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UPDATING CWATS

Understanding what CWATS is, the history of the 2012 CWATS Master Plan and how CWATS has been embraced by the County and its residents.

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CHAPTER 1 | UPDATING CWATS

Active transportation (AT) has a long history in the County of Essex. The County has hundreds of kilometres of existing on and off-road routes including corridors that form part of regional trail systems including the Trans Canada Trail, the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, the Cypher Systems Group Greenway, the CASO Rail Trail and the Province-wide cycling network. These routes link rural communities, provide linkages within built-up areas, facilitate long-distance travel throughout the County and facilitate regional connectivity in southern Ontario. In addition, the County's flat topography, mild weather and local tourism assets including wineries, distilleries and historic sites, make it a premier destination for active transportation and cycling in Ontario.

In 2012, the County completed its first active transportation strategy – the CWATS Master Plan. The 2012 master plan was developed to provide information, tools and recommendations to guide the future planning, design, implementation and operation of active transportation infrastructure and programming. Since this time, the County in collaboration with its local municipalities and partner agencies, has taken great strides to enhance the culture of healthy, active living and improve conditions for walking, cycling and AT.

The CWATS Master Plan is now being updated to reflect the growth that has occurred within the County of Essex since 2012, as well as lessons learned, best practices, new legislation and current design guidelines. This is the County's CWATS Master Plan Update. It is meant to provide the County and its partners with guiding policies and recommendations to build on the successes to date and move CWATS forward over the next 10 to 20 years.

1.1 WHAT IS CWATS?

CWATS refers to the County of Essex's:

County-**W**ide **A**ctive **T**ransportation **S**ystem.

CWATS is a network of on and off-road cycling and multi-use trail routes. Once completed as currently proposed, the CWATS network is expected to include over 1,000 kilometres of active transportation routes linking the County's seven local municipalities and connecting to existing and planned infrastructure in the County's neighbouring municipalities including the City of Windsor and the Municipality of Chatham-Kent.

CWATS goes beyond routes and infrastructure. It is part of the County's long-term strategy to promote connected communities, active, healthy living and support economic development through tourism.

It aligns with the County's overall goal of providing accessible, inclusive, sustainable transportation and recreation options that will link to rural and urban areas, enrich the quality of life for local residents and strengthen regional tourism initiatives. CWATS is for everyone, and it is meant to provide opportunities for people of all ages and all abilities to engage in active forms of travel and recreation.



Figure 1: 5th Annual CWATS Celebration (2018)
Source: County of Essex

In 2012, the first CWATS Master Plan was developed to guide the County, its local municipalities and partners in implementing a County-wide network of active transportation routes to encourage healthy, active living and to enhance regional recreational opportunities. Key components of the 2012 master plan include:

Policies	Network	Programs
Revisions to Official Plan policies, AT Pedestrian Charter and new CWATS policies.	Working with local municipalities and partners to build routes, facilities and other supportive amenities.	Identifying initiatives and programs to shift travel behaviours and encourage increased AT use.

About ten years have passed since the 2012 CWATS Master Plan was approved by County Council. During this time there has been great progress in improving active transportation infrastructure, policies and programs throughout the County and its local municipalities. Since adoption, over 550 kilometres of on and off-road active transportation routes have been implemented throughout the County including bike lanes, paved shoulders, cycle paths, off-road multi-use trails and signed routes.

County and local municipal staff, stakeholders and decision-makers understand the importance of active living and how it impacts the overall quality of life of residents. The update to the CWATS Master Plan is not intended to “reinvent the wheel” – it is intended to build upon the successes achieved and lessons learned since 2012. It is meant to review and revise the policies, recommendations, network and implementation strategy to ensure that what is being recommended achieves the desired outcomes of the County, its local municipalities and partners over the next 20+ years.

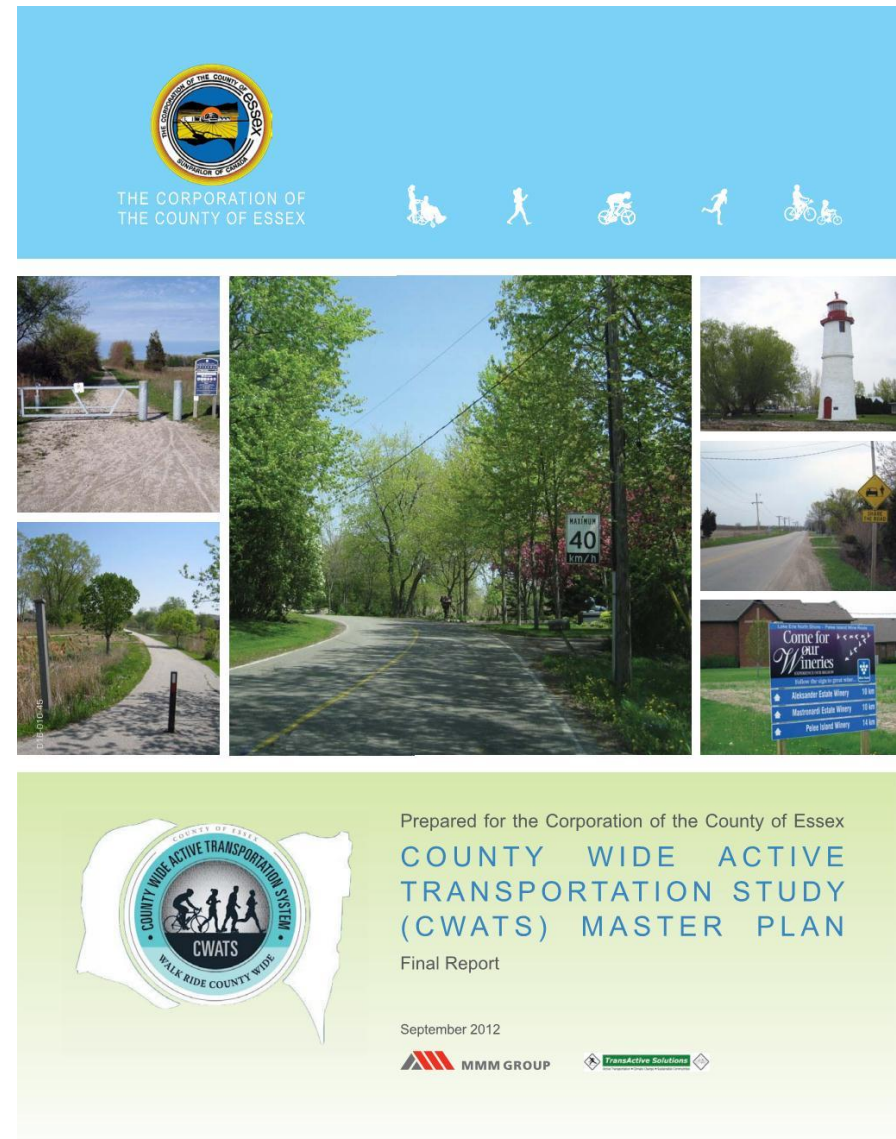


Figure 2: CWATS Master Plan 2012

1.2 2012 CWATS VISION AND OBJECTIVES

The 2012 CWATS Master Plan was guided by a high-level vision that reflected the County's goals and priorities for active transportation at that time. This vision was supported by five objectives which were intended to explain how it could be achieved, and used to shape the recommendations, policies and priorities that comprise the 2012 plan.

2012 CWATS Vision

The County of Essex and its seven local area municipalities support active transportation and in association with the Essex Region Conservation Authority, City of Windsor and Municipality of Chatham-Kent, Windsor-Essex County Health Unit and other partners, are working together to foster a safe, comfortable, bicycle and pedestrian friendly environment.

This will be done through encouraging people of all ages and abilities to engage in non-motorized activities for everyday transportation and recreation. Residents and visitors are able to travel and experience the urban and rural areas of the County by way of a connected network of on and off-road pedestrian and cycling facilities.

2012 CWATS Objectives

1. Recommend actions to improve conditions for walking, cycling and active transportation for people of all ages by providing an on and off-road routes for both recreation and utilitarian use.
2. Identify elements of the active transportation network to improve consistency and connectivity throughout the County and to the surrounding municipalities.
3. Develop an effective and practical implementation strategy that will identify priorities, annual costs, best practices for facility design and support an improved active transportation network.
4. Identify and recommend strategies and programs that the County as well as local municipalities can lead, or partner with others, to encourage more people to walk and bicycle more often for utilitarian and recreational purposes.
5. Identify roles and responsibilities for the County and its partners to continue implementing the recommendations contained in CWATS.

This Vision and its accompanying Objectives reflect a core understanding of the community's aspirations and concerns for active transportation. Accordingly, they remain essential in prescribing effective recommendations towards future related changes and opportunities. The following CWATS Master Plan Update will therefore adapt from, rather than replace, the pre-existing 2012 Vision and Objectives.

1.3 2012 CWATS POLICY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2012 CWATS Master Plan included 48 recommendations to guide future planning and decision-making to improve active transportation policy, infrastructure (network) and programs in the County and its local municipalities. **Technical Appendix A** presents all 48 recommendations identified in the 2012 CWATS Master Plan.

The following section provides a sample of some recommendations that have been rolled-out since the 2012 CWATS Master Plan was completed, and that have had a significant impact / contribution towards the success of CWATS. Many of these recommendations continue to be implemented and applied on an on-going basis to support the continued development of active transportation policy, infrastructure and programs throughout the County and its local municipalities. These recommendations serve as the foundation for the 2012 CWATS Master Plan and they are intended to inform new and / or modifications to current recommendations as part of the update to the CWATS Master Plan.

2012 CWATS Recommendation	Outcome(s)
<p>7-2 The County should establish and chair an Inter-Municipal Active Transportation Advisory Committee. It is proposed that this AT Committee include local municipal staff representatives, as well as representation from the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA), Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU), and other stakeholders as determined by the County.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The CWATS Committee was established in 2013 (following completion of the 2012 master plan). The Committee meets six times per year with one meeting open to the public and stakeholders. - The CWATS Committee has 11 voting members from Essex County, each of the seven local municipalities, Ministry of Transportation Ontario, ERCA and Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU). - Non-voting members are also invited to meetings including representatives from the City of Windsor, Municipality of Chatham-Kent and other stakeholders (as deemed appropriate by the Committee). - The Committee has supported, recommended and confirmed CWATS network priorities and projects since 2013. Over 340 kilometres of CWATS routes have been implemented since the 2012 CWATS Master Plan was developed.

2012 CWATS Recommendation	Outcome(s)
<p>7-6 The Active Transportation Coordinator should be responsible for the implementation and follow-up of the CWATS Master Plan at the County level and provide updates on the progress of the study when necessary.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An Active Transportation (AT) Coordinator position was established within the County’s Transportation Services Department. The AT Coordinator reports to the Manager of Transportation Planning and liaises with local municipal staff and other partnering agencies / stakeholders in providing support on the roll-out of the CWATS Master Plan. - The AT Coordinator is responsible for championing AT related initiatives and programs throughout the County in coordination with the CWATS Committee.
<p>7-9 The AT Committee, County, local municipalities, ERCA and respective partners should make the development of end-of-trip facilities a priority during the planning and implementation of active transportation facilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Since 2012, three bike repair stations have been installed across the CWATS network, with additional locations planned. - The County’s online mapping tool has been updated to show bike repair stations and other end-of-trip facilities such as water fountains and filling stations. - The County has agreed to extend its pilot program of implementing bike lockers with existing end-of-trip facilities,

2012 CWATS Recommendation	Outcome(s)
<p>7-27 Develop and distribute newsletters and / or digital newsletter to promote and educate the public on AT opportunities, recommendations for routes and destinations and updates on available and safe routes. These initiatives will be undertaken as a combined effort by WECHU and the local area municipalities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Following the 2012 master plan, a CWATS specific website (www.mycwats.ca) was developed. - The CWATS website includes information about existing routes / facilities, future projects, events, background resources and etiquette tips. The website also contains links to PDF maps and the MyCWATS online mapping tool which illustrate the CWATS network and routes. - Social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook have also been developed for CWATS to provide opportunities to share updates on new projects / routes, upcoming events and engagement opportunities for the public.
<p>7-34 That the County and local municipalities establish a budget on an annual basis, with the approval of their respective Councils, to support implementation of the master plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The County and its local municipalities have identified an annual budget for implementation of the CWATS network. For example, the County's 2019 Capital Budget identified \$1.8 million for construction / implementation of CWATS infrastructure. - Annual commitments to funding the CWATS network has helped provide key connections through rural areas in the County and within built-up areas of the local municipalities, such as by implementing paved shoulders.

2012 CWATS Recommendation	Outcome(s)
<p>7-38</p> <p>The County should develop a partnership program with local municipalities, ERCA, WECHU to provide funding for AT projects. These funds would be used for the development and implementation of select program and outreach initiatives as outlined in the master plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Municipal Partnership Program (MPP) was established following the completion of the 2012 CWATS Master Plan to assist local municipalities and key stakeholders with the implementation of CWATS recommendations including programs, physical amenities (such as end of trip facilities) and research activities (such as development of design guidelines and traffic / pedestrian counts). Infrastructure identified in the CWATS Master Plan, including new segments, is not typically eligible for funding through the MPP. - The current MPP includes a funding envelope of \$100,000 per year, for a five-year period of time. Funding is matched up to a maximum of 50% by the local municipality or partner.

Though only a sample, these recommendations demonstrate how the implementation of CWATS has been embraced within the County and its local municipalities. The recommendations contained in the 2012 master plan, have been reviewed to inform potential new and / or modifications to recommendations as part of the update to the CWATS Master Plan. The intent is to build upon the successes and lessons learned to guide the County, its local municipalities and partnering agencies in the implementation of the CWATS Master Plan for the next 10 to 20 years.

1.4 EMBRACING CWATS

Active transportation is part of the County's strategic vision of maintaining strong, sustainable and resilient communities, a clean and healthy environment and a strong economy. This vision is outlined in the County of Essex's Official Plan (2014) and is supported by several goals, some of which specifically address active transportation. These include:



To support the strategic vision and goals outlined in the Official Plan, the County in collaboration with its local municipalities and partners have made great strides in implementing the CWATS Master Plan recommendations to improve cycling, walking and active transportation infrastructure, programs and initiatives since 2012. Though the CWATS Master Plan is intended to provide a blueprint to guide the County and its partners over the next 20+ years, the plan outlines tools, strategies and policy considerations to inform short-term decision making and to accommodate changes. An overview of the successes and examples of how CWATS has been embraced, implemented and promoted in the County and its local municipalities in the short term (since 2012), is provided on the following page.

AT COORDINATOR

This role was established following a recommendation in the 2012 CWATS Master Plan to hire an AT Coordinator who would be responsible for championing AT initiatives and programming throughout the County.

MPP

MUNICIPAL
PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAM

The MPP was established following a recommendation in the 2012 CWATS Master Plan to provide partnership funding for supportive amenities and outreach.

CWATS Charter

FOR THE COUNTY OF ESSEX AND ITS PARTNERS

Access
Active transport can support residents to access local goods, services, and places that they need to go.

Equity
Active transportation is a universally affordable way to travel that allows residents to live more independently.

Health and Well-being
Regular active transportation increases overall health and well-being of our residents and so many.

Environmental Sustainability
Active transport relies on human power and is good for our environment.

Personal & Community Safety
An environment where people feel safe and comfortable supports active lifestyles and increases community safety for all.

Community Cohesion and Prosperity
Active transport is an important, social, accessible and viable local economic vitality.

CWATS Vision
The County of Essex and its partners are working together to foster a safe, comfortable bicycle and pedestrian friendly environment. Well designed and connected facilities can help us live in a more active and healthy way. For safety and health, it is a fun and affordable way to travel and is better for the environment.

Through a strong partnership...
The County of Essex, along with its local municipalities, the Essex Region Conservation Authority and the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, are committed to these CWATS Charter principles.

The CWATS Charter outlines the commitment made by the County, its seven local municipalities, ERCA and Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, to active transportation, community building, safety and environmental sustainability.

The CWATS Charter was launched in 2015 and is founded on seven key principles:

1. Access
2. Equity
3. Health and well-being
4. Environmental Sustainability
5. Personal and community safety
6. Community comprehension and prosperity
7. Strong partnerships



Figure 3: CWATS route signage example

CWATS ROUTE SIGNAGE

The CWATS network, including on and off-road routes, has been marked with the branded CWATS signage. The signage is part of the CWATS “identity” and provides a cohesive, unified brand that is easily distinguishable for all residents and visitors.

The CWATS signage has been implemented throughout the County and its local municipalities following completion of 2012 CWATS Master Plan. The signage identifies facilities which comprise the CWATS network.

CWATS LOGO & SLOGAN

All facets of the CWATS network are signified under a slogan of: **“Walk, Ride County Wide”**

The phrase is simple and conveys the underlying goal of improving connectivity among the county’s communities through AT linkages. This slogan is the defining feature of the CWATS network’s emblematic logo.

CWATS COMMITTEE



The CWATS Committee was established following a recommendation in the 2012 CWATS Master Plan to develop an inter-municipal active transportation advisory committee which would include County staff, the County's AT Coordinator, local municipal staff and representatives from ERCA and WECHU.

As per the CWATS Committee Terms of Reference (TOR), the role of the committee is to provide input and guidance to the County, local municipalities, ERCA and WECHU on the implementation of the CWATS Master Plan as well as other initiatives related to active transportation and regional trail use in the County of Essex. The committee meets a minimum of six times per year, with additional public meetings and outreach as required.



Figure 4: CWATS Annual Celebration

CWATS ANNUAL CELEBRATION

Since the completion of the 2012 CWATS Master Plan, annual celebrations have been hosted in various communities across Essex County. These celebrations include opportunities to promote educational resources and explore new infrastructure that has been developed as part of the CWATS network. The 6th annual CWATS celebrations were held in 2019.

CWATS INFRASTRUCTURE

556 km

Approximately 556 kilometres of CWATS routes, including on and off-road facilities have been implemented as of 2022. This includes through the Paved Shoulder Program, which benefited both urban and rural areas.

Building upon all of the successes in implementing and promoting CWATS, the master plan has been updated to respond to current community trends, design guidelines, best practices and lessons learned that have emerged since 2012. **Chapter 2** provides additional detail to explain why the CWATS Master Plan has been updated and how this was undertaken. This includes ensuring that the plan evolves to accommodate changes to best practices and the needs and aspirations of Essex County communities over time. Photos of various initiatives, projects and programs that have been undertaken throughout the County and its local municipalities are illustrated on the following pages.



Bike Safety Rodeo Harrow Arena - August 2019



Bike to Work Day at Essex County Civic Centre - 2019



CWATS Bike Repair Station



Construction of cycle path along County Road 20 - 2018



Town of Essex - Bronze Bicycle Friendly Community Award 2018



5th Annual CWATS Celebration - 2018 Leamington



4th Annual CWATS Celebration - 2017 Sadlers Nature Park, Town of Essex



Construction of paved shoulders along County Road 50 - 2019

Figure 5: 8 photos of CWATS events and construction



4th Annual CWATS Celebration
LaSalle - AUGUST 2017



CWATS Bike Repair Station at Rotary
Centennial Hub



CWATS Celebration Walk
LaSalle - 2016



Cyclists on County Road 50 -
2018



CWATS route on County Rd 7 - 2019



Bike Windsor Essex Cycling Education
Event - 2018



Pedestrians and Cyclists along CWATS
route on County Road 2 - 2019



CWATS Celebration
Tecumseh - 2016

Figure 6: 8 photos of CWATS events

Chapter 1 is intended to be an introduction to the updated CWATS Master Plan (2012) including its guiding principles such as the vision, objectives and recommendations. It is important to outline the foundational components from the 2012 plan and the successes of the County, its local municipalities and partnering agencies, to better understand why the CWATS Master Plan has been updated and how this was done. **Chapter 2** answers these questions and provides an in-depth summary of the various factors that prompted the need for an updated master plan.



Figure 7: CWATS Annual Celebration (2018)