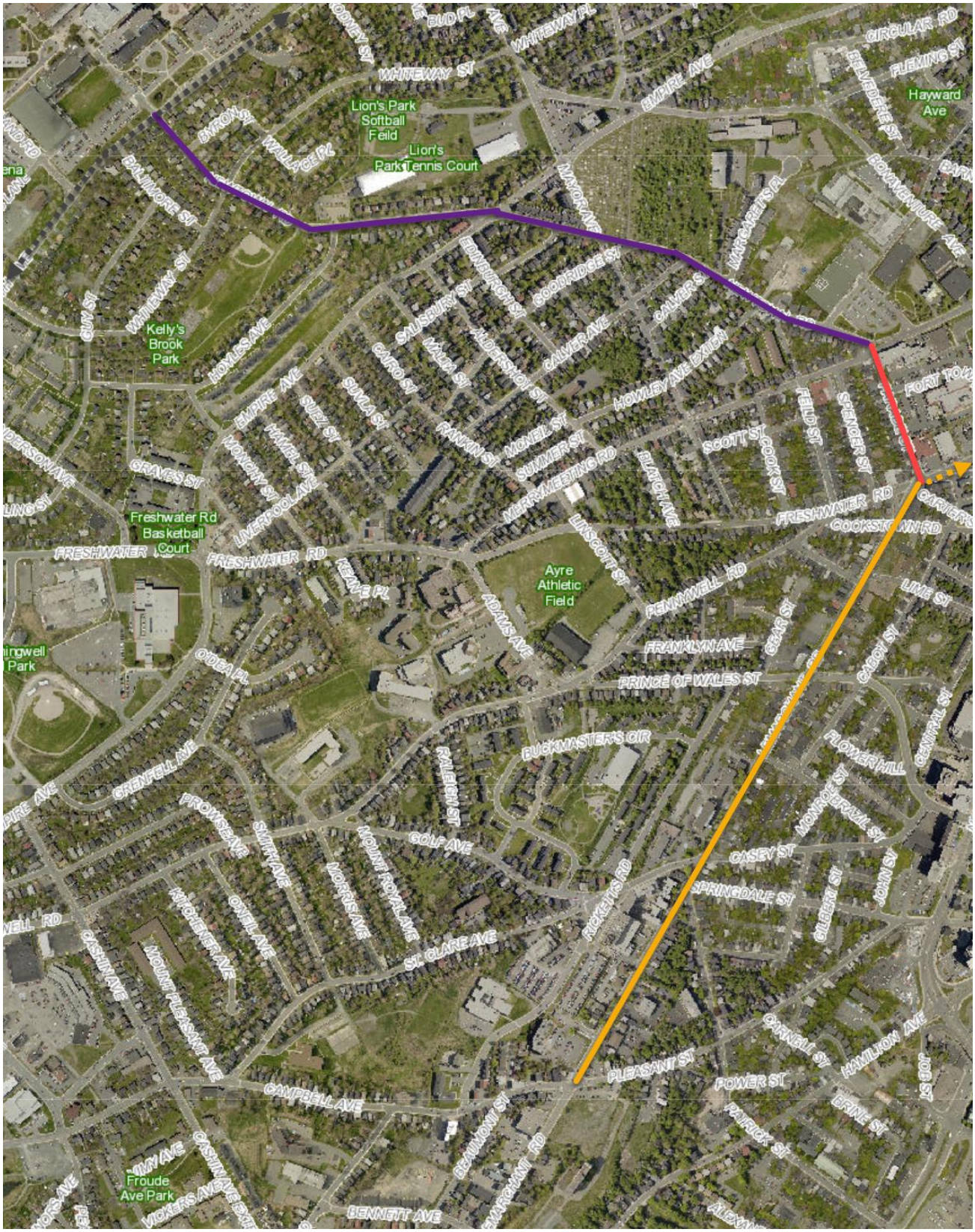
Since the implementation of these projects the outlook on COVID-19 has improved. The current alert level 2[1] allows for outdoor gatherings of up to 50 people (provided physical distancing is maintained), playgrounds are open, and it is widely reported that the risk of outdoor transmission is very low. These public health factors point to a lower need to provide widened sidewalks to accommodate active transportation.

Concerns have been raised about congestion on Elizabeth Avenue during the after period. Across the City it is estimated that we are at about 50% to 60% of normal vehicle traffic volumes. The situation may be a bit different on Elizabeth Avenue due to local conditions but three lanes remain available for vehicle travel.

[1] https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/alert-system/alert-level-2/

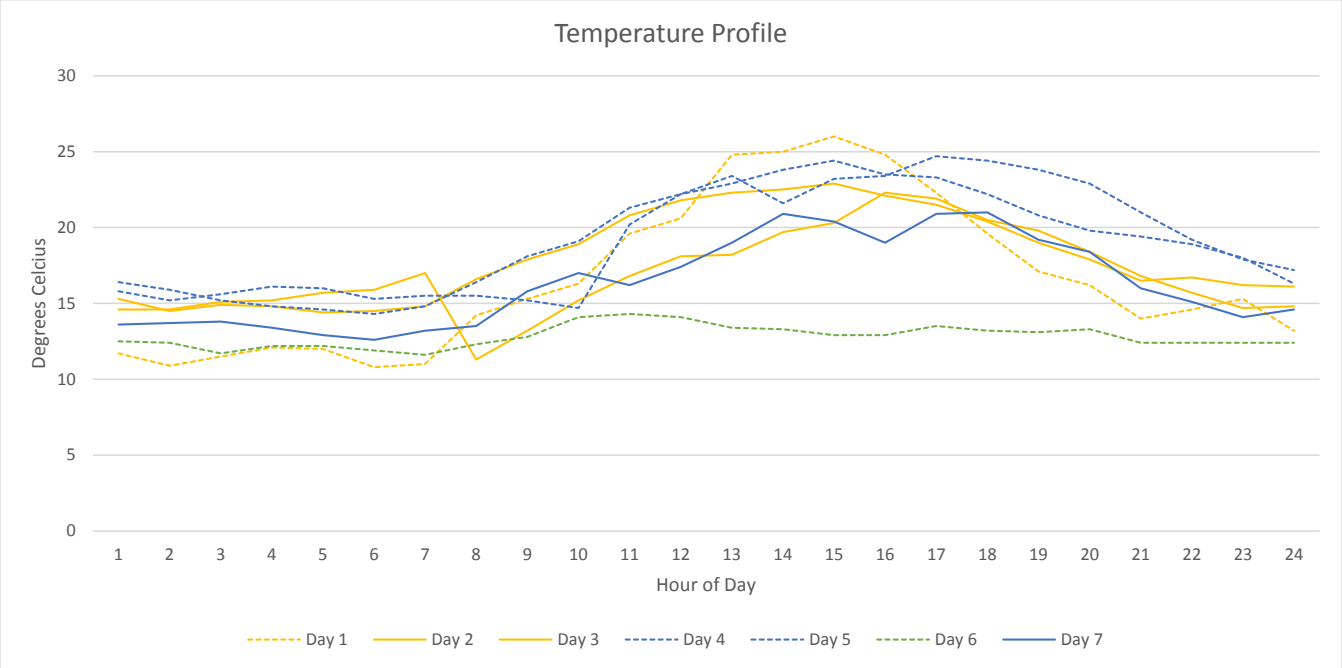
Figure 1: Project a (purple solid line)

Figure 2: Project b (red) and c (purple)



The weather plays a significant role in the number of people we expect to take advantage of active modes of transportation. As such an effort was made to collect data on days that are of comparable “quality” to minimize the chance of this effect impacting results. Shown in Figure 3, counts were conducted on 3 days before (yellow lines) and 3 days after (blue lines) implementation. One additional day in the after period experienced poorer weather (green line) and is not considered to be representative in this evaluation. Both weekdays (dashed lines) and weekends (solid lines) were sampled.

Figure 3: Weather on data collection days



Overall, usage by both pedestrians and cyclists has been stable between the before and after periods. This indicates that the additional space did not result in an increase in usage. The daily usage profiles are shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5.

The number of pedestrians using the sidewalk during a set period is an indicator of crowding which is a key issue to consider with regard to the City’s response to COVID-19. The busiest section included in this initiative was the east side of Parade Street. This area saw peaks of up to 30 people in a single hour (or an average of 12 people per hour from 11AM to 9PM). This volume of pedestrians is quite low from the perspective of possible interactions. Even at the peak of 30 people in an hour this only represents 1 person passing the survey site every 2 minutes. People walking in pairs or small groups means that this frequency would be even less.

There was a possible reduction in bicycle use on Elizabeth Avenue during the after period. The numbers of cyclists observed is not high enough to say with certainty but this does correspond with complaints received about the placement of delineators adjacent driveways and difficulty with compliance to right of way rules at these same points.

Figure 4: Pedestrian data at all sites

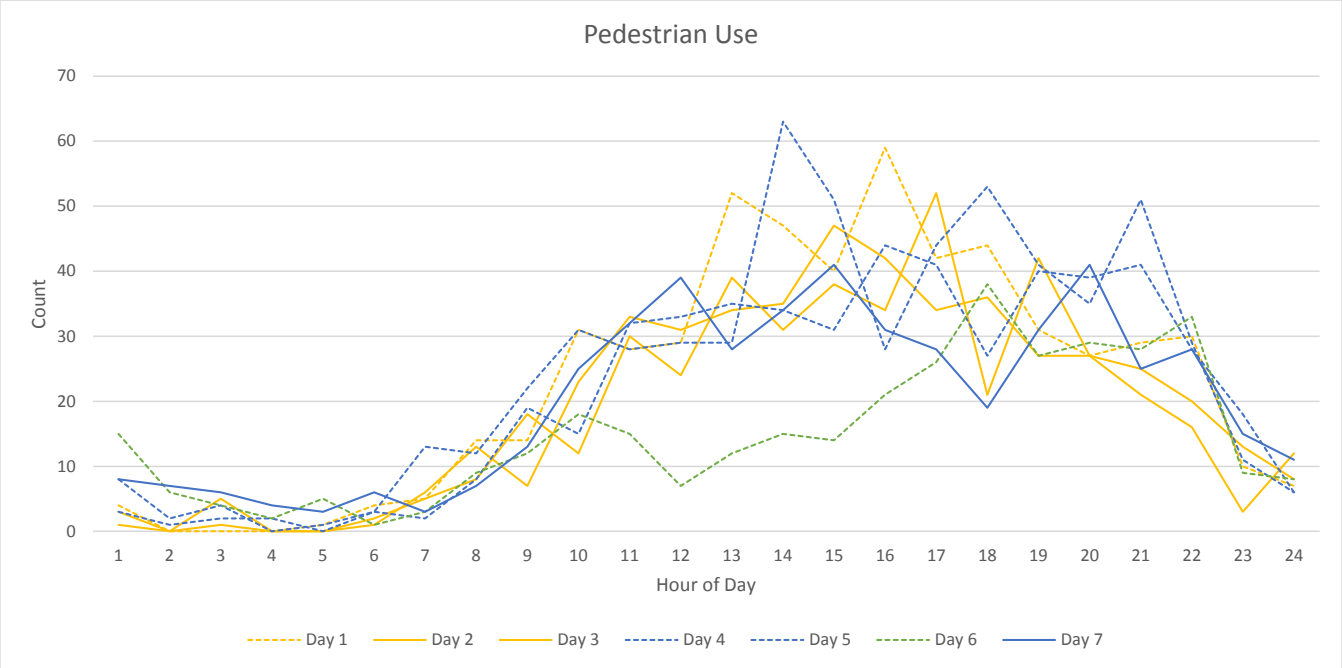
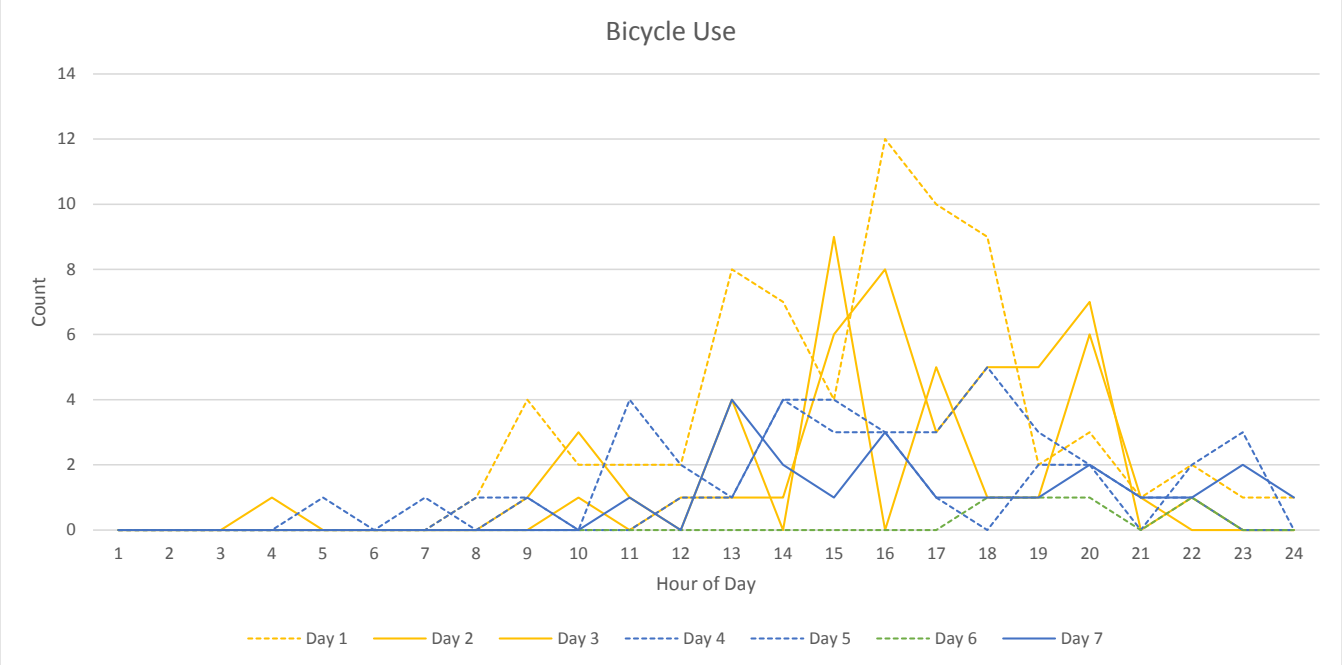


Figure 5: Bicycle data at all sites



Based on this evaluation, Council is asked to provide direction on whether to maintain, conclude, or modify the changes currently in place.

This project must be removed before the winter season at the delineators used can not stay in place when snow clearing operations start. Given this timeline the options available are:

1. Maintain the existing changes until a set date. This date should fall between August 10th and October 30th.
2. Conclude the existing changes at the earliest time practical.
3. Modify the existing changes with an ultimate end date of up to October 30th. The changes desired would need to be clearly outlined in order to be implemented. Additional equipment is likely to be needed if an expansion of the area covered is selected.

As we move into September there may be an increase in vehicle traffic as more people return to work and school. While the projects in place are not on direct routes to school, it is also possible that there will be a small increase in pedestrian volumes.

Ultimately the need for the expanded sidewalks is based on a public health determination and engineering staff are not qualified to provide an opinion on the contribution these changes make to a COVID-19 response. However, based on the usage data collected it appears as though the demand for this active space is low.

Key Considerations/Implications:

1. Budget/Financial Implications:
   Costs to date for this project are as follows.
   - Equipment purchased: $9,200 (delineators and signs)
   - Installation: $7,300

   In addition, there will be removal costs of an estimated: $6,100

   This sums to a project total of $22,600. This project has been funded through the capital allocation for sidewalk infill.

   Data collection costs of approximately $7,200 were covered under normal data collection budgets.

2. Partners or Other Stakeholders:
   n/a

3. Alignment with Strategic Directions/Adopted Plans:
   n/a

4. Legal or Policy Implications:

Several complaints about the impact on parking have been received in the Newtown Road area. Tickets issued may be subject to higher than normal rates of challenge.

5. Privacy Implications:
   n/a

6. Engagement and Communications Considerations:
   Changes made to the transportation network were communicated to the public through normal channels. Additional notices were delivered within the Newtown Road project to help notify people of the posted changes to on street parking.

7. Human Resource Implications:
   n/a

8. Procurement Implications:
   n/a

9. Information Technology Implications:
   n/a

10. Other Implications:
    n/a

Recommendation:

That Council

1. Direct staff to maintain, conclude, or modify the changes currently in place and implement the necessary changes based on this direction.
2. If the direction in (1) is not to conclude the project immediately, provide direction on when the removal should be scheduled (up to October 30th, 2020).

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Evaluation of Transportation Changes in Response to COVID-19.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Jul 30, 2020

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Scott Winsor - Jul 30, 2020 - 10:40 AM

Jason Sinyard - Jul 30, 2020 - 11:34 AM