

**REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2025**

SUBJECT **Salt Spring Island Regional Trail Feasibility Study Findings and Next Steps**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To present the findings of the Salt Spring Island Regional Trail Feasibility Study and recommend next steps for the project and continued implementation of the Gulf Islands Regional Trails Plan.

BACKGROUND

The Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks Division has long led the development, management and maintenance of regional trails across the Capital Region, including the Galloping Goose, Lochside and E&N regional trails, as well as the recently completed Mayne Island Regional Trail. Off-road segments of these trails are built and operated on lands managed by the CRD through leases, licences or statutory rights-of-way, while on-road segments fall under the jurisdiction of local governments or the Province.

Originally designed as linear park corridors for recreation, these trails are now recognized as key components of the region's transportation system—supporting low-carbon mobility and regional connectivity within the broader active transportation network.

Evolution of Regional Trail Planning and Management

In 2016, the CRD Board approved the Regional Trails Management Plan (2016), which sets priorities and establishes development guidelines for the planning and management of CRD regional trails. This plan considers both recreation and active transportation objectives.

In 2018, the CRD Board approved the Gulf Islands Regional Trails Plan (GIRTP), establishing a long-term vision for a system of off-road bike and pedestrian trails on Mayne, Salt Spring, Pender, Galiano and Saturna islands. The initial phase of the Mayne Island Regional Trail (MIRT) was completed in 2024 as a demonstration project to assess opportunities and challenges associated with regional trail development on the Gulf Islands. Salt Spring Island is identified as the next priority for regional trail development.

Approved in 2023, the Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 (Strategic Plan) embeds both regional park and off-road regional trail commitments.

In June 2025, the CRD established the Regional Transportation Service (RTS) under Bylaw No. 4630 to consolidate transportation planning and regional trail management across the Capital Region. The RTS mandate for active transportation includes:

- Developing transportation policies, plans, programs, projects and studies.
- Managing regional trails that serve a transportation function, including planning, policy development, construction, operations, maintenance, capital planning and land tenure management.
- Providing services and support to municipal partners and public authorities for transportation initiatives that promote active transportation.

The RTS reports to the Board through the CRD Transportation Committee. The Board has identified the Galloping Goose, Lochside and E&N regional trails as initial priorities. Accordingly, CRD Regional Parks is transferring staff, including the regional trail planning functions and associated operational and capital funding, to the RTS. CRD Regional Parks will continue to operate and maintain these priority trails under an internal service agreement and allocation funded by the RTS.

While the GIRTP and associated trails are not current RTS priorities, Bylaw No. 4630 allows for the inclusion of additional trails that support regional transportation, subject to CRD Board approval.

Salt Spring Island Feasibility Study

In June 2024, CRD Regional Parks initiated the Salt Spring Island Regional Trail Feasibility Study (the Study), included in Appendix A.

The Study assessed physical constraints along the 21 km conceptual route outlined in the GIRTP. It proposes a regional trail alignment extending from the Fulford Harbour Ferry Terminal in the southeast, through Ganges Village, to the Vesuvius Bay Ferry Terminal in the northwest. The analysis applied active transportation design guidelines, developed preliminary cost estimates, and identified priority segments for phased implementation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Salt Spring Island Regional Trail Route and Segment Overview



Recognizing past and ongoing efforts to improve active transportation on Salt Spring Island, the Study was developed with input from key community and agency partners, including:

- Island Pathways—a community organization that advocates for safer walking and cycling routes on Salt Spring Island.
- Salish Sea Trail Network Working Group—a coalition of community members and elected officials advocating for a trail network linking the Southern Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island.
- BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit
- Islands Trust
- CRD Salt Spring Island Administration

The Study confirms that a regional trail across Salt Spring Island is feasible and can meet active transportation design standards with significant investment. The initial concept proposed a three-metre-wide paved trail designed to meet BC Active Transportation Design Guide (BCATDG) All Ages and Abilities (AAA) standards, with an estimated cost of approximately \$102 million. To identify more feasible alternatives, the Study explored design standards appropriate for low-use rural contexts—consistent with the BCATDG and the 2016 Management Plan—by narrowing the trail to two metres, using gravel surfacing (as applied on the MIRT), and incorporating traffic-calmed side streets in high-cost areas, reducing the cost to approximately \$63.1 million.

In alignment with the implementation approach outlined in the GIRTP, the Study identified the Ganges Village to Vesuvius Bay section (segments J, H, L2, G, K, and I) as the highest priority for implementation. This includes a 2.5 km on-road portion through segments J and K on traffic-calmed side streets, which are outside CRD Regional Parks' mandate to manage.

Key implementation partners with jurisdiction over portions of the proposed corridor include MoTT, BC Ferries, the Salt Spring Island Local Community Commission (LCC) and Islands Trust, and additional cost savings may be achievable by leveraging existing or planned projects within their road rights-of-way.

Further consultation with these partners is required to confirm prioritization of route segments and inform an implementation strategy for the initial phase. Upon completion, route surveying, conceptual and technical design along with community and First Nations engagement could proceed.

Key Conclusions

- A fully separated regional trail across Salt Spring Island is not currently feasible under CRD Regional Parks' existing guidelines.
- To establish an active transportation corridor, a viable alternative could combine separated trails, traffic-calmed streets, sidewalks and bike lanes and multiple operators (a similar approach to the Lochside Regional Trail). Advancing active transportation on Salt Spring and the Southern Gulf Islands will require a coordinated, multi-year, multi-agency effort.
- With the establishment of the RTS, CRD Regional Parks no longer has the capacity to plan and develop regional trail infrastructure. Regional transportation matters fall under the governance of the CRD Transportation Committee and are the responsibility of the RTS. Including the Gulf Island regional trails within the RTS could represent a more effective approach to ensure consistency, apply a transportation lens, and enable multi-agency coordination.

- CRD Regional Parks' existing regional trail plans—including the 2016 Management Plan, 2018 GIRTP, and 2023 Strategic Plan—will require review and either revision or repeal to align with RTS's mandate and future plans.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

1. That the planning, implementation, and operation of all regional trails on the Gulf Islands—such as those identified in the Gulf Islands Regional Trails Plan—be referred to the CRD Transportation Committee for consideration;
2. That this report, including the Gulf Islands Regional Trails Plan, be referred to the Salt Spring Island Electoral Area Administration for information, in recognition of the local interest in establishing additional community trails in village sites on Salt Spring Island; and
3. That staff report back with a list of all CRD Regional Parks plans, policies, and bylaws requiring amendment or repeal as a result of establishing the Regional Transportation Service, and outline the process and timeline for completing these changes.

Alternative 2

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That this report be referred back to staff for more information.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

Implementation of the GIRTP, which includes the development of the SSIRT, supports 2023-2026 Board Priorities relating to Transportation by improving regional connectivity and safety across transportation modes (1a) and supporting investments, expansion, and equitable access to active and low-carbon transportation (1b).

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The development of the SSIRT supports the implementation of the GIRTP (Appendix B). The Study's findings align with the recommended implementation approach within the GIRTP, with the Ganges Village to Vesuvius Bay section containing the highest priority segments for implementing the initial phase of the project.

The development of the Gulf Islands regional trail network is identified as a priority project for the upcoming decade in the Strategic Plan. CRD Regional Parks' existing regional trail plans and priorities will need to be reviewed and updated to ensure alignment or adjustment to correspond with the RTS mandate.

Financial Implications

The total cost to implement the SSRIT, as outlined in the Study, is an estimated \$63.1 million. This is a class D estimate with a ±50% contingency and does not include land tenure costs. The initial phase of trail development identified in the GIRTP spans approximately 6 km—from the Atkins Road/Lower Ganges Road intersection to the Vesuvius Bay ferry terminal (excluding Ganges Hill). This section, identified in the Study as segments H through L2, has an estimated

construction cost of \$8.5 million. This includes a 2.5 km on-road section through segments J and K on traffic-calmed side streets. More accurate estimates will be possible following detailed route surveying and design.

CRD Regional Parks has allocated \$300,000 in 2027 and \$330,000 in 2028 within the preliminary budget to support planning activities for the SSIRT. Construction funding of \$4 million is currently designated for debt financing starting in 2029 and continuing into 2030, with additional support anticipated through external grant opportunities. In addition, approximately \$2.3 million in the Regional Parks Capital reserve are designated to leverage external grants and support Gulf Islands regional trail development.

If Gulf Islands regional trails are determined to fall under the purview of the RTS, the financial plan will need to be amended to reflect implementation priorities.

First Nations Implications

Salt Spring Island is situated within the asserted territories of several First Nations, including the Semiahmoo First Nation, Snuneymuxw First Nation, STÁUTW (Tsawout) First Nation, scəwaθən məsteyəx^w (Tsawwassen) First Nation, BOKEĆEN (Pauquachin) First Nation, WJOŁEŁP (Tsartlip) First Nation, WSIKEM (Tseycum) First Nation, Stz'uminus First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Tsu'uubaa-asatx First Nation, Lyackson First Nation and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nation. Engagement with these Nations is an important part of the process and would take place in a subsequent phase of the project, following the completion of route surveying and conceptual design drawings.

Intergovernmental Implications

Implementation of the SSIRT will require close coordination with multiple agencies. As Salt Spring Island is an unincorporated community, MoTT is responsible for its road rights-of-way. Similar to the MIRT, MoTT's role will include reviewing and approving detailed design drawings and entering into a licence agreement for the trail's development and operation. MoTT is also currently implementing recommendations from its *2023 Salt Spring Island Cycling Safety Review*, which include shoulder widening and other active transportation upgrades across the island. In some areas, these improvements may create safer conditions for cyclists and pedestrians along existing roads, reducing the need for separate trail development in some future SSIRT segments.

Local governing bodies, including the Salt Spring Island Electoral Area Administration, LCC and Islands Trust, will play key roles in representing community interests, guiding land use policy alignment, and ensuring the trail is built in a manner that preserves the island's character. The Salt Spring Island Electoral Area Administration and LCC are implementing active transportation improvements in Ganges Village, as outlined in the [Salt Spring Island Active Transportation Network Plan](#), which the regional trail is envisioned to connect with in the GIRTP.

BC Ferries will be an essential partner in trail development near the Fulford Harbour and Vesuvius Bay ferry terminals, helping to ensure safe active transportation connections that align with terminal operations and long-term plans. These areas are spatially constrained and influenced by surrounding transportation, commercial, residential and tourism activities, making them particularly complex. As such, additional planning, engagement and inter-agency coordination will be required to thoughtfully integrate active transportation infrastructure into the broader public realm.

Service Delivery Implications

Completing the SSIRT project and advancing implementation of the GIRTP will require significant resources for planning and construction, as well as long-term operation, maintenance and asset renewal funding. Any CRD service (i.e., RTS, Regional Parks, and Salt Spring Island and Southern Gulf Island Administration) will need to assess implementation pathways and service needs for any existing and future regional trails on the Gulf Islands. However, this service may require additional time to become fully operational and to assess and plan to implement transportation priorities across the region.

The Salt Spring Island Electoral Area Administration and LCC have expressed strong interest in the project and may be able to leverage local partnerships to support cost-effective implementation, provided sufficient resources are made available to them.

Social Implications

Developing the SSIRT strengthens community connectivity, promotes active transportation and enhances recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. However, it may also raise concerns about impacts on private property, the environment, and increased development and tourism in rural areas. Early and meaningful community engagement is key to addressing these concerns and building support. Partnering with local groups, such as Island Pathways, can strengthen public trust and increase buy-in by ensuring local perspectives are reflected in the planning and design process.

CONCLUSION

The development of the SSIRT aligns with CRD Board corporate priorities and Regional Parks planning documents. However, it is a significant undertaking that will require coordination among multiple agencies, meaningful engagement with First Nations and the public, and careful consideration of construction, operation and maintenance costs, along with associated service demands. As responsibility and resources for regional trail management shift from CRD Regional Parks to the new Regional Transportation Service, it may be appropriate for the Transportation Committee and Board to consider including the regional trails on the Gulf Islands under the RTS mandate.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

1. That the planning, implementation, and operation of all regional trails on the Gulf Islands—such as those identified in the Gulf Islands Regional Trails Plan—be referred to the CRD Transportation Committee for consideration;
2. That this report, including the Gulf Islands Regional Trails Plan, be referred to the Salt Spring Island Electoral Area Administration for information, in recognition of the local interest in establishing additional community trails in village sites on Salt Spring Island; and
3. That staff report back with a list of all CRD Regional Parks plans, policies, and bylaws requiring amendment or repeal as a result of establishing the Regional Transportation Service, and outline the process and timeline for completing these changes.

Submitted by:	Mike MacIntyre, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Luisa Jones, MBA, General Manager, Parks, Recreation & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Kevin Lorette, P. Eng., MBA, General Manager, Housing, Planning and Protective Services
Concurrence:	Stephen Henderson, MBA, P.G.Dip.Eng, BSc, General Manager, Electoral Area Services
Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: Salt Spring Island Regional Trail: Final Section of the Salish Sea Trail Network
Feasibility Study Report (October 2025)
- Appendix B: Gulf Islands Regional Trails Plan (January 2018)
- Presentation: Salt Spring Island Regional Trail – Feasibility Study & Next Steps