

SURP 824 Project at a Glance

"Re-Imagining the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway"
Queen's School of Urban and Regional Planning
December 19th, 2014

This project is the result of three months of work from nine students in Queen's University's School of Urban and Regional Planning, engaged by the National Capital Commission in order to re-imagine the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway. Comprised of several elements, from research and public engagement to conceptual design to implementation and maintenance plans, this report details the processes that led to an innovative vision of the Parkway as a linear park; a focal point in Ottawa not only for the locals, but for all Canadians, and indeed international visitors to Canada's Capital.

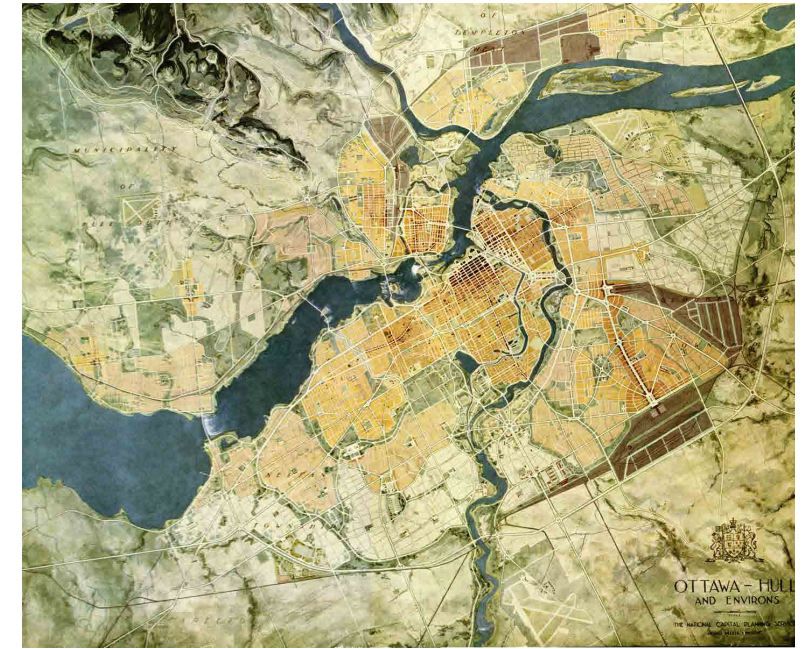
The linear park, as we see it, should be a Capital Venue for commemorations, celebrations, events and festivals. This report aims to emphasize the characteristics of our design that will help to attract the users who will make the Parkway a special place; more of a destination than a pleasant way to reach some other place. In this spirit, exciting features such as public art, expansion of recreational pathways and amenities to facilitate education at the Mud Lake area have been added, all in order to give people a reason to use and care about the Parkway.

Executive Summary

Parkway Background

The Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway runs along the south bank of the Ottawa River for approximately nine kilometres from Mud Lake to LeBreton Flats. The Parkway is an important part of Ottawa's built heritage. First suggested in 1903 by Frederick Todd, Olmsted's protégé, it was built in 1961 as part of Jacques Gréber's Plan for the National Capital. The Parkway is bounded by parkland on either side and delivers stunning views to those who traverse its length. Surrounding communities enjoy the recreational pathways that run parallel to the roadway, as well as hidden gems such as Westboro Beach and Rémic Rapids. The roadway itself currently functions as a divided four-lane thoroughfare, with an often-exceeded speed limit of 60 km/h and carries as many as 2,100 vehicles per hour at peak times.

While the Sir John A Macdonald Parkway continues to be the beautiful scenic drive it was intended to be, there are several opportunities that could be seized to improve the Parkway. Reducing traffic, expanding greenspace, involving the surrounding communities, and focusing on the Parkway as a focal point of Canada's Capital all helped to guide the team's vision for the re-imagined Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway.



Gréber's 1950 Master Plan for the National Capital.



Cycling along the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway's recreational pathway.

Imagine...

The year is 2039, you're walking east along the Ottawa River shoreline of the SJAM Parkway, heading for Canada's Parliament. The busy pathway bustles with walkers, joggers, people with strollers, skate boarders, and more.

As you exit the Mud Lake conservation area, you see a signpost that welcomes you to the Sir John A. Macdonald Park, Canada's Capital Park. Beyond the sign, you see a tree-lined cycling way full of cyclists of all ages and some on their commute and others ambling along leisurely, taking in the beautiful views of the river and beyond to the Gatineau shoreline.

Across the parkway median, you can catch glimpses of red mapled mature trees lining the Parkway. As you advance closer, you notice several areas to safely cross this scenic parkway.

All day long, throughout your pleasant stroll, you notice signs of care and public activity along the corridor – from public art pieces to groves of trees, easy to read signs and clear posts to mark gateways to neighbouring communities. Throughout the different areas, you see groups of people picnicking, playing catch, pushing kayaks into the river. The route seems to spell out the history of the area, with overt interpretive panels and more subtle characteristics like pavilions that seem reminiscent of Ottawa's old industrial mills.

As the sun is setting behind you, and you finally reach the terminus of the Parkway, standing on the lawn of the War Museum, you see the sun as it hits the Peace Tower, lighting Parliament Hill. Turning around, you see the sun setting over the green expanse of the Parkway,



Perspective of our design for a Mikinàk Point Pavilion.

rays glimmering off the river as the crowds dwindle; truly, this is a postcard moment and a site to be shared and enjoyed by Ottawans, and Canadians from sea to shining sea.

Current Conditions

Today, the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway, formerly known as the Ottawa River Parkway, is a busy and important thoroughfare transporting people from the west end of the City of Ottawa and Gatineau to the downtown core of Canada's Capital. The busy four-lane, 60 km/h divided roadway carries as many as 9,300 vehicles and up to 10,400 occupants over the course of a weekday. It also carries a significant number of buses, becoming a veritable transitway at peak hours.

The other component of the Parkway is the park itself. A multi-use recreational pathway system runs between Mud Lake and the National War Museum, giving pedestrians and cyclists a safe, separate route to call their own. Along this recreational pathway system, and accessible from the road, there are some activity nodes such as Remic Rapids and Westboro Beach, which draw people in. There are also stunning views from both the roadway and the recreational pathway system along the entire length of the Parkway.

The contemporary SJAM Parkway is a natural gateway which does not rely on cultural features to draw in users. It separates automobile uses from active uses, and usually keeps pedestrians away from the roadway. While these points count in favour of the Parkway in some ways, in other ways they can be a detriment, for example the recreational pathway system being shared between pedestrians and cyclists is unsafe, especially

considering the speeds at which many of the cyclists travel. Furthermore, the stark separation of the uses highlights the lack of safe crossings from the urban side of the Parkway to the natural side; this lack of permeability could be preventing some people from using the Parkway to its fullest extent.



Multi-use trail at Remic Rapids.



Traffic during rush hour creates a barrier for water access and can be visually obstructive.

The reliance on natural features has led to a corridor that feels bare in some places. New amenities and features will help to attract new segments of park users. It is important to consider the types and intensities of desired use in the re-imagining process.

What we see on the SJAM Parkway today helps us to determine what we want to see tomorrow. While it is a busy thoroughfare, it is important to put the focus on the movement and enjoyment of people, and not on the expressway nature of today's roadway; otherwise, residents may not see the problem when inevitable pressure to widen the corridor and add more lanes comes. The future of the Parkway depends on the actions of today.

Precedents Research

While it is important to examine the conditions of the SJAM Parkway, it is also important to seek inspiration from other parks and roadways from Canada and around the world. Through in-depth research, over thirty precedent case-studies have been examined in order to draw lessons for the SJAM Parkway. Among the 30 parks and parkways researched were Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo, Brazil; Holyrood Park in Edinburgh, Scotland; Stanley Park in Vancouver; the George Washington Memorial Parkway, which runs from Virginia to Washington, DC; and, the Promenade Samuel-De Champlain in Québec City. We were also informed by the reconstruction of Queen's Quay on the Toronto waterfront.

From the above examples and several more, some general lessons were learned and some specific

characteristics were noted. One of the key lessons is that parkways are fragile and are subject to expansion until there is no longer a park to drive through, with only pavement from one edge of the corridor to the other. Other general lessons are that parkways can be used to tell a story through space and that the journey matters. Some of the more specific characteristics that helped to inform our design can be seen in the photos throughout this report.



The Promenade Samuel-De Champlain is a riverfront park in Québec City. As visitors stroll along beside the St. Lawrence River, they are barely aware of the roadway at the left of the image.

Vision

“To create a public space that represents who we are as a country and a people, which celebrates the diversity of our landscapes and peoples, and which showcases the natural beauty of Canada’s capital city. To create a signature public space that draws people to it, residents and visitors alike, and allows Canadians from coast-to-coast to feel at home.”

Our vision for the SJAM Parkway is intended to be a vision for the Capital, and indeed all of Canada. It was built through research, design charrette session, public consultation, and stakeholder interviews by our team and synthesis of more extensive public consultation conducted by the NCC.

Implementation Plan

Our vision was constructed around four major goals – Identity, Community, Environmental Sensitivity, and Recreation. Our design was informed based on these four goals, with more specific objectives during the re-imagination of the SJAM Parkway.

| Design Features | Short Term (within 5 years) | Medium Term (6 - 10 years) | Long Term (more than 10 years) |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Gateway Features (Western and Eastern Nodes) | | | |
| Public Art | | | |
| Parkway Amenities | | | |
| Elevated Wooden Boardwalk | | | |
| Educational Signage | | | |
| Landscaping | | | |
| Mikinàk Point Playground | | | |
| Local Events | | | |
| Maple Avenue | | | |
| Programming | | | |
| View Corridor Protection | | | |
| Pedestrian Crossings | | | |
| Neighbourhood Gateways | | | |
| Wayfinding and Signage | | | |
| Westbound Lane Conversion | | | |
| Geometric Green Path | | | |
| Cycling Infrastructure | | | |
| Wading Pool and Skating Rink | | | |
| River Wall and Seating Area | | | |
| Lighting | | | |

Conclusion

The SJAM Parkway is a valuable asset to Canada's Capital. It has a lot of potential, and there are many ways to re-imagine it in the future as a focal point, not only for Ottawans, but for all Canadians when they visit the city. It exists as a gateway to Parliament, the seat of government in our great country, and its grandeur and beauty should reflect its importance as that gateway. Simultaneously, real-life considerations for nearby residents must be made through offering amenities and programming that will draw them to the Parkway as regular users. Giving residents a sense of ownership over the Park will make them more likely to defend it from future development. Safety should also be a serious concern; it is important that users feel safe and comfortable when they are on the Parkway. All these considerations and more have been taken into account during the design process, with the vision of the SJAM Parkway as a place people will want to visit, a destination that people will wish to share with their loved ones, a shining symbol of the grand, diverse and beautiful culture and country in which we live. 🍁



Postcard with a perspective of Maple Avenue, a proposed signature feature along the re-imagined Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway.