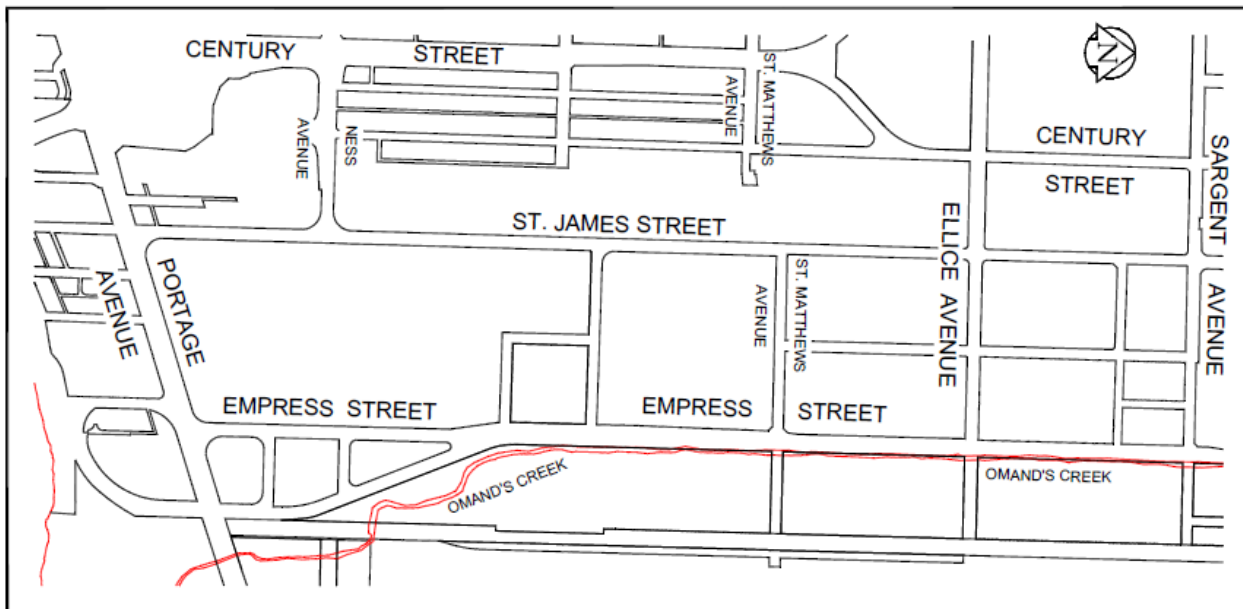




MORE PEOPLE BIKING
MORE OFTEN

Comments on Proposed Polo Park Infrastructure Improvements Bike Winnipeg, Nov. 29, 2013

We have reviewed the plans for Polo Park infrastructure improvements and while we are pleased to see that accommodations for cyclists are part of the plan for the rehabilitation and extension of St. Mathews, we are disappointed to see that other important AT routes in the Polo Park area such as Empress and Ellice have been left out of the project. While Empress is outside the defined scope of the project as presented in the open house, it is well within the bounds of the project presented in the 2013 capital budget as shown below.



Empress is a key north/south route in the City's proposed Bicycle Network acting as a parallel alternative to St. James Street, which will be rehabilitated as part of this project, but without any improvements benefitting people choosing to travel on their bicycles. An infrastructure project of this magnitude (\$30 million) represents an opportunity to "connect the dots" and make the overall network more useful and complete. It would be a shame if the opportunity to move forward on the City of Winnipeg's commitment to "a transportation system that supports active, accessible and healthy lifestyle options"¹ were lost because of an administrative decision to limit the scope of this important project only to options dictated by the demands of increasing motorized traffic.

We would like to emphasize a few points that we feel are crucial to successfully improving the bikeability and walkability of the Polo Park area and convincing more people to walk or bike to or through the Polo Park area, thereby reducing car congestion.

¹ Winnipeg Transportation Master Plan; City of Winnipeg, pg. 9. 2011

Neighbourhood Travel Patterns and Routes

It is important to step back and look at the larger picture to see how the infrastructure in the Polo Park area affects travel by bicycle or on foot to other neighbourhoods. The key connections for cyclists are between Polo Park and the “West End” to the east, Wolseley and River Heights to the south, and St James to the West. St. Matthews has been designated as a bicycle route and has been partially improved with painted bike lanes. This has not been done within the project area yet, nor has it been done on the section of St. Matthews crossing the CPR tracks immediately east of the project area. To the west, St. Matthews could provide a good connection to St. James, but again, it has not yet been improved. Empress provides an opportunity to connect to the south.

Opportunity to Encourage Cycling

Even without full improvements or connected bike routes the level of bicycle use in and around Polo Park is much higher than the city average. According to the 2011 National Household Survey the average percentage of commuters traveling to work by bicycle for Winnipeg CMA was 2.0%. As the following table shows, in the Polo Park area and its nearby neighbourhoods more than 5% of commuters travel to work by bicycle. Therefore, many of them would be prepared to use a bicycle to travel to Polo Park if safe, bicycle-friendly infrastructure was available. The Polo Park infrastructure improvements are an important opportunity to support and encourage increased levels of cycling, thereby helping to reduce car use and congestion in the area.

Census Tract	Boundaries (North / East / South / West)	Bicycle Commuter Percentage
Polo Park & West End		
019	Ellice Ave / Erin / Portage Ave / St James	3.8%
020	Ellice Ave / Ingersoll / Portage / Wall	6.1%
021	Ellice / Sherbrook / Portage / Ingersoll	6.1%
030	Notre Dame / Ingersoll / Ellice / Wall	4.5%
029	Notre Dame / Simcoe / Ellice / Ingersoll	1.8%
028	Notre Dame / Sherbrook / Ellice / Simcoe	3.7%
Wolseley		
018	Portage / Aubrey / Assiniboine River / St James	10.7%
017	Portage / Canora / Assiniboine River / Aubrey	12.9%
016	Portage / Sherbrook / Assiniboine River / Canora	14.8%
St James		
532	Ellice / St James / Silver Ave / Airport	2.6%
531	Silver Ave / St James / Portage / Truro	1.9%
530	Portage / St James / Assiniboine River / Truro	2.2%
533	Airport / Truro / Assiniboine River / Conway	2.6%
	Regional Average (weighted)	5.3%

Source: Bike Winnipeg Calculations based on the 2011 National Household Survey Data for Winnipeg Census Tracts

Improving and Connecting St. Matthews

The project will provide an opportunity to provide for cyclists along St. Matthews, making sure that AT connections are established both to the east, across the CPR tracks, and to the west across Century. Because of the high volume of traffic the bicycle facilities on this route need to be separated from car traffic by building them at a higher level than the main roadway (above grade) but lower than the adjacent sidewalks. We notice that the diagram presented at the open house does not provide for grade separation for the bicycle lane or track. We also notice that the connection to the west is provision, based on acquisition of land between St. James Ave and Century. We would emphasize that even if it is not possible to acquire this land, a completed bike track should be built for the full length of St. Matthews within the project area.

Empress as the North-South Bicycle Route

Given that there will not be a provision for a bike path on St. James, another route is required to provide a bicycle connection to Wolseley and to River Heights to the south. This will also provide an alternate means of connecting to the west on the south side of Portage Ave., allowing cyclists to use the route underneath the route 90 bridge. What is needed is a two way bicycle track on the east side of Empress from Ellice to Portage Ave. The existing walking path is inadequate for shared bicycle and pedestrian traffic in two directions, and the west side of Empress would not be appropriate for a bicycle track because of the many intersections and entrances to Polo Park.

Critical Intersections

All of the intersections along St. Matthews are critical for cyclists. To reduce the risk of crashes bicycle paths or tracks through the intersections should be clearly identified with green pavement. In addition, provisions such as bike signals or bike boxes should be installed to provide cyclists with safe, convenient options to facilitate turns onto or off of the proposed Empress bikeway.

Sidewalks on St. Matthews

The sidewalks on St. Matthews should be extended across the CPR tracks to the east to facilitate pedestrians traveling between the West End and Polo Park.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. Provide grade separated bicycle tracks on the rehabilitated sections of St. Matthews.
2. Ensure that St. Matthews is connected to continuations east and west of the project area.
3. Provide a two-way separated north-south bicycle track on the east side of Empress.
4. Provide bicycle signals and “bike boxes” to facilitate cyclists making left turns from all four directions at the St. Matthews – Empress Intersection.
5. Use coloured pavement to visually identify bike lanes through intersections.

Sincerely,



Jeremy Hull, Co-Chair
Bike Winnipeg