

# Communications & Engagement Strategy

## 1.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The City of Merritt is developing an Active Transportation Plan that will make walking, cycling, and other active modes of transportation a more viable and attractive option for commuting, doing business and recreating. The final Plan will be action-oriented and include a list of priority projects that will provide a connected network of on-street cycling routes and trail facilities for recreation, commuting and tourism. It will also include policy and programing recommendations that will promote active transportation more generally.

For the Active Transportation Plan to be successful, it will require input and buy-in from the Merritt community. The project will deliver a series of meaningful and inclusive community engagement activities encourage participation in the development of the Active Transportation Plan and begin to shift how community members view active transportation, especially the stigma around cycling.

The project will be completed between May to November 2020 with consultation scheduled for June and September. The final deliverable will be a presentation of the final Plan to City Council in November 2020 and will include a summary of all stakeholder/resident input.

This document provides guidance for the project team and outlines a process for involving a diversity of community members and key stakeholders in the development of the Active Transportation Plan.

## 2.0 ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The overarching purpose of this strategy is to enable a two-way dialogue with Merritt residents about the Active Transportation Plan to ensure the final Plan reflects the needs, aspirations, and concerns of residents.

The general objectives of the consultation process are to:

- **Listen and acknowledge concerns** raised by community members.
- **Raise awareness and provide information** that is interesting, relevant, and easy to understand.

- **Reduce barriers to participation** by engaging where people are (when possible), using the tools they are using, and by connecting with those who represent and work with harder to reach demographics.
- **Involve all user types** (cyclists, non-cyclists, etc.) and age brackets city-wide in the process to develop policy and design the cycling network and facilities that will work for them.
- Lay the foundation for building a **culture of active transportation** in Merritt.
- **Keep city residents informed** and respond to questions and concerns.
- **Clearly demonstrate** the decision-making process, how stakeholder feedback was incorporated, and why decisions were made.
- **Manage expectations** about what the Plan can accomplish.

## USING COMMUNITY INPUT

Managing expectations and implementing a transparent process are critical pieces of any consultation process. Community members will want to know how, as well as to what extent, their input will be used in the decision-making process. Setting expectations early in the process and reinforcing those expectations at each stage of the engagement process is important when creating sincere and successful two-way conversations.

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) refers to five levels of public participation; inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. Engagement for the Active Transportation Plan will largely be at the inform and consult levels.

## 3.0 KEY AUDIENCES

All Merritt residents are considered important stakeholders. To reach a broad range of Merritt residents, a list of community and service groups have been identified for targeted engagement. Targeted engagement efforts will focus on addressing gaps in participation by those harder to reach, such as newcomers, young families, homeless and the business community. This approach is being included to help achieve balanced and broad participation in the development of the Active Transportation Plan.

<< List to be developed in collaboration with City >>

Sectors to consider:

- Community/service groups
- Recreation groups
- Environmental groups
- Local business
- Group representing persons with disabilities
- Schools
- Seniors groups
- Tourism and economic development

- Cycling groups
- City staff
- City Council

## 4.0 KEY MESSAGES

Key messages are high-level communication points from which all subsequent communication material is developed. They allow the project team to speak with one voice, presenting the “big picture” overview of the Active Transportation Plan. While they do not represent all the messages that will need to be communicated throughout the course of the project, they are the most important.

Once the main communication and engagement channels have been confirmed, secondary messages will be developed on how people can become informed and involved.

### **DRAFT KEY MESSAGES**

- The City of Merritt is creating an Active Transportation Plan to guide the development of safe, convenient, and user-friendly active transportation options for people of all ages and abilities.
- The Active Transportation Plan will identify specific measures that will allow the City of Merritt to make walking, cycling and other active modes of transportation a more viable and attractive option for commuting, doing business, and recreating.
- Promoting and providing more opportunities for active transportation can play an important role in enhancing our community’s health, environment, and economy, and ensures community members can safely move in and around Merritt.
- The City is keen to hear from a range of voices to create an Active Transportation Plan that is inclusive and forward-thinking. All opinions are welcome - let's work together to make our community more walkable, bikeable, sustainable, and dynamic.
- The project process will take place over the course of 2020, with a range of engagement activities and opportunities to provide feedback.
- Creating opportunities for Merritt residents to walk and cycle has been a priority for City Council for some time. However, the need for safe and accessible facilities has never been higher. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in more people walking, as well as buying new bikes, fixing up old ones and riding more than ever before. Now is the right time to start a conversation that will kick start a new way of thinking about how Merritt residents and future visitors travel around our community.

## 5.0 COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

### CONTENT STRATEGY

The key messages outlined above will be reinforced through marketing and communication material. While key messages are intended to promote audience recall and retention, they are not especially useful for answering specific questions about the Active Transportation Plan or providing detailed information about engagement - this will be the job of ongoing communication and marketing. Communication and marketing materials may include such things as:

- FAQs
- Newspaper ads
- Informational/educational materials
- Posters
- Social media
- Internal communication
- Website information
- Media Relations

The content and format of communication material will be determined by the purpose, medium and timing of the communication.

### ONLINE STRATEGY

#### *Active Transportation Plan Project Site*

A project website, hosted on the City's website, will be used to share information related to the Active Transportation Plan process and promote opportunities for engagement both online and in-person. The page will be the primary location for project-related updates and information. Content developed at the onset of the project will provide sufficient context and serve as a foundation for future content. Information housed on the website will reiterate the key messages and be updated during each phases of the project, as required. The City's [info@merritt.ca](mailto:info@merritt.ca) email will be included on the project website for residents and stakeholders to submit inquiries.

#### *Social Media*

The City's existing social media channels should be highly active leading up to and during both rounds of engagement. Social media will be used to share project updates, raise awareness for the Active Transportation Plan, and communicate opportunities for engagement. The use of social media could include both postings to City's official social media accounts as well as posting boosts. Sample content and imagery will be provided to the City use at their discretion.

#### *Mayor Brown's Weekly Video Update*

Leveraging an already captive audience, content will be developed for Mayor Brown's weekly video update on Fridays. We will use this platform to raise awareness for the Cycling Master Plan and promote opportunities to participate in the process.

## BRANDING

All public facing documents for the Active Transportation Plan will be designed using the City of Merritt's Graphic Standards Manual. This will include the use of the City's logo, fonts, and colors to ensure the project is recognizable, consistent and in line with the image approved by Council in November 2019.

## 6.0 ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Throughout the development of the Active Transportation Plan, input will be collected using a variety of methods and approaches to meet the needs of different audiences.

The table below outlines the engagement activities and communication tools that are being recommended to seek input and buy-in from the Merritt community. To encourage participation in the process, the City should consider offering a prize with one winner selected at the end of the process. Each time a community participates in an engagement opportunity, they would be entered into the prize draw.

Tool/activity	Timing	Description	Roles & Responsibilities
Engagement Round 1			
Communications & Engagement Strategy	May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Include engagement objectives, key messages, stakeholder list, and communication and engagement tools</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Kelsea Korki to work with Will George and Don McArthur</li></ul>
Project website and online presence	June 5 (launch) - with ongoing updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Develop content for project website that communicates key project messaging (website will be continuously updated as the Plan is developed)</li><li>– During the summer, quick polls and project updates will be posted to ensure the project remains visible and on the minds of community members between the formal engagement periods</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– USL to provide initial content 2 weeks before go-live</li><li>– City to develop project page, review content and upload</li></ul>

Stakeholder e-blast	June 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– E-blast announcing launch of the Active Transportation Plan and opportunities to provide input</li> <li>– Includes a call to action to help the City raise awareness within each organization’s membership</li> <li>– Seeks feedback on how best to reach different demographics and individual comfort levels in participating in virtual and/or in-person engagement events</li> <li>– Include contact info for project manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to craft content</li> <li>– City of distribute to stakeholders list</li> </ul>
Newspaper ad	June 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Newspaper ad in the Merritt Herald to promote community survey and raise awareness for the project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to design ad and content</li> <li>– City to work with local paper for publication using standing agreement</li> </ul>
Spot on Mayor Brown’s weekly video update	June 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Content to include in the Mayor’s weekly video update during the COVID-19 pandemic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to draft content</li> <li>– City to review and ensure content is included in video</li> </ul>
Poster	June 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 8.5 x 11 poster to raise awareness for the project and community survey</li> <li>– Posted in locations were people frequent (community boards, municipal facilities, grocery stores, transit stops)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to develop content and design poster</li> <li>– City to review and handle all distribution</li> </ul>
Social media blitz	June 17 (then ongoing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Frequent posts to the City’s social media channels promoting the Active Transportation Plan</li> <li>– Posts will include links to the project website/survey</li> <li>– A photo contest could also be held in between the formal engagement periods to continue the conversation around active transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to provide content and images</li> <li>– City to post to social channels</li> </ul>
Community survey	June 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Designed to collect input on issues, opportunities and priorities, and current travel habits</li> <li>– Results will be used to inform the existing conditions summary report and create the Plan’s vision statement and goals. The vision statement and associated goals guide the preliminary directions for the Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to design survey questions and upload to USL’s Survey Monkey account</li> <li>– City to review and provide final sign-off on survey</li> </ul>
Engagement Summary Report	July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Summarize feedback to date for integration into technical work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to prepare summary report with input from City as required</li> </ul>

		– Published on the project website	– City to review
Engagement Round 2			
Update website content	September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Update on where we are in the process, result of the first round of engagement and existing conditions report</li> <li>– Promote second round of engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to provide content</li> <li>– City to review content and upload to project page</li> </ul>
Social media blitz		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Frequent posts to the City's social media channels promoting the Plan and engagement opportunities</li> <li>– Posts will include links to the project website/community survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to provide content and images</li> <li>– City to post to social media channels</li> </ul>
Stakeholder e-blast and outreach		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Opportunity to reconnect with stakeholders</li> <li>– Includes an update on the process and what was heard during the first round of engagement as well as a call to action to help the City raise awareness within each organization's membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to craft content</li> <li>– City of distribute to stakeholders list</li> </ul>
Newspaper ad		– Newspaper ad in the Merritt Herald to promote community survey and raise awareness for the project and engagement opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to design ad and content</li> <li>– City of work with local paper for publication</li> </ul>
Poster		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 8.5 x 11 poster to raise awareness for the project and engagement opportunities</li> <li>– Posted in locations were people frequent (community boards, municipal facilities, grocery stores, transit stops, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to develop content and design poster</li> <li>– City to review and handle all distribution</li> </ul>
Community survey		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Designed to collect input on the proposed strategies and options develop in the previous phase</li> <li>– Results will be used to inform the draft plan</li> <li>– Survey will be available during the in-person event (described below)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to design survey questions and upload to USL's Survey Monkey account</li> </ul>

Public event		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Information panels will present the draft Active Transportation Plan, including the vision and goals</li> <li>– Will include interactive elements and have the online survey available in hardcopy and online formats</li> <li>– Feedback will be collected to inform the implementation plan and what projects, policies, and programs should be prioritized.</li> <li>– Format of event (in-person or virtual) will be confirmed closer to September when more is known about the physical distancing requirements during that time.</li> <li>– If in-person event is possible, the event will be designed as a fun, family-friendly community celebration that go beyond a traditional open house (e.g. bike repair event, BMX demonstration, bike tour or parade, etc.). Detailed event planning will be undertaken in August and will be in-line with social distancing recommendations outlined by the Province at that time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL and City to work together to confirm format and if possible, identify and book venues</li> <li>– USL to develop all material</li> <li>– City to review and approve material</li> </ul>
Engagement Summary Report	October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Summarize feedback from the final round of engagement and incorporated into final report</li> <li>– Published on the project website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USL to prepare summary report with input from City as required</li> <li>– City to review</li> </ul>

## ADDITIONAL MEETINGS

- Internal kick-off meeting (completed)
- Internal check-in meeting - September/October
- Council meetings - June 16, then subsequent presentations as required (facilitated by the City)
- Final Council meeting - November (facilitated by USL)



## 7.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

The following tools will be used to measure the success of engagement:

- **Survey(s):** Number of surveys completed and an evaluation of the diversity of respondents (based on demographic questions, such as age, gender, neighbourhood, among others)
- **Site counters and sign-in sheets:** Number of attendees at public events (in-person or virtual)
- **Online analytics:** Website hits and interactions on social media

### ADJUSTING APPROACH

As this is a living document, decisions around modifications to the current approach will be based on preliminary results and close collaboration with the City project team. An engagement team meeting is recommended following all public events or any significant project milestones. These meetings are intended to assess the efficacy of the current approach and determining if any modifications are required to the overall strategy.