1.0 INTRODUCTION

The City of Toronto, in partnership with TRCA, has undertaken an MCEA for the Mid Humber Gap Multi-use Trail Project (Mid Humber Gap) – a multi-use trail connection to close an 800 metre (m) gap in the Humber River Trail (HRT).

1.1 Project Purpose

In 2012, City Council adopted the Bikeway Trails Implementation Plan, which identified and prioritized new bikeway trail connections to expand and enhance Toronto's bikeway network. As one of 26 projects identified within the Plan, the Mid Humber Gap constitutes a significant barrier to a continuous trail system from Toronto's northwest boundary to Lake Ontario and is also a discontinuity in the future Loop Trail. The Loop Trail will be a continuous 65 km off-road, multi-use ring trail that will connect multiple ravines, neighbourhoods and trail systems throughout Toronto.

Originally comprising a gap of approximately 1.4 km near Weston Road and Lawrence Avenue, the Mid Humber Gap has undergone a multi-stage approach to close the gap and provide a continuous multi-use trail connection along the HRT.

Building off the significant work completed to date, the primary objective of the Mid Humber Gap MCEA will be to identify a preferred multi-use trail alignment for the remaining 800 m gap in the HRT just south of Mallaby Park west of St. Phillips Road and the southern entrance to Crawford-Jones Memorial Park off Cardell Avenue.

1.2 Project Background

Since 2013, the City and TRCA have advanced a multi-staged approach to close the original 1.4 km gap in the Humber Trail.

Phase 1 was completed in 2013, which included the implementation of a 600 m trail connecting Mallaby Park to the HRT system and converting a pre-existing informal foot trail into a 3.5-meter-wide paved multi-use pathway.

In 2019, the City and TRCA completed Phase 2 of the Mid Humber Gap project. During Phase 2, a feasibility study was undertaken to evaluate conceptual trail alignment options to close the remaining gap in the HRT between Mallaby Park and Crawford-Jones Memorial Park. The feasibility study mirrored the formal MCEA process and evaluated a range of conceptual trail alignments, culminating in a recommended "in-ravine" and "on-road" option. The preliminary findings of the feasibility study provided a

strong rationale for undertaking a more rigorous planning framework via the MCEA Schedule B process.

Significant planning and design constraints were identified in Phase 2, including complex terrain within a sensitive ravine setting and private land considerations. Trail alignment concepts routed through the ravine were identified as likely requiring a combination of bridges, boardwalk structures, and the securement of property, with rough order of magnitude cost estimates ranging between $1.6 and $3.5 million (+/- 40%) for implementation.

For more details on the completed feasibility study, please refer to the Mid Humber Gap (Phase 2) Feasibility Study in Appendix A.

Due to a combination of planning, design considerations, and projected costs for construction, Phase 3 of the Mid Humber Gap is subject to MCEA Schedule B requirements.

1.3 Study Area

The project study area is bounded to the east by St. Phillips Road and Weston Road and to the west by the Weston Golf and Country Club (WGCC). Approximately 1 km of the Humber River is encompassed within the project area, which sits within the Lower Humber subwatershed of the primary Humber River watershed.

The Mid Humber Gap project area is between two completed sections of the HRT just south of Mallaby Park and west of St. Phillips Road and the southern entrance to Crawford-Jones Memorial Park off Cardell Avenue (Figure 1-1).

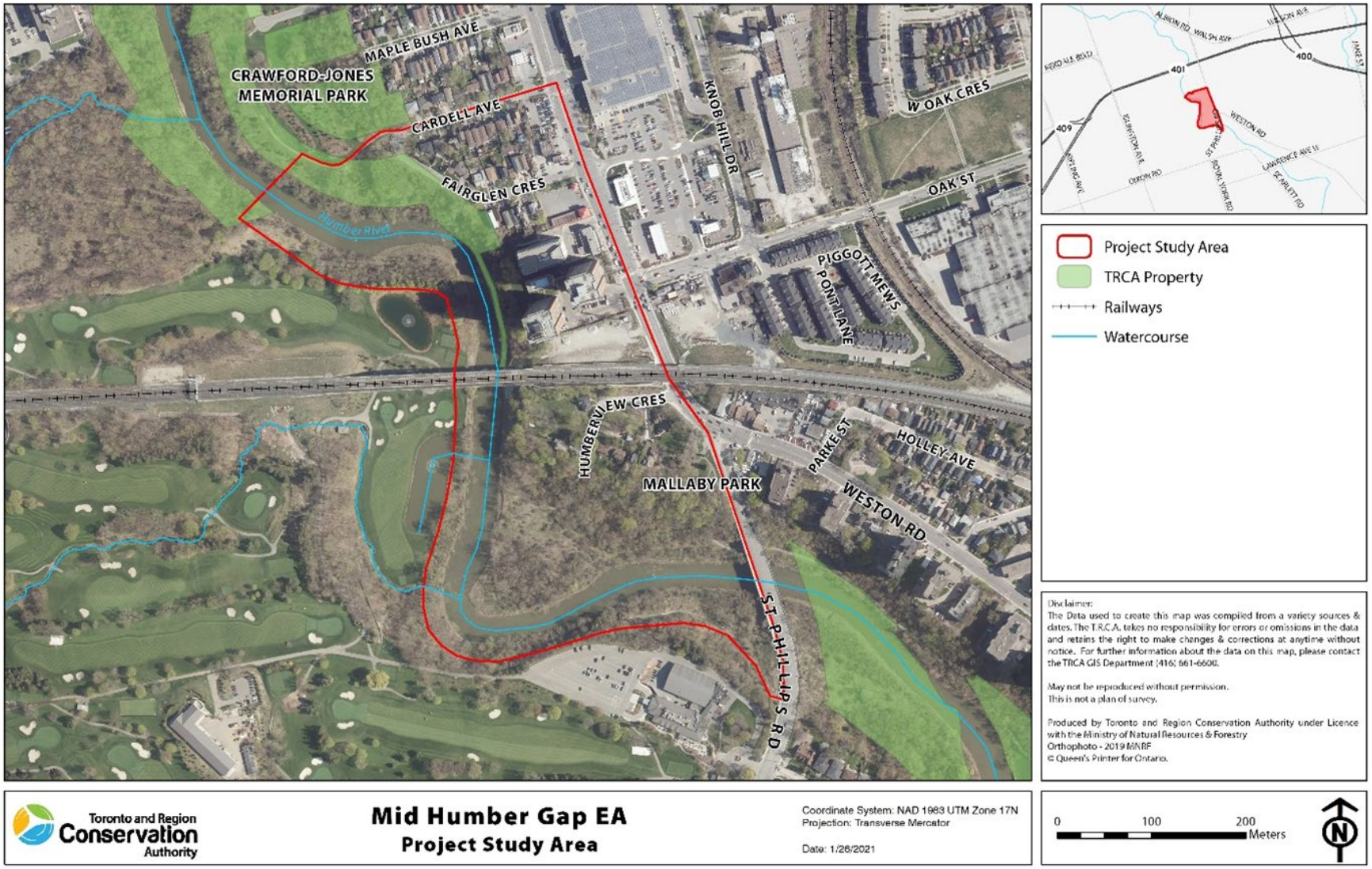

Figure 1-1: The Mid Humber Gap project area.

1.4 Key Planning Initiatives

City of Toronto

The City's Official Plan was developed to ensure the city evolves, improves, and realizes its full potential to the year 2031 in transit, land use development, and the environment. The Plan identifies where growth should go, and what is needed to support healthy, complete communities that includes discussions on equity, sustainability and more.

The Plan outlines the need for adding and improving public open space linkages and the exiting pedestrian connections between the Weston Community and the Humber Valley (City of Toronto, 2021).

While the Official Plan is a comprehensive document covering a wide range of city-building principles, some of the key policies and objectives that the Mid Humber Gap will achieve are outlined in Table 1-1 below.

Table 1-1: Key planning initiatives

Principle	Policy / Objectives
Building a More Liveable Urban Region	• Reduces auto dependency and improves air quality • Protects, enhances, and restores the region's system of greenspaces and natural heritage
Integrating Land Use and Transportation	• Encourages walking and cycling for local trips • Facilitates social interaction, public safety, and cultural and economic activity • Improves air quality, energy efficiency, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions
Centres: Vital Mixed-Use Communities	• Creates strong pedestrian and cycling linkages to transit stations • Establishes a high-quality public realm featuring public squares, parks, and public art • Connects Centres with the surrounding city fabric through parks, trails, and bikeways
Employment Districts: Supporting Business and Employment Growth	• Creates comfortable streets, parks, and open spaces for workers • Encourages walking and cycling by creating safer and more attractive conditions • Creates safe and comfortable pedestrian conditions between places of work and transit stops
Enhancing Neighbourhoods and Greenspaces	• Improves and expand existing parks and recreation facilities

Principle	Policy / Objectives
Toronto's Green Space System and Waterfront	• Improves public access and enjoyment of lands under public ownership • Restores, creates, and protects a variety of landscapes • Expands the Green Space System by linking parks and open spaces
A Progressive Agenda of Transportation Change	• Encourages active forms of transportation by integrating and considering pedestrian and cycling infrastructure • Implements measures to reduce auto dependency and rush-hour congestion by actively pursuing measures that increase the proportion of trips made by walking, cycling, and transit • Encourages people of all ages to cycle for everyday transportation and enjoyment via expanding the bikeway network • Creates an urban environment that encourages and supports pedestrian movement through the city for people of all ages and abilities

Cycling Network Plan

The Cycling Network Plan (CNP) serves as a comprehensive roadmap and work plan, outlining planned investments in the near-term and intentions for the long-term. The CNP is grounded in many city policies and strategies including Vision Zero Road Safety Plan, Transform TO Climate Action Strategy, and the Road to Health. In 2019 and 2021, the CNP was updated to continue to build on the work of the Ten Year Plan, with a revised approach to short-term programming and long term planning in an enhanced prioritization framework. The CNP has three main components: the Long-Term Cycling Network Vision, Major City Wide Cycling Routes, in which the Humber Trail is a recognized route and a three year rolling Near-Term Implementation Plan, in which planning work to fill the Mid Humber Gap was identified (City of Toronto, 2016, 2019, 2021).

Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy

A strong neighbourhood includes services, programs, public space and amenities that are relevant and accessible to residents. When Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIA) were identified for Toronto's Strong Neighbourhood Strategy (TSNS), the City considered five different domains of neighbourhood well-being:

1. Physical Surroundings
2. Economic Opportunities
3. Healthy Lives
4. Social Development
5. Participation in Civic Decision-Making

Out of 140 neighbourhoods, City Council designated 31 NIAs as they had scores that put them “below the benchmark” of a strong neighbourhood. This number included the Weston neighbourhood (#113) shown in Figure 1-2 below (Toronto, 2020).

Parkland Strategy

Parks provide essential elements of health and well-being by connecting people to nature, building community, and opportunities for improving physical health. It is anticipated that Toronto’s population will grow to 3.4 million by 2041, adding more residents to existing neighbourhoods primarily in residential high-rise buildings. The provision of parks is critical to the livability of communities and to support Toronto’s growing workforce. Parks should address inequities across the city to ensure access to high quality parks and natural areas for all Torontonians.

The Parks, Forestry and Recreation division, in partnership with the City Planning Division developed the Parkland Strategy to provide the City with a long-term vision and framework for the enhancement of Toronto’s parks systems. This will occur through the creation of new parks and the expansion/provision of improved access to existing parks. This report was developed to address the planning, acquisition, and development of parks to ensure that Toronto’s parks system will grow to support the needs of people and ensure a livable city (Toronto, 2019).

The Parkland Strategy Identifies four strategic actions: expand, improve, connect and include. Addressing the problem and opportunity statement for the Mid Humber Gap will further the goals of the Parkland Strategy by expanding and improving parkland in the Humber River valley to connect parks and open spaces and include more people by removing barriers to the parks system.

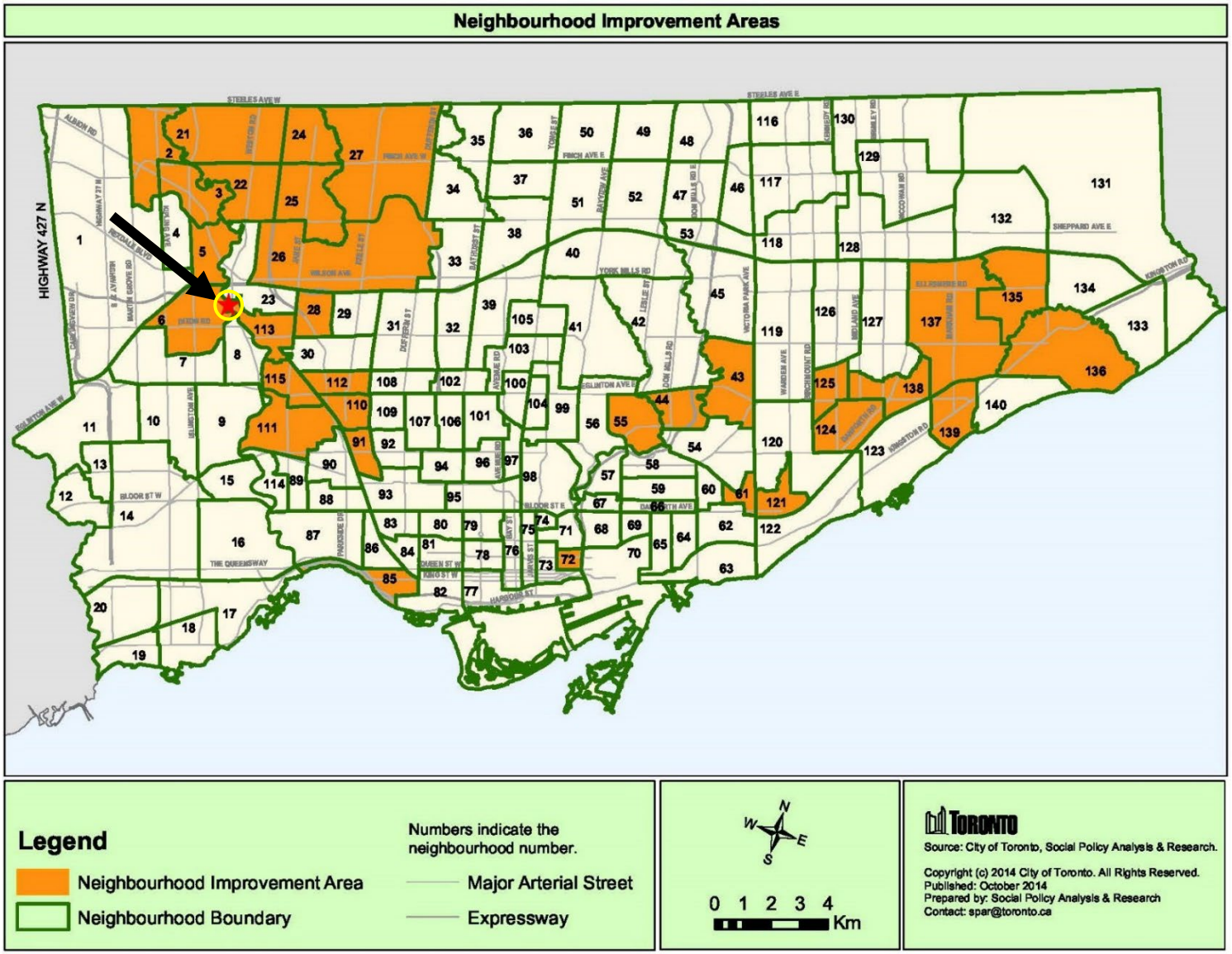

Figure 1-2: Neighbourhood Improvement Areas as outlined in the TSNS (general project area denoted by red star). Source: City of Toronto, 2020.

Ravine Strategy

Ravines are fragile resources that provide many essential ecological services and recreational opportunities for Toronto. With urbanization and population growth expected to increase significantly in the coming years, combined with increased pressures caused by climate change, the Toronto Ravine Strategy will guide future ravine management, use, enhancement, and protection.

Developed through a partnership between Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City Planning, and Toronto Water, the Ravine Strategy is built from five main principles: protect, invest, connect, partner, and celebrate Toronto's ravines as a signature feature and vital city asset (City of Toronto, 2019).

One of the initial projects identified as part of the ravine campaign includes The Loop Trail, an 65 km off-road, multi-use ring that will knit together five Ravine Priority Investment Areas, 22 Neighbourhood Investment Areas, the Humber River and Don River ravine systems, the waterfront and neighbourhoods along the Finch corridor. Closing the Mid Humber Gap is a key priority in ensuring a safe and continuous Loop Trail system.

Trails Strategy

TRCA Trail Strategy is a call to action to renew collective efforts to complete, expand, and manage the Greater Toronto Region Trail Network with the next generation of trails. The TRCA Trail Strategy serves as a framework to guide the planning, development, and management of regional trails in the current landscape of urban intensification, setting a vision for a complete regional trail network in greenspace that connects growing communities to nature and each other, supporting active living and enhancing TRCAs conservation legacy.

As shown in the concept map below (Figure 1-3) the project area for the Mid Humber Gap has been identified as a key missing link in the existing and future trail network (TRCA, 2019).

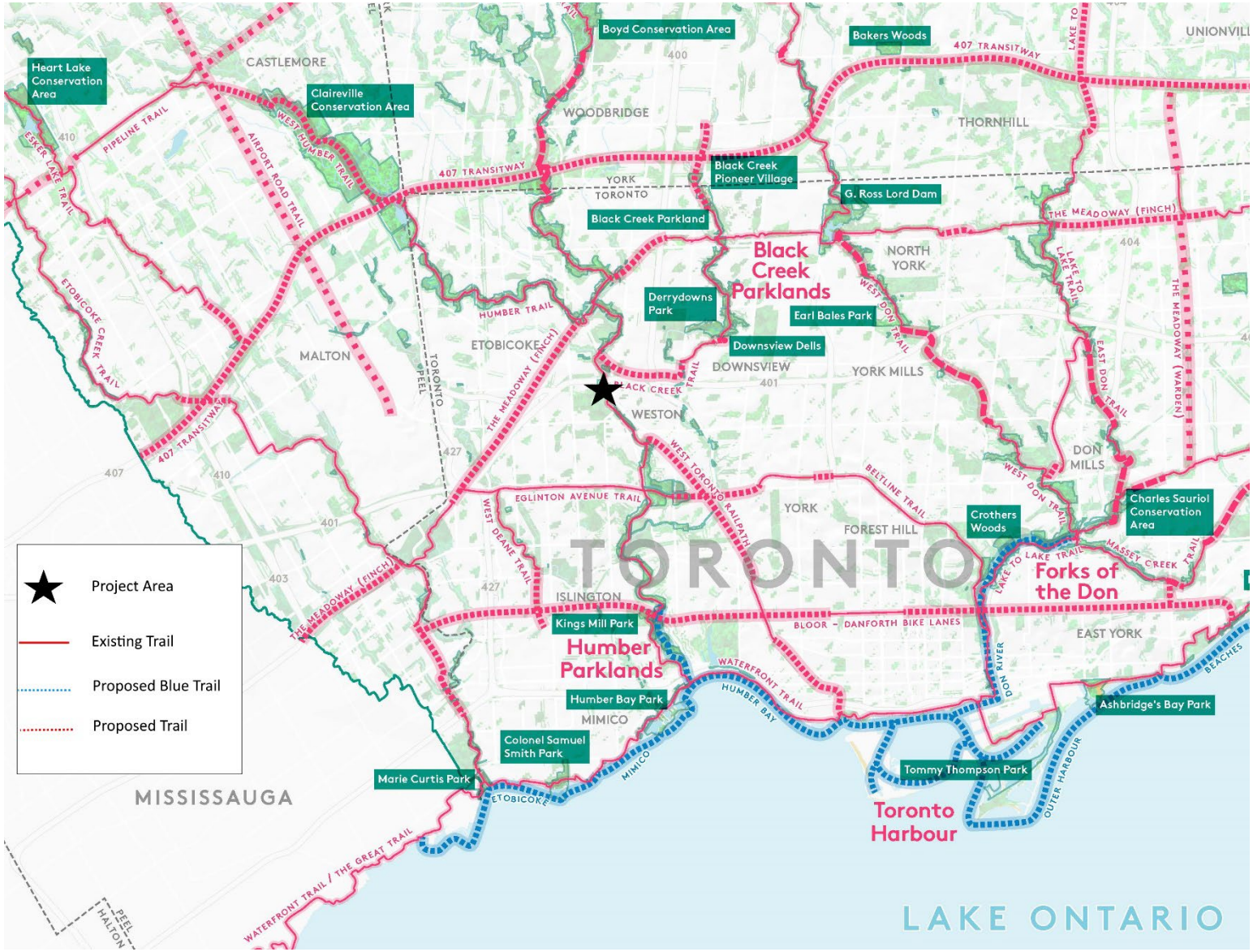

Figure 1-3: Concept map illustrating the proposed Greater Toronto Region Trail Network (general project area denoted by star). Source: TRCA Trail Strategy, 2019.

The Bikeway Trails Implementation Plan

In 2011, Toronto City Council directed Transportation Services to identify specific links and installation priorities of a multi-year Bikeway Trails Implementation Plan. The detailed feasibility assessment was guided by meaningful public and stakeholder consultation, and recommendations were developed on 77 km of new bikeway trails built on the existing 286 km network.

The plan included improving trail safety and connectivity through annual upgrades, developing new trail design guidelines, and a wayfinding program. Several existing multi-use trails were also evaluated through the feasibility assessment to identify gaps and links that need to be upgraded, including a multi-phased approach for closing the Mid Humber Gap (City of Toronto, 2012).