REIMAGINE
CATWALKS **playbook**

POLICY
COMPANION

Sustainable Calgary

WHAT ARE CATWALKS?

Catwalks are pathways that weave through 134 neighbourhoods in Calgary. They squeeze between houses, skip busy roads and create shortcuts to schools, parks, transit stops and local shops. These community assets have the potential to support low-carbon travel, physical activity and neighbourhood bumping spaces but no policies guide their care. We want to change that. Welcome to the catwalks policy companion.

Our Vision: Active citizens, safe kids, clean air, and a healthy city.

STREET

CATWALK

LANEWAY

CATWALK

STREET
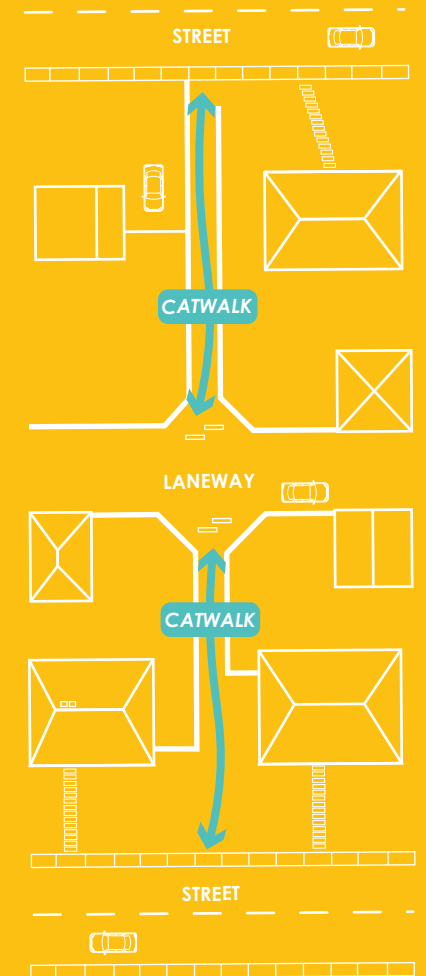
"I don't walk after dark. I worry about safety."... "back alleys need more lighting at night - I see people hanging out, and leaving cans of beer." Marlborough residents, 2016

Improving the pedestrian network - laneways, catwalks, sidewalk width, lighting and winter maintenance - consistently ranked as top priorities in Marlborough.

Hot Spots

"We're out in the yard last night and see the children with their families cycling through the space, stopping to admire all of the art on display. I actually overheard one of the boys asking his father about all the different birds eating out of the feeders you made! I'm really proud to see work like this in my community."

HOW IT ALL STARTED

In 2016, residents of Marlborough brought Catwalks - or "engineered walkways" - to our attention. Catwalks are essential - they cut neighbourhood walking times in half - but today, they're inaccessible and unsafe. We wanted to change that. We've worked with 16 communities on 30 projects bringing together professional designers and residents of all ages to make catwalks feel safe and fun. But we know that for meaningful change to happen, citizen action and policy change need to go hand in hand. This booklet makes that case.

CATWALKS AS SPACES FOR CHANGE

Catwalks, in their finest form, could make our neighbourhoods walkable places. Walkable places welcome children, seniors, people with disabilities, and new parents to the community. They ensure shift workers can get home safely. Walking improves public health, inspires creativity, boosts the local economy and reduces our carbon footprint.

Unfortunately, we have a walking deficit. Canadian kids and seniors clocked a D+ on physical activity last year, and diseases that can come from that inactivity - like obesity, type 2 diabetes, and chronic heart disease - are at all time highs. Greenhouse gases from personal transportation are on the rise. These trends can be reversed when policy and investment make active transportation the easy choice.

Catwalks could play a unique role. Not only do they provide convenient shortcuts to school for otherwise sedentary kids, they could awaken their imagination. Often, issues like climate change and public health seem too big to tackle - citizens want to make a difference, but they don't know where to start. Catwalks provide local pieces of infrastructure, relevant to residents' everyday lives, that are small enough to tackle. In catwalks, making change seems possible.

Catwalks are a great place to start!

Sustainable Calgary proudly supports the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. The Reimagine Catwalks project promotes active transportation and brings an inclusive approach to designing healthy, equitable places. The intended impact is to improve public health and health equity, diversify representation in decision-making, reduce pollution, and mitigate climate change. For more check out our Playbook SDG edition.

Catwalks shorten travel time…
…and complete walking networks

SCHOOL

BUS STOP
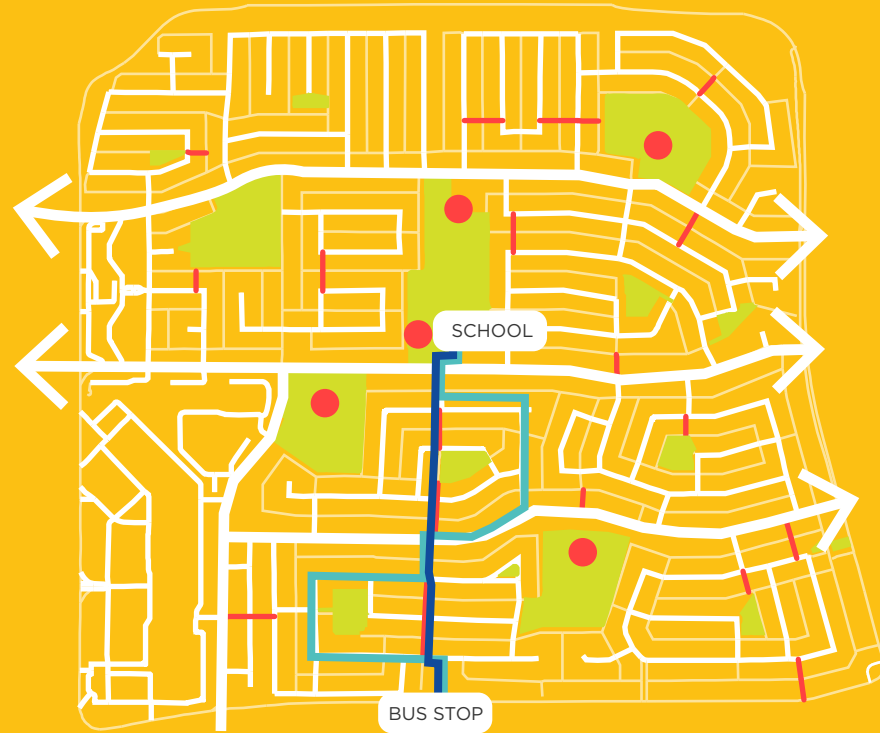
M A R L B O R O U G H

Jouney **Without** Catwalk

22 min
1.8 km

Journey **With** Catwalk

12 min
1.0 km

● School

— Catwalk

— Laneway

— Road

▮ Park

Mazegates: The Barrier To Equitable Use:

Well-connected communities provide an essential foundation for civic life, providing access to services and amenities for all residents. Maze gates, unfortunately, restrict equal access for certain users, impacting their quality, degree of interaction and experience within the built environment

WHY CATWALKS ARE AMAZING ASSETS

—

They provide bite-sized solutions to big issues like climate change and public health.

People walk more when there are destinations to walk to and great paths to get them there. Catwalks could be those great paths.

$\frac{2}{3}$ of household greenhouse gas emissions in Canada come from personal transportation

Transit users are healthier simply from walking to and from transit stops

Active kids manage stress better and have an easier time in the classroom

WHAT CHANGE COULD LOOK LIKE
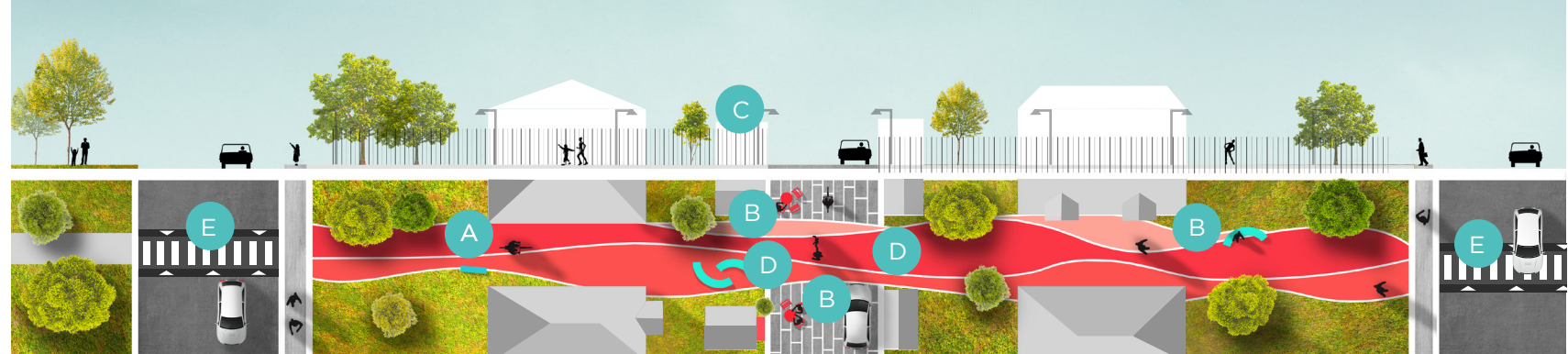
POCKET PARK

CATWALK

LANEWAY

CATWALK

A **Productivity.** Creating productive spaces that bring communities together.

B **Activity.** Encouraging pedestrian activity through the creation of useful, safe comfortable and interesting spaces.

C **Lighting.** Installation of lighting to improve visibility and increase safety.

D **Equity.** Removal of maze gates to improve accessibility for wheelchairs, strollers, trolleys and electric scooters.

E **Traffic Calming.** Installation of speed tables to elevate the pedestrian - protecting users as well as providing a continuous connection to the catwalk system.

WHY THEY'RE IMPERFECT

Snow

"We're all aging. My neighbours have been here since we bought the place in the 70s. We can't maintain the catwalks anymore, especially in the winter, it's just not safe for seniors"

Maze Gates

"I almost crashed into a maze gate trying to get my bike through. I have a family member that uses a mobility device. Fortunately no such gates where they walk, otherwise they would have trouble."

THEY'RE HARD TO CHANGE...
BUT WE KNOW THEY HAVE TO

Existing Policy Supports Catwalks Improvement

Catwalks have the potential to make Calgary a healthy, climate friendly city, but they fall into a policy black hole. No one is obligated to shovel snow, lighting must be requested and paid for by residents, problems have to be reported through 3-1-1, and no process exists for citizens to improve them. With no funds or policies guiding their care, catwalks are hard to change.

Thankfully, we aren't starting from square one. Our City recognizes catwalks as important and many of their own documents advocate for change. Here are a few:

Step Forward - Pedestrian Strategy

Actions:

"Undertake an assessment of engineered walkways, develop a management plan, amend the bylaw to address public concerns, and identify funding requirements to upgrade and maintain the walkways city wide." (pg.84)

Age Friendly Strategy

"Walking is an important means of transportation... older adults and other stakeholders identified accessibility challenges within the pedestrian environment in Calgary, particularly in the winter.

Actions:

Implement safe crosswalk design standards; manage and maintain sidewalks to reduce obstacles; support the communication and promotion of a culture of walking; implement a bylaw to ensure proper maintenance of engineered walkways and laneways" (pg.11)

2018 Climate Mitigation Action Plan

"How we design our neighbourhoods has a significant impact on the energy needed to move goods and people around Calgary. The City can tailor plans and policies for existing and future neighbourhoods to reduce the impact of emissions and energy consumption.

The key actions are:

Enable increased walking and cycling

5.1 Continue to implement Step Forward, the Cycling Strategy and Complete Streets

5.2 Enhance the safety and accessibility of walking and cycling for all citizens" (pg.44-45)

5A Network Guiding Principles

Actions:

"The Always Available for All Ages & Abilities will be a city wide network that aims to have:

• Fewer barriers like off-set gates,

• Smoother surface materials,

And improve safety by:

• Separating people according to their speed where appropriate,

• Improving visibility through lighting and paint striping, and

• Providing a reliable experience through additional year-round maintenance." (pg.3)

HOW WE COULD GET THERE

Part A – Learning From Others

Calgarians are invested in making their neighbourhoods amazing, but they need support. Here's how other places bridge city responsibility and community action:

Victoria, BC - My Great Neighbourhood Grant Program - Projects for and by community members are funded by the city and supported by city staff who help them navigate policy and city departments.

Portland, OR - Portland in the Streets provides a permit coordinator to help communities transform public spaces for placemaking, community gatherings or programming. Equity is central, and a culture of "everything is allowed" encourages participation and creativity. The program is guided by a strategy that promotes independence and support within city administration.

Halifax, NS - Participatory Budgeting - The city provides funds to communities for local projects and the community decides how the money should be spent.

Montreal, QC - Ruelles vertes - The city supports citizens to change alleyways from single-use spaces for cars to places for play, gardening, and connection. Citizens decide what their alleys will look like, and the ward provides the funds to complete the projects.

Bridgeland, Calgary, AB - Bridgeland installed wayfinding and rest areas to help local seniors get around the neighbourhood safely and comfortably. The community did the planning and leg work and the project was funded by the Calgary Parking Authority and Alberta Transportation. No existing process made this happen, but a clear process would make it easier for other communities to borrow from this amazing local work.

Part B – A Strategy For Our City's Catwalks

We have a unique opportunity for a made-in-Calgary approach to breathe life into these pathways, giving them a distinct community character and connecting them seamlessly to the neighbourhood active transportation network. To make that happen, we need a clear strategy and solid policy to support it. Core principles of this strategy should include:

MAKE A PLAN Follow through with existing policy recommendations to "undertake an assessment of engineered walkways, develop a management plan, amend the bylaw to address public concerns, and identify funding requirements to upgrade and maintain the walkways city wide." City of Calgary, Step Forward Pedestrian Strategy, Action 31

BUDGET Pair plan with adequate funding. When we looked at other cities, it was no secret why their infrastructure was great. They saw the need and the benefit, and put money towards making infrastructure equitable, accessible, and amazing.

EQUITY FIRST Identify priority investment routes based on community need (rates of pedestrian collisions, rates of disability, socio-economic status).

LITTLE CATWALKS, BIG CHANGE
Ensure catwalks contribute to municipal and neighbourhood active transportation networks like the City of Calgary's city-wide 5A Network and Sustainable Calgary's proposed Neighbourhood Active Transportation Networks.

A Neighbourhood Active Transportation Network is infrastructure that prioritizes people on foot or bike, and conveniently, safely and enjoyably connects them with local destinations.

MAKE A STRATEGY:
OUR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1 BEST PRACTICES
Adapt design and maintenance practices:

- Remove maze gates
- Traffic-calming at crossings
- Improve curb cuts
- Incorporate lighting
- Post wayfinding
- Assign department jurisdiction over year-round maintenance
- Refine best practices through prototyping and evaluation
- Evaluate frequency of use, diversity of users, enjoyment, and safety
- Design catwalks for all seasons and all times of day

2 CO-DESIGN
Develop a program to help citizens get involved.

- **INTAKE:** Develop a simple intake process for community project ideas.
- Assign 'project champions' at the City to help communities achieve their vision and navigate departments and paperwork
- **FUNDING:** Create a budget for community-led projects and/or identify grant opportunities for citizens.
- **CULTURE:** Adopt a culture of assisting communities to achieve their vision.
- Develop an understanding among departments that communities will be encouraged to move forward with their projects.
- **EVALUATION:** Identify and track barriers to implementation
- Review barriers annually and adapt guidelines as needed.

3 PROTOTYPE
Fund prototype programs to advance best practices and inform strategy.

A few ideas:

- Pair maze-gate removal and curb cuts with low-cost traffic-calming measures that could be replicated in the future through citizen-led projects. Develop a 'menu' of these low-cost measures.
- Test lighting techniques (solar powered, linked to grid, ground lighting, overhead lighting) for effectiveness, lasting power, popularity and cost.
- Select 20 catwalks redesigns via a competition evaluated by professionals. Implementation funded by the City and bid upon by communities.
- Task schoolchildren to redesign catwalks near their schools as part of a more comprehensive Safe Routes to School program. Implement and evaluate them.

4 ITERATE
Make early prototyping and evaluation central to a long-term plan for catwalks. Learn from effectiveness and cost of interventions to refine next steps.

5 ALIGN
Identify opportunities for strategy alignment with other initiatives and capital projects:

- Safe routes to school programs
- Renovations of public buildings or infrastructure upgrades
- 5A Network
- Canada Healthy Communities Initiative funding
- Parks and Recreation program

A BIGGER PICTURE WHAT IMPROVING CATWALKS COULD HELP US ACHIEVE

We want catwalks to be integral parts of complete walking networks, meaning they are part of routes that are safe and pleasant for everyone, from start to finish. Collectively, we call these routes Neighbourhood Active Transportation Networks. They connect important community and regional destinations like healthcare facilities, schools, grocery stores and recreation centers.

Bringing them to life could make walking everyone's first choice because it is safe, fun, and convenient. For more, check out our publication "Neighbourhood Active Transportation Networks Policy."
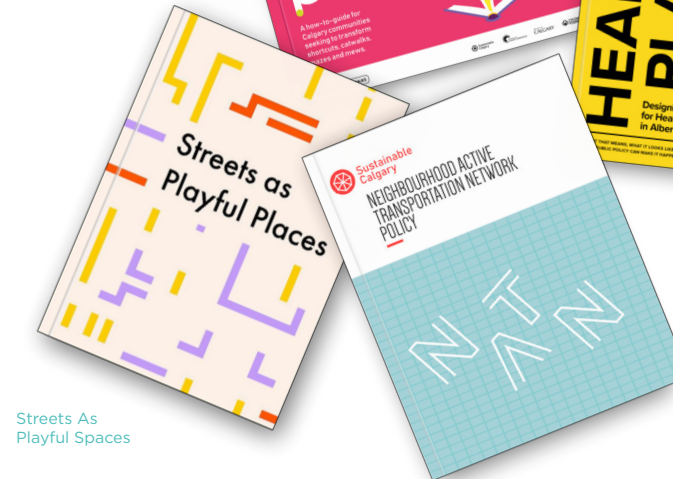
Designing for health equity, low carbon and vision zero.

Catwalks Playbook

Healthy Places: Designing For Health in Alberta

Neighbouhood Active Transportation Network

Streets As Playful Spaces

Our mission is to encourage and support community-level actions and initiatives that make Calgary a safer, healthier, more sustainable city. Projects are based on our State of the City reports, which identify where interventions are needed. Recent work with communities focuses on municipal design and planning processes. Our expertise is producing credible research, and engaging with communities to participate in research, discussion and action. We would love to work with you!

Sustainable Calgary

sustainablecalgary.org
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