

Submission by the Greenspace Alliance to the NCC on the Parkways Draft Planning and Design Guidelines

10 October 2024

The Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital is pleased to take this opportunity to make known its views on the early draft of the *NCC Parkways Planning and Design Guidelines* made public in September 2024.

As an organization of individuals and citizens' groups working to protect significant green spaces and precious natural heritage in Canada's Capital area, we support NCC efforts to sustain the Capital parkways as scenic corridors of outstanding regional, provincial and national significance that evoke a sense of place and tell a story that links together the route, its special characteristics and the surrounding area to create a unique experience for users. The Greenspace Alliance seeks to conserve the natural areas and scenic corridors threaded by the parkways.

The Parkways are distinctive elements of the landscape of our Capital region, a testament to the history of the region's visionary federal planners from the 1800's. We acknowledge that the early goals of the parkways for pleasurable driving and visual interest have faded in favour of traffic efficiency and capacity. Some of our parkways, originally designed to carry few cars at relatively low speeds, are now accommodating many commuters at higher speeds. This is the dilemma of our Capital parkways today - highly used, fraught with challenges due to the disjuncture between their original conception and their current incarnation as commuter routes.

We embrace the concept of the parkway as connoting a strip of land of varying width containing a gently curvilinear roadway within park-like or landscaped surroundings, requiring slower speeds, with minimal intersections with local roads and without direct access from abutting private property owners. We feel strongly that green roadside treatment and planting are necessary parts of the parkway to achieve a park-like effect. We regard the parkways system as a key component of the public urban green spaces and green infrastructure that promote well-being and community cohesion. The NCC is strongly urged to maintain and enhance the key principles of accessibility, inclusivity, and harmonious blend of natural and built elements as part of the long-term vision for the parkways as effective and essential means of threading nature into urban life.

We acknowledge that the main original purpose of the parkways for pleasurable driving and visual interest have been impacted by increased car and bicycle use for commuting purposes. This we feel is a consequence of peak period transportation options in Ottawa that have become increasingly challenging. Some of our parkways, originally designed to carry few cars and bicycles at relatively low speeds, are now accommodating many commuters. This is the dilemma of our Capital parkways today - ensuring that a higher volume of vehicles during peak hours does not jeopardize their proper maintenance and safe use for recreational purposes.

We support in principle the proposed *Planning and Design Guidelines* and trust they will sustain and augment the distinctive qualities and features of the parkways that favour the pleasant experiential quality of the travel offered and will reinforce the high quality of design elements that both attract users and also serve as conservation tools.

The Greenspace Alliance urges the NCC to consider and treat parkways as corridors that conserve and enhance natural and built scenic qualities, heritage values and cultural assets. We also urge the NCC to entrench the protection of the Capital Parkway system by way of policies that are mandatory and go beyond the suggestive or advisory nature of “guidelines”.

The preservation of pristine and scenic areas should be genuine and less flexible, particularly in the area of nature and green space conservation. For instance, we expect the updated policies and design elements will include parkway frontage requirements that provide ample and sufficient setbacks from adjacent built environments and structures to preserve the unique landscape character of the relevant parkway(s).

We believe that the Capital parkways contribute substantially to quality of life for all, help celebrate scenic spaces, waterfront parks, cultural assets, and heritage features. The parkways also cultivate a sense of place and embrace the conservation of our natural environment. It is essential that the proposed policies and guidelines do not detract from these fundamental functions. It is also fundamental that the NCC develop management plans for the parkways.

In summary, Greenspace Alliance believes strongly that parkways are an intrinsic part of the Capital region’s green infrastructure and natural capital, including linear parks, ecological areas, and woodlands and wetlands. They weave together various aspects of place making, environmental responsibility, landscape planning and design, and offer access to green spaces and corridors where people can enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of contact with nature.

It is important to note that the future integrity and enjoyment of the Capital parkways as well as the Greenbelt and Gatineau Park cannot be dissociated from how the City of Ottawa and Ville de Gatineau govern their transportation systems and manage urban growth. It is incumbent on the NCC to play a more active role in ensuring closer collaboration with municipal partners to ensure the long-term integrity of its parkways through harmonious and cooperative planning of the regional transportation system.

We look forward to more details as the NCC elaborates on the policies and guidelines as well as management strategies in the next iteration of the parkway policies and design guidelines.

Sincerely,

Paul Johanis
Chair
Greenspace Alliance of Canada’s Capital