



ROUTE EVALUATION REPORT

OCTOBER 2016

VÉLOROUTE VOYAGEUR CYCLING ROUTE



Minnehaha Bay, Sturgeon Falls
part of the Voyageur Cycling Route

Project Lead



Project Partners



Project Supporter



Municipality of
St. Charles



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Background

In support of the implementation of the Voyageur Cycling Route, Discovery Routes Trails Organization in partnership with the Voyageur Cycling Route Working Group hosted a Mobile Workshop along the trails and low to moderate volume roadways that make up the route on September 19 - 22, 2016. A group of experienced cyclists from around the Province participated in the four-day ride to:

- Evaluate the new route's tourism and recreational potential,
- Experience and evaluate the Voyageur Cycling Route,
- Inventory and evaluate cycling facilities and amenities along the route, and
- Field test route maps.

The riders were accompanied daily by local advocates and project proponents who were interested in learning how the Voyageur Cycling Route compares to long-distance cycling routes in other jurisdictions and the benefits of community involvement in cycling. A variety of provincial, regional and local stakeholders participated in the workshop. Provincial representation included the Ministries of Transportation, Northern Development and Mines and Tourism, Culture and Sport. A personalized greeting from the Honorable Eleanor McMahon, Minister of Tourism was played during the workshop. Other stakeholders participating included elected leaders, economic development agencies, tourism development agencies, public health and organizations such as the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, Ontario Cycling Association and Adventure Cycling. Presentations made during the workshop are available for download at <http://discoveryroutes.ca/mobile-workshop>.

For the purpose of the Mobile Workshop, the 380-km Voyageur Cycling Route was divided into rideable sections. Sections where the route follows Highway 17 and no alternative roadway exists were not ridden as part of the Mobile Workshop due to the high traffic volumes and speeds and the absence of bicycle specific infrastructure. The route is outlined in the 2015 *Voyageur Cycling Route Feasibility Study and Implementation Plan*.

The four-day route breakdown was as follows:

- Day 1: Mattawa to Eau Claire (22km) and Eau Claire to Bonfield (25km)
- Day 2: Bonfield to Callander (27km) and Callander to North Bay (18km)
- Day 3: Sturgeon Falls to Lavigne (25km) and Lavigne to Monetville (30km)
- Day 4: Monetville to West Arm (30km) and West Arm to Hagar (22km)

A professional photographer was hired to follow the riders each day and capture active images along the route to be used for future marketing. These photos will be available for communities and other stakeholders to use to attract cyclists and develop their cycle tourism product.

Evaluation Methodology

The experienced riders that performed the evaluation were from outside the region and therefore unfamiliar with the communities and roadways that form the Voyageur Cycling Route. This was deliberate to ensure a subjective assessment and that observations made by the evaluators were more true to a visiting cyclist unfamiliar with the area.



The route was divided into eight sections ranging in length from 18 to 30km. Each section was evaluated separately under the following categories: overall impressions, strength and challenges, surface and slope, notable scenery, safety, services and maps/ wayfinding. These evaluation criteria were selected based on a tool used by the Ministry of Transportation to assess candidate routes for the future provincial cycling network.

Rider Feedback

Participants of the Mobile Workshop agreed that the Voyageur Cycling Route will provide a uniquely Northern Ontario experience, attractive to cyclists looking for an adventure in a rugged and stunning natural setting, steeped in the history of the Nation.

Some of the comments received during the mobile workshop:

- Highways were so nice to cycle, very smooth with rolling hills and little motor vehicle traffic
- Nice shoulders, never felt unsafe while riding
- Sparse services, but the distances between are not great so not a deterrent
- Excellent road conditions and good riding surfaces
- Beautiful scenery
- Low traffic volumes
- Nice views and spacing between services
- Rest stop at the narrows [Lake Nipissing West Arm] would be perfect for swimming and a picnic
- Good distances between communities
- Shoulder on Highway 64 was great
- Beautiful ride, very scenic – iconic northern Ontario
- Not too challenging
- Drivers are very courteous
- Mashkinonje PP is a great opportunity to bike and hike with a short walk to a beautiful wetland

Results and Recommendations

The following are recommendations based on the feedback received during the Mobile Workshop and analysis by the Voyageur Cycling Route Working Group. The recommendations have been prioritized into short, medium and long-term objectives that will allow for the first phase of the route to be marketable to the public in 2017. Discovery Routes will continue to work collectively with municipalities and stakeholders through the Voyageur Cycling Route Working Group to achieve the objectives.

Short-term Objectives

1. Implement Voyageur Cycling Route **wayfinding signage** on low to moderate volume roadways and trails through Mattawa, Papineau-Cameron, Calvin, and East Ferris and VVCR and Trans Canada Trail wayfinding signage through Callander, North Bay, West Nipissing, French River, St. Charles and Markstay-Warren
2. Develop wayfinding strategy for sections where route follows **Highway 17**
3. Consider implementing **sharrows** along urban sections of the routes in Mattawa, Callander and Sturgeon Falls



4. Promote the **Ontario By Bike bicycle-friendly business program** to enhance the attraction potential of communities. These businesses as well as other bicycle amenities should be identified on maps, especially those that are present within 5km of the route. A general rule for long-distance cyclists is that they will travel up to 5km off the route for an attraction or amenity.
5. Given that the addition of paved shoulders or hard surfacing of certain municipal roads may not be possible in the foreseeable future, existing **road maintenance practices** should be reviewed to take cyclists into consideration.
6. Continue to work with partners in Sudbury to ensure a seamless **connection to the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail** Lake Huron North Channel Cycling Route and the Georgian Bay Cycling Route.
7. Continue to support the objectives of the provincial cycling strategy, **#CycleON**, to create a provincial cycling network, encourage healthier and more active lifestyles and make Ontario a major destination for cycle tourism.

Mid-term Objectives

8. Continue to work with the Province to implement **cycling specific infrastructure** as recommended in the *Voyageur Cycling Route Feasibility Study and Implementation Plan*. Moving toward the objective that will allow the Trans Canada Trail sections of the route to be marketable to the public in 2017, **the highest priority for infrastructure improvement are the sections of Highway 17 between North Bay and Sturgeon Falls, and Highway 17 between Hagar and Coniston**. Without cycling specific infrastructure, these sections of Highway 17 create a barrier in the connectivity of the route due to the high volume of motor vehicle and truck traffic.
9. Consider **hard surfacing** roads in Papineau-Cameron, Calvin, West Nipissing and French River. It should be noted that as part of the developing provincial cycling network, new funding opportunities may become available in the future to ease the burden on already tight municipal budgets. Callander and North Bay have already benefited from cycling specific infrastructure funding as a recipient of MTO's Municipal Cycling Infrastructure Program.
10. The vision for the Voyageur Cycling Route is a continuous cycling **route connecting to the Nation's Capital** and as such, the Working Group should continue to work with partners in the Ottawa Valley to determine the most appropriate extension of the route into southeastern Ontario.

Long-term Objectives

11. Consider the addition of **paved shoulders** on moderate volume municipal roads when budgets allow
12. Develop the **interpretive aspects** of the cycling route with special focus on the natural history and heritage values
13. Local municipalities should develop **secondary bicycling itineraries** to attract cyclists interested in loop rides
14. Work with the Province to provide potable water and other amenities appropriate to cyclists at **provincially maintained rest areas** along stretches of Highway 17 with limited services for cyclists

