Official Community Plan
Nelson 2050
Leading the way, together.

OCP 1-Pager Series: Traffic

As the service, employment, and shopping hub of the region, most people who live within a 15min to 1hr drive come into Nelson on a regular, often daily, basis. The more regional growth we can accommodate within the city limits, means there are more opportunities for commutes and errands to be accomplished by foot, bike, and transit. The more people who work in Nelson, but live out-of-town, then the more likely it is that they will be entirely car-dependent increasing Nelson's traffic and parking demand. The Official Community Plan provides policies for a transportation network that is safe, sustainable, efficient, accessible, and aligned with the community's values.

What will be the impacts if car usage stays the same as we grow?

If we keep driving as much as we do now, rush-hour traffic will see significant increases in delays to turn on to Highway 3A in the next 15 years. (2023 City of Nelson Traffic Study)

Unless car usage declines, costly road upgrades and new traffic lights will be necessary, especially along the highway corridor.

Increased traffic will be more noticeable on residential streets.

More cars will be competing to park downtown.

Myth Busting

MYTH: We should be encouraging people to drive because it's good for the economy.

BUSTED: Of course, people who walk and bike also eat and shop. In fact, research has found that cyclists and pedestrians generally spend more per month downtown than visitors who arrive by car.

MYTH: No one takes the bus.

BUSTED: West Kootenay transit ridership has increased by some 60% since 2013 and many young people are not driving. Between 2003 and 2013, there was a 13.9% decrease in drivers aged 16 to 21 in Nelson.[1]

MYTH: Reducing car use will make it harder for seniors and people with disabilities.

BUSTED: By encouraging more people to use other means of transportation, we free up road and parking space for those who need it the most

MYTH: There's no where to park so we need to build more parkades.

BUSTED: To recover the costs of building a new parkade, it would be necessary to charge between $233 and $572 per month, per stall – for the upfront construction costs alone. It is cost-prohibitive to build new parking, particularly if we want to reach, and invest in, our climate action goals.

Projections show that if we drive 20% less as we grow, we can maintain current traffic levels and avoid the cost of new traffic lights and other upgrades needed to accommodate more traffic. Already 35% of Nelsonites do not commute by car and over 82% of Nelson commuters work/study in town (2021 census). On average, there are only two vehicles for every three adults in Nelson (ICBC), which shows that many Nelsonites don't regularly drive. Actions that can help contribute to everyone driving less include leaving your car at home a few times each week and modal shifting your commute or replacing car ownership with a carshare membership.

Challenges

Modal Shift Gaps - Bicycle, pedestrian, and transit network gaps need to be addressed so that shifting to these transportation modes is an easy option.

Peak Demand - Every city is faced with the challenge of building enough capacity (whether roads or transit service) for weekday rush-hour. This leads to excess capacity the rest of the time and more tax dollars needed to upkeep infrastructure that is only used for a few hours a week.

Pricey Transit - Two people pay $9 to take the bus round-trip to downtown, whereas plugging the parking meter only costs a few dollars creating what economists call a "perverse incentive".

Steep Terrain - Our topography and winter conditions make it harder to walk and bike year-round.

Opportunities

Healthier Lifestyles - By driving less, we can make a significant impact on municipal expenses & taxes and reduce our own expenses. Active transportation speaks to all three OCP Update guiding principles: equity, health, and climate action.

Safety - Slower speeds not only help make streets be perceived as safer to would-be cyclists and pedestrians, but studies prove that safety significantly increases.

Pedestrians have a 10% risk of losing their lives if hit at 30 km/h compared to an 80% risk at 50 km/h. This is due in part to the shorter distance required to come to a complete stop.[2]

The number of collisions overall also lowers with lower speeds. With over 190 traffic collisions in Nelson in 2022, we have a lot of room to improve.

Initiatives Snapshot

Modal Shift Success in Canmore and Banff (Alberta)
In 2018, Canmore resolved to reduce the use of cars to 60% of trips by 2030 in order to mitigate traffic impacts and avoid costly infrastructure upgrades. Starting in 2020, Canmore and Banff both implement large seasonal pedestrian zones in their downtowns. Banff allows slow transit buses through the pedestrian area, and transit is free for its residents.

Kootenay Carshare
Established in 2001, the carshare is a community cooperative organization with an intention to encourage the reduction of individual greenhouse gas emissions. www.carsharecoop.ca

Downtown Parking Strategy (2021)
This City of Nelson strategy was developed with community input. It features 61 recommendations that will assist staff in decisions and policy projects related to parking. The strategy is designed to help the City achieve its sustainability goals, including economic, social, and environmental.

Project Information

OCP Update: Nelson2050.ca

Email: OCP@nelson.ca

1 Volker, J. & Handy, S. "Economic impacts on local businesses of investments in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure: a review of the evidence", 2021

2 Government of British Columbia: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/reports-publications/annual-reports/reducing-motor-vehicle-crashes-bc.pdf, page 113
City of Edmonton: https://www.edmonton.ca/transportation/traffic_safety/why-30