



DELEGATION TO COUNCIL REPRESENTING THE GUELPH HIKING TRAIL CLUB

DATE: JUNE 27TH 2022

AGENDA ITEM: GJR 2021 ANNUAL SHAREHOLDERS MEETING

Introduction

Mr. Mayor, Councilors, City and GJR staff,

My name is John Fisher and I am the President of the Guelph Hiking Trail Club. The club has over 450 members and 2500 Facebook followers. We are an active partner of the Guelph Trail Users Coalition and contribute regularly to city plans and policies affecting parks, trails, active transportation and their impact on the economic and general health of the city and its citizens.

The Staff report concerning the GJR concludes that this wholly owned subsidiary creates financial value to the city through equity gains and dividend returns and I want to congratulate GJR for its commercial success in working with Guelph's Business community.

Last year I delegated at the GJR 2020 annual report to shareholders. I criticized the corporation's conflicting and opaque governance structure and the annual report, which was very light on activities relating to the public good. There was some discussion at that meeting which indicated council support for a greater "public good" role in the GJR's strategy and activities. Absent that larger role and the GJR is simply another commercial enterprise whose place might be better situated in the free market outside of municipal responsibility, mandate and shared service agreements.

I had hoped this year's report might reflect GJR taking a more active role in the public realm, but I was disappointed.

It's true that the annual report draws attention to GJR's relationship to the Strategic Plan. There is an aspirational paragraph under Navigating our Future which certainly reflects the vision most trail user's support, but the language gives little confidence that these aspirations are a priority, or will become a reality any time soon.

Navigating Our Future

Within the city itself, the GJR aids in the construction and connection of trail networks that

follow the railway and provide a safe, easy way to get around or through Guelph.

The 2021 GJR Annual Report talks of making small gradual steps, or working with Parks to aid connections through discussions, but there is a total lack of declarative intent, or action taken or planned.

Argument

The GJR occupies a significant Right-of-way (ROW) footprint and valuable real estate corridor traversing the city from the Southeast to the Northwest through the economic downtown hub. City departments with limited capacity seem reluctant to press GJR to make improvements to the corridor that benefit people who want to travel by foot or bike. Under GJR's current mandate those kinds of requests for improvements to the rail corridor will always be secondary to profitability and dependent on GJR's own plans for track improvements and the timing of commercial customers requirements. Actions taken by GJR, in the public good are subordinated to direct fiscal opportunity and external commercial catalysts and often not even considered.

I can think of 4 recent projects that could have been enhanced and would have had a direct and beneficial impact on City Master Plans and Strategic Plan, if GJR had been required to engage in a public discourse prior to their implementation, but GJR has no "Have Your Say" protocol.

- 1) The additional spur line by PDI (Kaufman siding), which could have provided direct trail access from York Rd for people travelling by foot or bike into the GID and Reformatory property over the unfinished GJR trestle bridge. (Eramosa Bridge Project)
- 2) The additional spur line between Carter Rd and Arkell Rd., which could have considered a recreational trailway as part of the project.
- 3) The proposed rebuild schedule for the railway bridge sandwiched between the Ward to Downtown pedestrian bridge and the Macdonnel Bridge rebuild.
- 4) The G2G missing link between downtown and Silvercreek.

In 1998 Guelph led the global RAILS WITH TRAILS movement and installed a multipurpose trail within the ROW of an active railway from Macdonnel to Eramosa Rd. That was followed in 2011 with the installation of the Trans Canada Trail from Eramosa to Speedvale. This continuous multipurpose trail has brought huge benefits to the citizens of Guelph. 10 years later and not a single metre of trail has been added to the ROW corridor.

Meanwhile national and international experience of the economic success derived from Trails ON Abandoned Railbeds has encouraged governmental authorities to press for the development of active "Rails WITH trails" ROW corridors. Best practices and examples abound. Short Line railways are most receptive and adaptable to this kind of development. Guelph has a particular advantage to further develop the strategy as it owns the railway!

Proposal

I am delegating to Council, the sole shareholder of the GJR Corporation, to direct GJR to play a more proactive role to deliver results that directly impact the public good:

that role can be summarized as a comprehensive "RAILS WITH TRAILS strategy to develop a 15 km improvement opportunity corridor of separated trail for people who want to walk, or bike for employment, recreation, or commerce. It would run from Arkell RD to the bump stop at Silvercreek Parkway".

The strategy would be given equal importance to economic profitability and require GJR to make use of its income tax exemption and preferential property tax valuations to make capital expenditures and plough back the annual city dividend into the corridor for the benefit of people travelling by foot or bike. It would be GJR's responsibility, (NOT other city departments) to be the prime mover and developer of the GJR ROW.

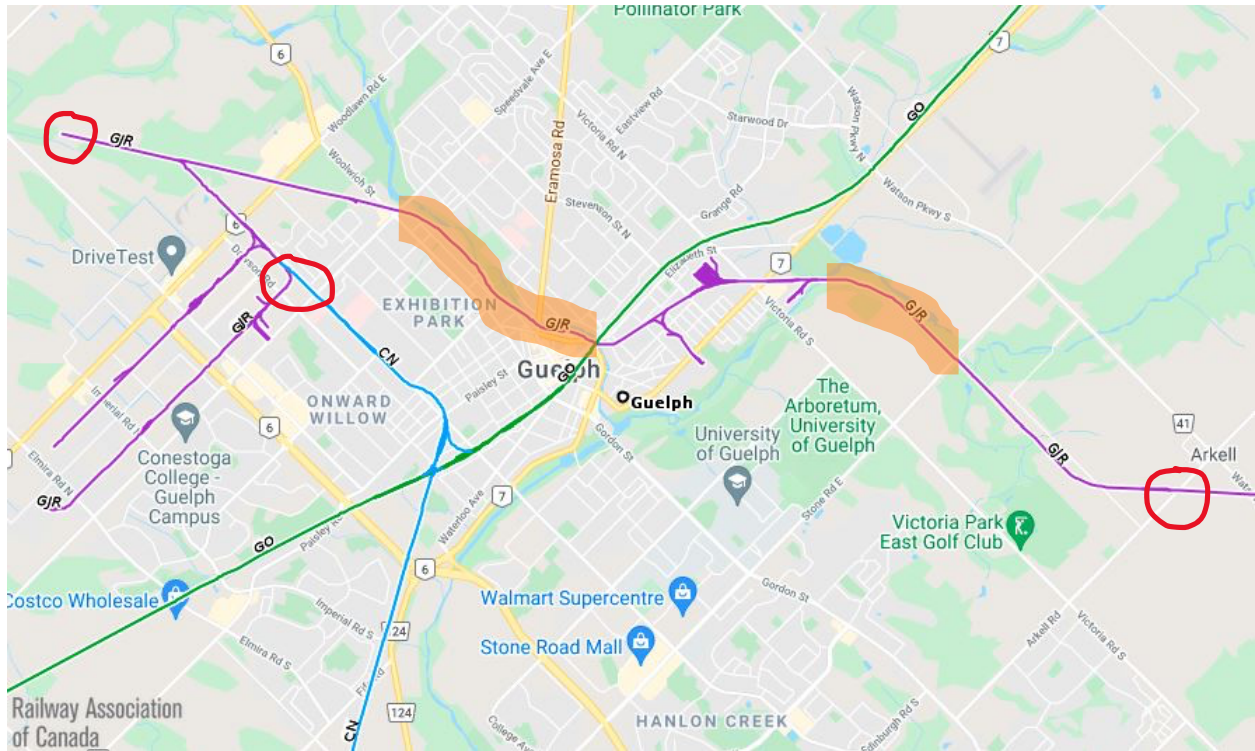
Future GJR annual reports to shareholders would include results, actions and plans of the RAILS WITH TRAILS strategy.

In the words of Brent Toderian, Guelph is an ideal Bike City. Let's move beyond "discussions and small gradual steps." Let's demonstrate urgency by going further, faster and require GJR to develop its ROW asset for the benefit of all Guelph's citizens.

Thankyou.

Benefits of the strategy:

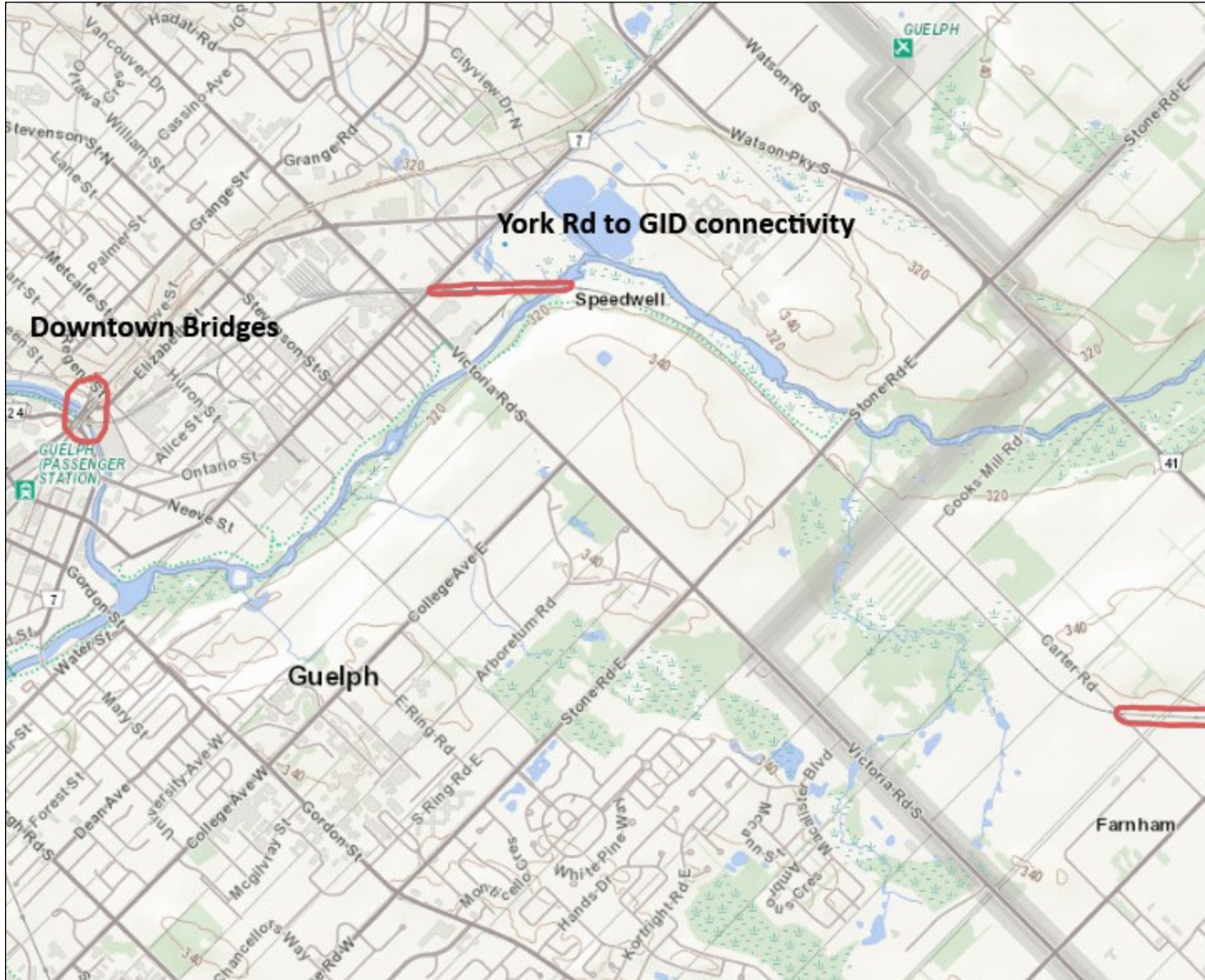
- Intuitive trailway.
- Easily communicated and understood by citizens and tourists.
- Progress is easily measured and reported on annually.
- Progress of the built corridor is not dependent on different terms of council or competing city budgetary priorities.
- The mandate change would demonstrate the benefit of a municipally owned short line railway and reinforce the "wisdom" of the city railway purchase decision from CP.
- The change would allow GJR to call its own priorities which can align with commercial considerations if progress was being made along the corridor.
- Prevents whipsawing of GJR by different city departments, or community groups on what is most important.
- Reduces risk and liability from trespassing on active rail lines by providing a much more pleasant travel alternative.
- Blunts criticism of not acting in the public good unless there is no action to extend the "RAILS WITH TRAILS" network.



GJR “Rails WITH Trails” Comprehensive Strategic plan.

- Purple line is GJR railway
- Corridor trail heads: Silvercreek in west, Arkell in east, Edinburgh north to junction.
- GJR railway with existing MUP or recreational trail adjacent.

Approximately 4km of 16km already has RAILS WITH TRAILS.



Missed GJR infrastructure Improvement enhancement opportunities for the public good.