

Winter Snow Removal on the Martin Goodman Trail

Date:	October 30, 2008
To:	Parks and Environment Committee
From:	Brenda Patterson, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

At its meeting of May 13, 2008, the Parks and Environment Committee requested the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report on the feasibility of removing snow from the Martin Goodman Trail during the winter season. This request originated from a communication by the Toronto Cycling Advisory Committee, which was referred to the Parks and Environment Committee. The Toronto Cycling Advisory Committee's communication requested that this matter be reviewed by the Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Transportation Services Divisions.

The issue of snow removal along the Martin Goodman Trail has been examined by Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff on more than one occasion. In 2004, at the request of several Councillors in the Toronto East York Community Council District, staff reviewed this matter, including undertaking an analysis of the additional costs required. At that time, it was determined that the additional operating cost of clearing snow along the trail in the winter months, were unaffordable, so the matter was not pursued.

In preparing this report, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff have consulted with Transportation Services staff who were also requested to report to the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee on snow clearing and improvements for bike lanes, laneways, laneway entrances and sidewalks. Both Divisions are reporting to the November Committee cycle, so the two standing Committees – Parks and Environment and Public Works & Infrastructure can consider this matter simultaneously.

Our two divisions are recommending that we work jointly on an effective and practical approach to provide winter maintenance along portions of the Martin Goodman Trail, where feasible, as a pilot project. We are also recommending that the General Manager of

Parks, Forestry and Recreation report back on the capital and operating cost implications of winter maintenance on the Martin Goodman Trail.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that:

1. Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division work with Transportation Services Division on a pilot project to determine the feasibility of providing winter maintenance on the Martin Goodman Trail; and
2. that the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation report back on the capital and operating cost implications of winter maintenance on the Martin Goodman Trail.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of May 13, 2008, the Parks and Environment Committee considered a communication from the Toronto Cycling Advisory Committee requesting that

“The General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to consult with the Chair of the Toronto Cycling Advisory Committee and the General Manager, Transportation Services, to review the feasibility of clearing snow along heavily-used bicycle trails within the park and open space system and report back to the Parks and Environment Committee on the results, including any recommendations to improve bicycle access on these trails during winter months.”

(April 22, 2008) Letter from Toronto Cycling Advisory Committee
<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/pe/bgrd/backgroundfile-12592.pdf>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The issue of winter snow removal along the Martin Goodman Trail has been examined in the past by Parks, Forestry and Recreation division. In 2004, staff were requested by several Councillors in the Toronto-East York Community Council District, to investigate this matter and advise them of its feasibility. At that time, it was determined that the additional annual operating cost of clearing snow along the trail in the winter months, together with the capital costs needed to upgrade the trail for winter use were unaffordable, so no further action was taken.

In responding to this request, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff have consulted with Transportation Services staff to discuss the issue of snow removal along the Martin Goodman Trail. Transportation Services Division will also be reporting to Public Works

& Infrastructure Committee at its November meeting on city-wide snow clearing improvements for bike lanes, laneways, laneway entrances and sidewalks. Transportation Services Division has the expertise, staff, equipment and resources to maintain existing bike lanes on City streets so Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff sought their advice in this matter.

COMMENTS

The Martin Goodman Trail is 20 kilometres long and was constructed as a paved path for seasonal use by pedestrians and cyclists. (See Attachment 1) It would be very challenging to clear snow along the full extent of the Martin Goodman Trail during the winter season for several reasons, as outlined below.

The Martin Goodman Trail was not designed or built to support heavy equipment such as tractors, trucks or snow ploughs. Staff would need to determine whether or not the trail could withstand wear from heavy equipment in order to provide winter snow clearing maintenance.

Currently, there are 51 sets of bollards along the trail which would need to be replaced. During the winter months these bollards are frozen into place. As a result, snow clearance along large portions of the trail using snow ploughs would not be possible due to the presence of these bollards. Additional costs would be incurred either to replace these bollards with new collapsible style ones.

There are extensive low lying areas along the Martin Goodman Trail which collect water. During the winter months these areas will freeze, creating a hazard. In order to keep the trail open for winter use, several portions would need to be lifted and sloped and a stormwater sewer system, including catch basins, would need to be installed to allow for drainage from the path and the surrounding areas.

Mechanical clearing utilizing sidewalk ploughs will create windrows on either side of the trail. As the trail traverses across uneven terrain, there are many locations where ponding will occur, as water will be unable to escape due to the windrows. The resulting ice patches created by freeze/thaw cycles will pose a hazard for pedestrians and bicyclists. Because of the potential liability that could result from public use of the trail during the winter, regular snow and ice clearance would have to be provided along the portions of the trail that are kept open.

Staff would also need to determine an appropriate ice melting product that could be used to provide safe cycling and walking conditions, since the majority of the Martin Goodman Trail runs through parks and natural areas and is situated adjacent to the lake. The environmental impact of an ice melting product would need to be considered as there will be run-off directly on to parkland and into Lake Ontario.

Staff would also need to investigate lighting levels along the trail, taking into consideration that its use during winter months is more treacherous. Although the City

parks abutting the trail have safety lighting installed in them, these lights don't follow the route of the trail. At night, much of the Martin Goodman Trail is poorly lit. Therefore, an audit would have to be done to investigate if more illumination would be needed along portions of the trail, during the winter.

In order to mitigate the risk of liability, appropriate signage would have to be installed indicating to both cyclists and pedestrians that they should use caution and would be at their own risk when using the trail during the winter season. In addition, if the trail becomes well used by cyclists and pedestrians, staff may need to consider winterizing nearby public washroom facilities, so they could be left open for public use.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation has worked collaboratively with Transportation Services on this issue. Transportation Services is exploring the feasibility of developing a pilot project to provide two temporary winter bicycle routes along the Martin Goodman Trail into the downtown core. From the east, this route would encompass approximately 5.6 kilometres along the trail on the north side of Lakeshore Boulevard, from Northern Dancer Boulevard west to Lower Sherbourne Street. From the west, this route would encompass approximately 5.4 kilometres of the trail, extending from The Queensway east to Bathurst Street, via King Street. Each of these two routes would receive winter maintenance services, as required, on a priority basis. Transportation Services and Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will determine the most suitable approach for the ploughing and/or removal of snow along these routes and the most appropriate equipment to be used.

Accordingly, we are recommending that Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division work with Transportation Services Division on a pilot project to determine the feasibility of providing winter maintenance along the Martin Goodman Trail, in order to provide winter access. We are also recommending that the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation report back on the capital and operating cost implications of winter maintenance on the Martin Goodman Trail.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Brenda Patterson
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Map of Martin Goodman Trail

