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July 21, 2020

The Honourable Catherine McKenna, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
107 Catherine Street
Ottawa, ON K2P 0P4

VIA EMAIL

Catherine.McKenna@parl.gc.ca

Re: National Active Transportation Strategy and COVID-19 Economic Stimulus

Dear Minister McKenna,

As part of Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) mandate to safeguard and enhance the health and well-being of our watershed communities, we have worked extensively with municipalities, other levels of government, and external partners and organizations to design, build and maintain an integrated trail network for the most populous region in Canada. Our jurisdiction spans nine watersheds, fifteen single-tier or lower-tier municipalities, and three regional municipalities, with a combined population of over 3.5 million people. TRCA will thus play a unique and important role in the development of a regional trail network that supports active transportation options.

Trails provide opportunities for connection with nature and greenspace, recreation, and healthy living, all of which have been highlighted as critical community and public health needs during the current COVID-19 pandemic. As an example, TRCA has recorded a nearly 1500% increase in the number of TRCA trail users at select locations between February and June 2020. Furthermore, an integrated trail system facilitates the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by providing the infrastructure needed for residents, visitors, and workers to engage in active transportation. A comprehensive trail network also creates economic development opportunities—including tourism—while the design, construction, and maintenance of trails themselves create ongoing employment opportunities. An investment in trails is an investment in improved public health, environmental and economic outcomes.

TRCA's Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Area (Trail Strategy) includes dozens of trail-development projects and builds on a legacy of regional trails in greenspace to complete, expand and manage the Greater Toronto Region Trail Network. This trail network is a key component of our region's active transportation network and offers pedestrians and cyclists an environmentally safe and cost-effective alternative to travel between home, work, school, and play. The Trail Strategy builds on existing and planned active transportation and public transit networks to enable people to move about their daily lives and addresses the current "first mile/last mile" barrier to the success of our regional public transit systems.

TRCA has worked closely with its municipal partners to develop the Trail Strategy and its priority trail projects. The Trail Strategy complements the active transportation plans, strategies, and priorities of

the municipalities within TRCA's jurisdiction and is being implemented in close partnership with municipalities to coordinate work and leverage various sources of funding. Given TRCA's role in advancing active transportation and recreational opportunities within our jurisdiction, we are happy to hear of the Federal government's plan to establish a national active transportation strategy. As part of this emerging direction, and in recognition of the need for economic stimulus as part of COVID-19 recovery, we encourage sustainable funding to implement active transportation infrastructure and programs, including trails. TRCA also endorses the recent requests made to the Federal government by municipalities within our jurisdiction for funding to support the development of an extensive and integrated active transportation network.

TRCA's Trail Strategy identifies a regional trail network of over 1000 kilometres within our jurisdiction, including multiple high priority regional trail projects that will address over 140 kilometers of gaps in the regional trail network. This includes the 17 trail projects identified below that build on investments in cycling, walking, and all-ability friendly communities across our jurisdiction in collaboration with our municipal partners:

1. Bloor/Danforth Bike Lanes (3.3 km in the City of Toronto)
2. East Don Trail (8.0 km in the City of Toronto)
3. Highland Creek Trail (2.2 km in the City of Toronto)
4. Humber Trail (30.0 km in the City of Toronto, the City of Vaughan, the Town of Caledon and the Township of King)
5. Lake-to-Lake Trail (6.6 km in the City of Richmond Hill)
6. Massey Creek Trail (3.7 km in the City of Toronto)
7. Oak Ridges Corridor Park Trail (5.1 km in the City of Richmond Hill and the Township of King)
8. Pipeline Trail (0.5 km in the City of Richmond Hill)
9. Richmond Hill Connection Trail (5.4 km in the City of Richmond Hill)
10. Rouge Trail (19.3 km in the City of Markham, the City of Pickering, the City of Toronto, the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, and the Township of Uxbridge)
11. The Great Trail (1.0 km in the City of Pickering)
12. The Meadoway Finch Corridor (15.7 km in the City of Toronto)
13. The Meadoway Gatineau Corridor (10.8 km in the City of Toronto)
14. The Meadoway Kipling Corridor (2.0 km in the City of Toronto)
15. Waterfront Trail (14.4 km in the City of Toronto)
16. West Don Trail (5.2 km in the City of Toronto and the City of Vaughan)
17. West Humber Trail (7.7 km in the City of Brampton and the City of Toronto)

TRCA has also identified opportunities to provide greater east west connectivity between Brampton, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Markham and Pickering by developing trails in existing utility corridors such as the Parkway Belt West Plan / 407 corridor.

In addition to the multiple economic, public health, community, and environmental benefits of trail development and maintenance, these projects will also offer co-benefits including the opportunity to remedy 42 erosion hazard sites and implement up to 74 stream and 364 terrestrial restoration projects. These improvements offer additional economic and environmental benefits including increased public safety, property and infrastructure protection, and enhanced community and greenspace amenities. TRCA also advocates for the inclusion of trail projects and associated erosion risk management and restoration works in the design and construction of linear infrastructure projects.

As Canada begins its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, government stimulus funding will play a critical role in economic recovery. This funding can also strategically support new infrastructure that advances greener, safer, more livable, and more resilient communities. Municipalities are increasingly recognizing the importance of active transportation as a key part of city building and planning, as demonstrated by the number of municipalities developing and implementing active transportation strategies and integrating active transportation into municipal policies and integrated transportation master plans. This municipal priority will undoubtedly be supported by the development of a national active transportation strategy and can be further moved advanced by strategic Federal investment in important trail and active transportation infrastructure.

We look forward to discussing these important opportunities with you and your staff. We would be pleased to meet with you and offer a tour of any of these sites in accordance with physical distancing and gathering limit requirements. Please contact Leena Eappen in my office to arrange a meeting by email at leena.eappen@trca.ca or by phone at 416-661-6600 ext. 5254.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Innis
Chair



John MacKenzie, M.Sc. (PI) MCIP, RPP
Chief Executive Officer
Secretary-Treasurer

cc: Andy Fillmore, MP for Halifax, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
Andy.Fillmore@parl.gc.ca