

Report to Council



Date: November 15, 2021
To: Council
From: City Manager
Subject: Knox Mountain Drive Engagement Survey and Multi-modal Access Strategy
Department: Parks and Buildings Planning

Recommendation:

THAT Council receives, for information, the report from the Parks and Buildings Planning Department dated November 15, 2021, with respect to the Knox Mountain Drive Engagement Survey and Multi-modal Access Strategy;

AND THAT Council directs staff to provide time restricted vehicular access to the First Lookout on Knox Mountain Drive as described in this report through a two-year trial basis;

AND FURTHER THAT Council directs staff to report back to Council at the conclusion of the two-year trial period.

Purpose:

For Council to consider a strategy to provide limited vehicular access to Knox Mountain Drive on a two-year trial basis.

Background:

Knox Mountain Park, and Knox Mountain Drive specifically, has seen an explosion of use over the last several years. Vehicles (pre-pandemic), pedestrians, mountain and road cyclists, all share the paved surface. Knox Mountain Drive was originally built as a mountain access road and is not to a standard expected elsewhere in the City to accommodate a multi-modal road cross section.

In the spring of 2021, staff initiated public engagement to determine how and when people use Knox Mountain Park. The results of the survey were considerable, with over 8,100 survey responses and over 4,000 comments.

This report outlines the challenges of the road, current use patterns and operations protocol, public engagement results, and a strategy for access management on a trial basis. The proposed Knox Mountain Drive Multi-modal Access Strategy will inform the Knox Mountain Management Plan Update, which is currently underway. The Knox Mountain Park Management Plan Update will include

a review of the park’s ecological status and amenities, and a work plan to guide the park through the next decade.

Knox Mountain Drive – Use and Operation

Knox Mountain is one of Kelowna’s most popular parks, with many park visitors using a variety of trails, as well as the road on any given day. Hiking, driving to look at the views, mountain and road cycling, playing frisbee, strolling the dog park, and viewing wildlife, are just a few of the activities to enjoy in the park. Knox Mountain Drive is one of the access routes used by multiple users, including vehicles.

Knox Mountain Drive is a mountain road, unique in Kelowna. The road surface is less than 5.5m wide through much of its length and the grades can reach over 20 per cent. It winds through steep slopes and sensitive ecosystems, making upgrading the roadway to a city standard both physically and economically unfeasible and ecologically undesirable. Operationally, the road is closed during the winter through the frost and snow season, from approximately November to March. It is also closed frequently in July and August when the fire hazard rating is extreme. As such, in non-pandemic years, it is typically closed between 5-7 months per year. In March 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the road was closed to create a one-way route up to the Apex Trail and down the road, to facilitate and encourage better physical distancing.

With the increased use, amplified by the pandemic, the constraints of the Knox Mountain Drive have come into focus. Table 1 illustrates an over 50 per cent increase in the use on the Apex Trail from 2020 to 2021. Table 2 shows pedestrian and cycle use of the road from May to October 2021. An average of 1,179 people have walked or cycled on Knox Mountain Drive daily during this period.

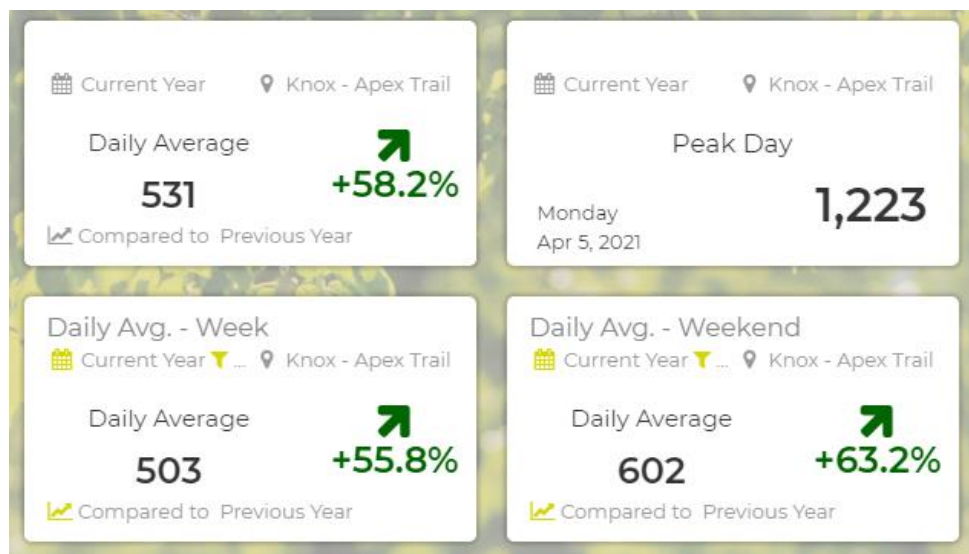


Table 1 – Pedestrian Counts – Apex Trail 2020 to 2021

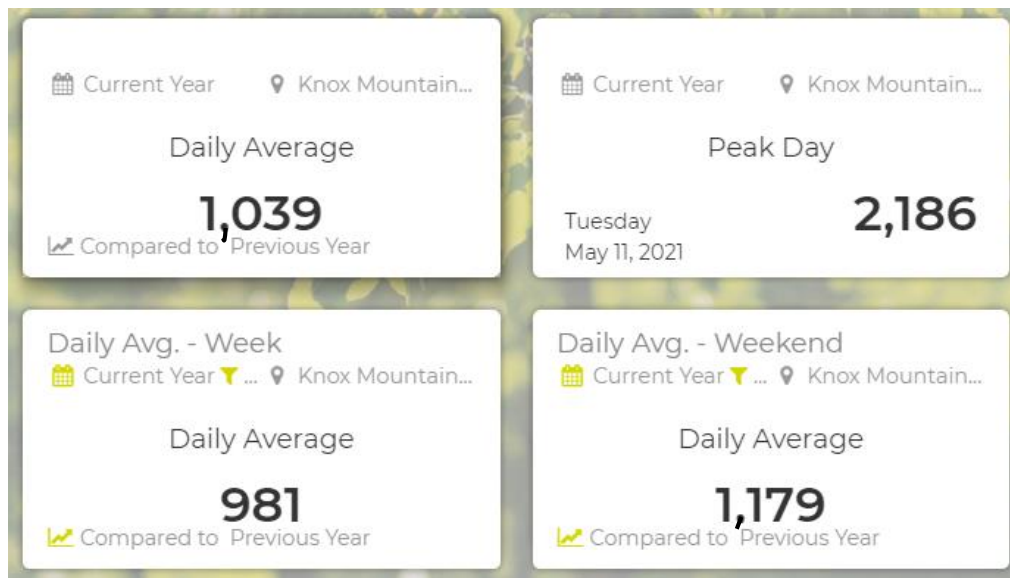


Table 2 – Pedestrian and Cyclists Counts – Knox Mountain Drive at Base 2021

Pedestrian and bicycle traffic is busiest in the morning, with peak use occurring between 8 to 11am. There is a drop in the afternoon, more pronounced on weekdays, and another slight increase from 4 to 8pm evenings, shown in Table 3.

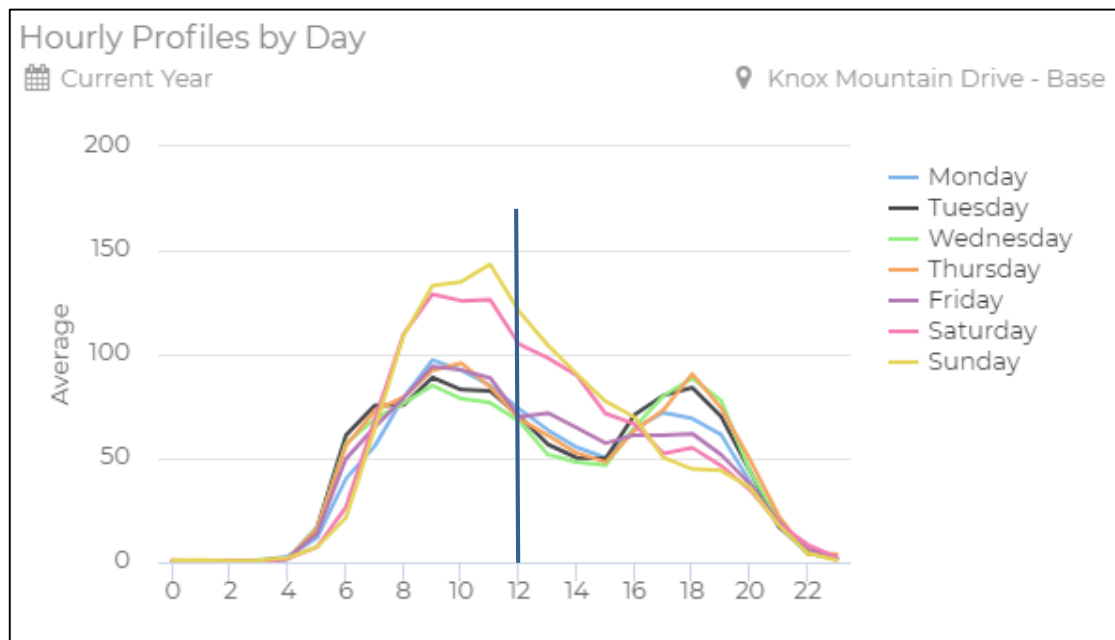


Table 3 Pedestrian and Cyclist Counts – Average by Hour and Day of Week

Knox Mountain Drive – Survey Results

Due to the increased use of the road by all modes, including new trends developed during the pandemic, an online survey to better understand how people use and access the park was conducted in the spring of 2021. The survey response was significant, with over 8,100 responses and over 4,000 comments. The bulk of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 64, but all age groups were well

represented. Results from surveys such as this are a collection of opinions and perceptions from interested or potentially affected residents and are not a statistically significant random sample of all Kelowna residents. Due to its opt-in and open methods, results are qualitative in nature. Refer to Appendix A for the complete Engagement Summary.

Survey respondents indicated that the most popular activity was hiking, followed by driving to look at the view. These activities were followed in popularity by wildlife viewing, mountain biking, visiting the dog park, running, road cycling, long boarding, and bus tours.

Regarding access, the survey outlined five options for Knox Mountain Drive. The overall highest rated option was to keep vehicular access to the First Lookout. The second highest rated option was to keep vehicular access to the Upper Lookout, followed by a shuttle service, then vehicles only for permitted events. The lowest rated option overall was to close Knox Mountain Drive to vehicles at all times.


OPTIONS	AVG. RANK
Knox Mountain Drive is open to vehicles up to the lower look out	2.69 
Knox Mountain Drive is open to vehicles up to the upper look out	2.93
Knox Mountain Drive is closed to vehicles but a shuttle service is available	3.03
Knox Mountain Drive is open to vehicles only for permitted events	3.06
Knox Mountain Drive is closed to vehicles at all times	3.29

Table 4 – Ranked Preferred Option - Knox Mountain Road (1 most preferred  to 5 (the least)

Knox Mountain Drive, Multi-modal Access Strategy – Two-year Trial

Due to operational concerns regarding the increased use of the road and safety considerations, the Knox Mountain Drive, Multi-modal Access Strategy was proposed. The objectives for the Knox Mountain Drive Strategy are safety, accessibility and operational considerations. It is physically, economically and ecologically unfeasible to create a standard multi-modal roadway at Knox. It is a park drive and requires management and use restrictions to reflect its context and constraints. The strategy takes into consideration the survey results as well as operational considerations, current use data, technical road standards and transportation safety principles. Staff propose a balanced approach with a focus on a 'Share the Road' philosophy. The sharing will be both temporal and spatial, targeting the most accessible location for vehicles with a temporal element to allow time for non-vehicular uses as well.

A two-year trial is proposed. Public vehicles will be allowed access just to the First Lookout, and only limited days of the week, and limited hours on those days. This will provide consistency for other park users to be familiar with and when to anticipate public vehicles on the road. The road will continue to

be closed fully to vehicles during the winter months and periods of extreme fire danger. Staff will monitor vehicle counts, as well as pedestrian/cyclist counts at select locations in the park.

First Lookout

The vehicular access to the First Lookout was chosen for a number of reasons:

1. The views over the City are immediately accessible from the First Lookout parking lot, without needing to walk to a viewpoint, as opposed to the Upper Lookout, which is not fully accessible from the parking lot.
2. There is existing parking at the First Lookout.
3. There are options for alternate hiking routes to the First Lookout.
4. This option was most favoured in the public engagement survey.

Vehicular Access – Hours of Use

For the two-year duration, vehicular access to the First Lookout of Knox Mountain will be split temporally, with vehicular access from Wednesday to Saturday, from 12 p.m. noon to 8 p.m. This will split the weekend, the week and the day, to provide some flexibility to plan visits for both those by car or those who prefer vehicle free. Staff will monitor the use and may revise the schedules during the trial in response to demand or conditions.

Events

It is possible to rent the Pavilion for events, most of which are weddings and typically on Saturday afternoons. To access the Pavilion, a staff pilot car will lead the group up the mountain to the Upper Lookout and Pavilion. Events will remain subject to the current outdoor events application process and review.

Signage

There will be improved signage established to communicate the hours of use, including reminders to 'Share the Road'. Temporary signage will be used during events.

Trail Improvements

Trail improvements will be investigated, to encourage hikers to use routes alternate to the road surface to the First Lookout, in order to reduce opportunities for conflict while vehicles are on the road. Additionally, opportunities to improve short loop routes, to enjoy from the First Lookout, will be investigated. This will be done as part of the Knox Mountain Park Management Plan Update.

Conclusion:

Next steps include updating the Getinvolved webpage, communicating with stakeholders by email, and continued work on the Knox Mountain Management Plan Update.

Internal Circulation:

Infrastructure Operations Department
Transportation Engineering
Financial Services
Active Living & Culture
Infrastructure Delivery
Community Communications

Partnerships Office
Policy and Planning

Considerations applicable to this report:

Existing Policy:

- *Knox Mountain Management Plan* (currently being updated)
- *Community for All Action Plan*
 - Focus on accessibility and safety in parks and public facilities

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

A budget request for \$150,000 for signage, trail Improvements to First Lookout, and traffic calming devices will be included in the 2022 Preliminary Budget volume for Council consideration.

Communications Comments:

Engagement Survey Summary included as Attachment 1.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Legal/Statutory Authority:

Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:

External Agency/Public Comments:

Submitted by: M. Steppuhn, Parks Planner

Approved for inclusion: D. Edstrom, Divisional Director, Partnerships & Investments

Attachment 1 – Engagement Survey Summary

Attachment 2 - Knox Mountain Drive Engagement Survey and Multi-Modal Access Strategy presentation

cc: Manager, Parks Operations