



Cortes Island

Active Transportation Network Plan

Appendix A | Background Report

Acknowledgments

This Background Report was prepared by ISL Engineering and Land Services Ltd. with input from the Regional District of Strathcona staff and Board, community members, partners, and interest holders.



Table of Contents

At a Glance	A1
A1. Community Overview	A3
A2. Background Document Review	A5
A3. Census Overview	A8
A4. Key Destinations	A11
A5. Existing Infrastructure	A13
A6. Gap Analysis	A15

Community Direction

To develop a transportation system that meets the needs of Island residents and visitors, yet does not detract from the area's rural Northern Gulf Island character



Existing Infrastructure

There are no adequate on-road, or roadside active transportation facilities resulting in a considerable barrier to active transportation use across the island

Limited Comfort Today

Most people walking and cycling along island roadways are confined to narrow shoulders or must share the roadway with motor vehicle traffic



Targets

The Province has set a target of doubling the proportion of trips taken using active transportation by 2030



Small Connectivity Upgrades

Improvements to routes people already use today to walk and bike around the island can support more active trips



Finding Other Ways to Improve Safety

Improvements can range in scale and even smaller projects can promote a culture of safer roads



A1. Community Overview

A1.1. The Island

Cortes Island is a rural island within the Strathcona Regional District (SRD). There are approximately 1,000 full-time residents spread mainly across three village centres: Whaletown, Squirrel Cove, and Mansons Landing. The community is characterized by its natural features, recreational opportunities, marine access, and is home to the Klahoose First Nation.

Cortes Island is a diverse island, rich in natural features and recreational opportunities with a selection of marine, lake, and forest parks and trails that offer hiking, mountain biking, and watersports.

The Klahoose First Nation traditional territories span from Cortes Island to Toba Inlet. The Nation's primary village site at Squirrel Cove is home to approximately 75 full-time residents

who live and work on Cortes Island and in the surrounding areas.

Prior to roadways being constructed in the 1970s, these communities were accessed by boat; marine access to each remains in place.

Distance from the Whaletown ferry terminal to the island's largest village area, Mansons Landing, is approximately 13 kilometers. This is beyond a reasonable walking distance and also beyond a comfortable cycling distance for many given the lack of safe facilities.

The SRD, in partnership with several community groups and contractors, develops and maintains a growing system of parks and trails. On Cortes Island, the SRD Parks Service manages 12 parks and several trails that connect to various amenities across the island.

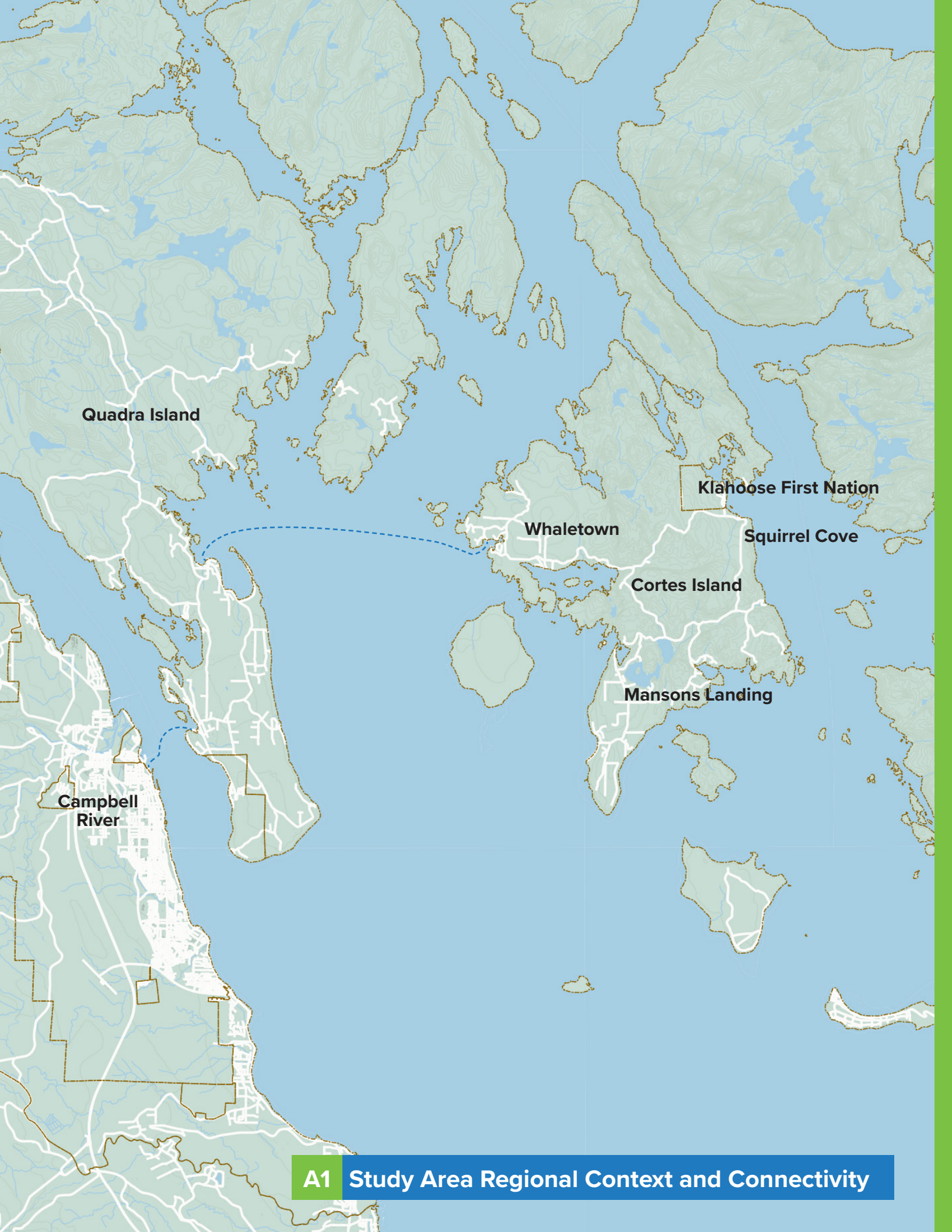
A1.2. The Transportation Network

Accommodation for people walking and cycling on Cortes Island is predominantly facilitated through roads shared with vehicles, as well as the available trail networks. People walking and cycling along island roadways are generally confined to narrow shoulders or must share the roadway with motor vehicle traffic.

A lack of pedestrian infrastructure, combined with longer travel distances between key destinations, result in unfavourable conditions for travel by active modes. In the centre of Mansons Landing, however, two pedestrian crossings and a roadside gravel shoulder are provided.

Amenities such as bike racks and benches can be found across the island; however, they are limited and predominantly provided in semi-public or private spaces, such as at local businesses and marinas.

Marine access through beach pathways and trailheads, as well as boat launches and marinas are also available. These marine accesses are provided federally, regionally, and through private marinas. Although this study has focused on active transportation related to walking, cycling, and rolling, active transportation does also include water-based travel that could be further considered as a travel mode in an Official Community Plan (OCP) update.



Quadra Island

Klahoose First Nation

Whaletown

Squirrel Cove

Cortes Island

Mansons Landing

Campbell River

A2. Background Document Review

A2.1. Cortes Island Official Community Plan (OCP) | Bylaw No. 139, July 2012

The OCP provides a strong foundation for the Active Transportation Network Plan (ATNP) with its emphasis on sustainability, inclusivity, and community well-being. The OCP envisions Cortes Island as a cooperative, self-reliant, and resilient community that values low-carbon living, environmental stewardship, and individual freedom.

Recreational infrastructure and parks are identified as being integral to active transportation on the island. The OCP supports the development of trails and greenways for both recreational and transportation to connect village areas, parks, beaches, and community amenities.

“
To develop a transportation system that meets the needs of Island residents and visitors, yet does not detract from the area’s rural Northern Gulf Island character.
”

Environmental stewardship and climate action are key themes. For example, it promotes development practices that minimize ecological disruption, while also calling for strategies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions -- objectives

This vision supports active transportation as a means of reducing reliance on fossil fuels, enhancing public health, and fostering local connectivity. While active transportation best practices have evolved since the OCP was prepared, the island’s context has not changed substantially and the OCP still presents valuable direction.

that align with active transportation goals.

The transportation objectives promote improvements to connectivity and mobility for residents of all ages and abilities. These objectives encourage collaboration with provincial agencies to maintain road infrastructure, support potential transit options, and advocate for pedestrian-friendly infrastructure like pathways and crosswalks. The plan also suggests infrastructure that supports electric vehicles and alternative transportation, to align with CleanBC goals.

From a health and quality of life perspective, the OCP highlights the need for safe, inclusive, and accessible infrastructure that supports physical activity and social engagement. Active transportation contributes directly to these goals by creating opportunities for daily exercise and connection that happens more easily when people are not stuck behind a windshield.

Overall, the OCP supports the enhancement of active transportation options to support broader community goals. This alignment offers a clear policy direction for the SRD and its partners to pursue capital improvements, prioritize network gaps, and enhance the equity and resiliency of the transportation system in a way that is reflective of Cortes Island’s unique context.

A2.2. Active Transportation Conditions Report, June 2022

This recent report prepared for SRD provides a lot of valuable insights to the development of a plan and it's content has been carried through many of the sections of this Background Report

Most residents walking or cycling must share narrow roads with vehicles, raising safety concerns, especially along routes such as Whaletown Road, Gorge Harbour Road, Seaford

Road, and Sutil Point Road. People walking sometimes have gravel pathways and shoulders to walk on but few to no formal sidewalks or crossing locations.

The report identifies several priority gaps and needs.

These are included in the gap analysis section of this Background Report and relate to trails, dedicated pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, road safety, integration with other modes, education, and enforcement.

Overall, the report paints a picture of a community with interest in active transportation but constrained by limited infrastructure and challenging topography.

“
There are no adequate on-road, or roadside active transportation facilities resulting in a considerable barrier to active transportation use across the island.
”

The report provides a detailed snapshot of the current state of active transportation infrastructure, challenges, and community needs on Cortes Island based on field observations, survey data, and community input to outline existing gaps and barriers for walking, cycling, and other human-powered modes of travel.

The report notes that getting around by active transportation is challenging for many people. There are virtually no dedicated cycling facilities, and even basic accommodations like paved shoulders, wayfinding, and bike parking are limited.

“
Most people walking and cycling along island roadways are confined to narrow shoulders or must share the roadway with motor vehicle traffic.
”

A2.3. Provincial and Federal Strategies

The Cortes Island ATNP will support provincial and federal objectives around active transport and road safety.

The provincial and federal active transportation and road safety strategies provide a framework that aligns with the goals of the Cortes Island ATNP. At the provincial level, British Columbia's Active Transportation Strategy—*Move. Commute. Connect.*—is a key policy document that supports the CleanBC climate plan. It aims to double the percentage of trips taken using active transportation by 2030. The strategy prioritizes creating safe, accessible, and integrated active transportation networks for all ages and abilities. It emphasizes collaboration with local and Indigenous governments, equity in access to transportation, and the integration of active transportation with public transit and land use planning. The *BC Active Transportation Design Guide* (2019) offers design guidance to meet these objectives including for rural and small communities such as Cortes Island.

Complementing this is the *BC Road Safety*

By 2030, the province has set a target of doubling the proportion of trips taken using active transportation.

Strategy 2025: A Collaborative Framework, which adopts the Vision Zero approach—seeking to eliminate serious injuries and fatalities on the road. It outlines initiatives like speed management, safer road designs, and educational campaigns—all tailored to

reducing risks for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists.

At the federal level, Canada's *National Active Transportation Strategy*—the first of its kind—was launched in 2021. It envisions all Canadians, regardless of age or ability, having access to safe and convenient active transportation infrastructure. It identifies six key pillars under the ACTIVE framework: awareness, coordination, targets, investments, value, and experience. The strategy is backed by a \$400 million Active Transportation Fund to support new and improved infrastructure across the country. In parallel, Canada's *Road Safety Strategy 2025* also reinforces Vision Zero principles and promotes a safe systems approach that includes safer road users, vehicles, and infrastructure. It encourages all jurisdictions to adopt context-specific safety measures, particularly those that benefit rural and remote communities.

No loss of life on our roads is acceptable.

These federal and provincial strategies directly inform and reinforce the objectives of the Cortes Island ATNP. This ATNP aims to improve safety, comfort, and accessibility for people walking, cycling, and rolling in a rural island context with limited roadway infrastructure. The plan will align with provincial and federal priorities and, by doing so, the ATNP positions the SRD and Cortes Island to access external funding to implement best practices that support these wider goals.

A3. Census Overview

A review of high level census metrics were undertaken for Cortes Island using the latest available 2021 Census as well as a comparison with the previous 2016 census.

Population

The island has a population of 1,059 residents, compared to approximately 48,150 residents in Strathcona Regional District as a whole, and thus representing about 2.4% of the Regional District's population. This is an increase from 1,035 in 2016 indicating only a very slight increase in population of 2.3% on the island.

Age Profile

The population of Cortes Island skews older with an average age of 52.2 years, compared with the SRD (46.4 years) and BC (43.1 years) averages. Many residents are retirees or older working adults. This age structure has implications for accessibility and mobility, especially for active transportation. Given that the average age was 5-years younger in the 2016 census (48.3%), this suggests limited movement on and off the Island and that people are aging in place.

Housing

Cortes Island has 555 occupied private dwellings, up from 535 in 2016. These are primarily single-detached homes (525), many of which are off-grid or seasonally occupied. Homeownership is high at 88%, relative to the Regional District (74%) and BC as a whole (67%) and there is an average household size of 1.9, the same as in 2016.

Income

Average household income on Cortes Island is approximately \$41,200, an increase from 32,395 in 2016. This income is lower than both the Regional District (\$48,840) and the BC average (\$54,450).

Mode Share

For travel to work, the census indicates that 11.1% walked, 7.4% biked, 55.6% drove, 13% were a passenger, and 13% used other means such as a boat or ATV. Based on these statistics travel to work is far more active on Cortes than the Regional District (5.1% walked, 1.4% biked) and British Columbia as a whole (5.5% walked, 2% biked).

The values have changed since 2016, where 15.7% walked, 8.6% biked, 61.4% drove, 7.1% were a passenger, and 7.1% used other means.

However, it should be noted that travel to work is only captured in the long-form census questionnaire and the sample size may have been small for Cortes Island. Furthermore, Covid-19 may have influenced work from home, with 80 of 445 employees noting work from home in 2021. No data is available to compare with 2016.

Lastly, it's important to recognize that while census travel to work data provides one easily available measure of mode-share, it does not capture the many other trips made in a day, that can often be carried out by active modes such as child care, shopping, socializing, etc.

Census highlights are provided on the following page.

Census Trends

Cortes Island is home to **1059** residents

There are 804 private dwellings many off grid

Walking mode share for travel to work **11.1%**

Cycling mode share for travel to work **7.4%**

558 homes are usually occupied

228 commute within census subdivision

80 worked from home

The average age is **52.2**

490 people are employed, 50 unemployed, 450 not in labour force

The average income is **\$41,200**



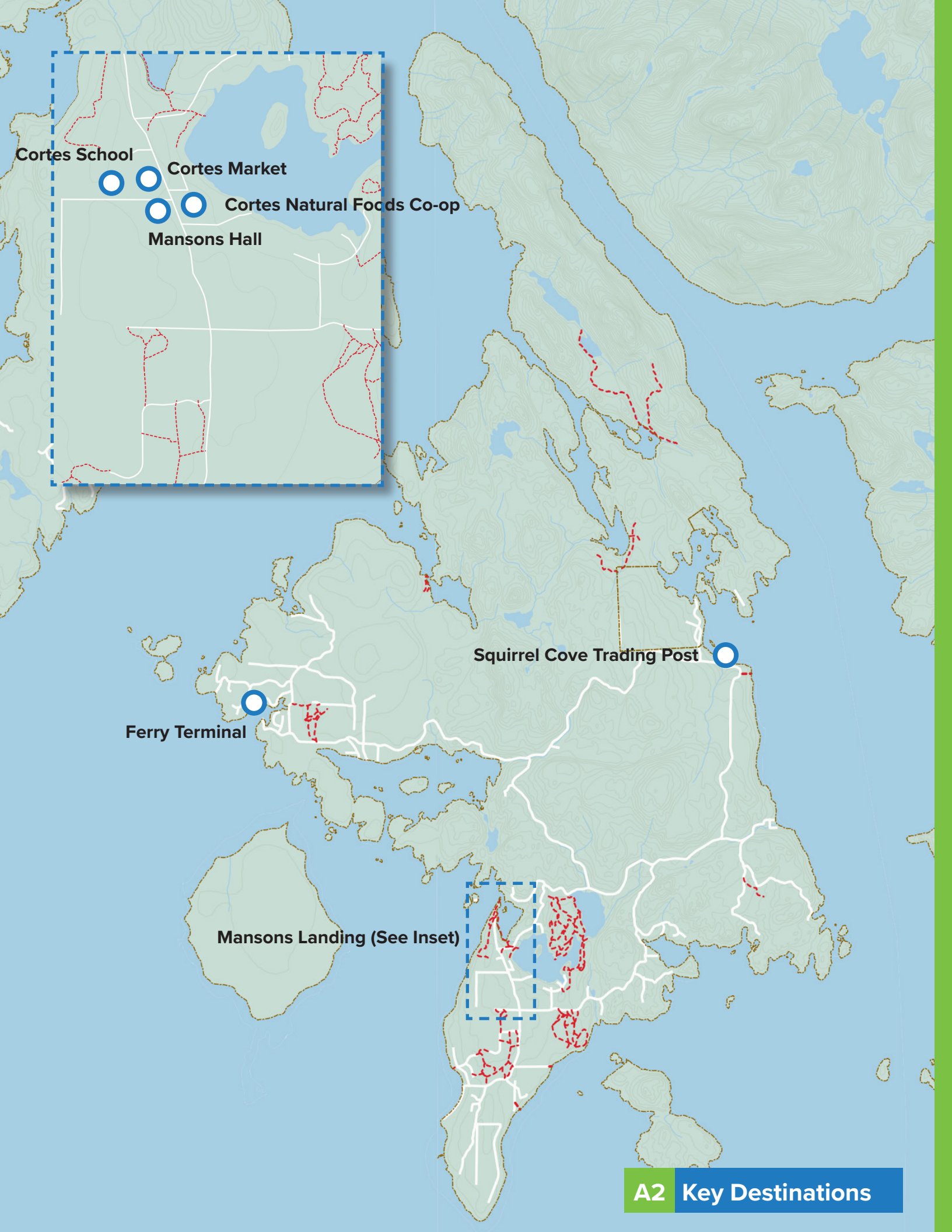
A4. Key Destinations

The three main village centres are spaced quite far apart, making them less suitable for trips on foot. While they also include a reasonable amount of climbing if someone were to use a bicycle, these destinations could easily be reached by anybody comfortable using an electric bicycle or other electric micromobility device. Table A4.1 compares approximate travel times and levels of effort required to travel between Whaletown, Squirrel Cove, and Mansons Landing.

Table A4.1: Key Trip Origin-Destination Information

	Whaletown (Ferry)	Squirrel Cove (Trading Post)	Mansons Landing (Mansons Hall)
Whaletown (Ferry)		14.6 km 259m elevation gain 20 min drive 64 min cycle 38 min e-bike 3 hr 27m walk	15.9 km 229m elevation gain 22 min drive 67 min cycle 40 min e-bike 3 hr 42m walk
Squirrel Cove (Trading Post)	14.6 km 251m elevation gain 20 min drive 64 min cycle 38 min e-bike 3 hr 25m walk		11.1 km 170m elevation gain 14 min drive 48 min cycle 29 min e-bike 2 hr 36m walk
Mansons Landing (Mansons Hall)	15.9 km 196m elevation gain 22 min drive 62 min cycle 37 min e-bike 3 hr 41m walk	11.1 km 143m elevation gain 15 min drive 44 min cycle 26 min e-bike 2 hr 34m walk	

Travel times for driving, cycling and walking, distance and elevation determined using Google Maps. E-bike travel times estimated assuming a 40% reduction in travel time.



Cortes School



Cortes Market



Cortes Natural Foods Co-op

Mansons Hall

Squirrel Cove Trading Post



Ferry Terminal



Mansons Landing (See Inset)

A5. Existing Infrastructure

The Road Network

All paved routes for walking and biking are rural roadways shared with motor vehicles, often without shoulders or centre lines, and often winding with relatively steep grades. They are conditions typically considered uncomfortable for less confident people to walk or ride a bike, and challenging from a physical perspective. Given the island context and generally low vehicle volumes, some people may be tolerant mixing with traffic, assuming they have the physical ability to navigate the terrain or are supported by an electric-assist device.

Arriving from the ferry, a regulatory road sign notes that the posted speed limit on the island is 60 km/h unless otherwise posted. There are examples where the posted speed limit reduces; for example, to 30 km/h adjacent to the school during school days and times.

For many people, walking is suitable only for short trips, but this could be as part of a longer multi-modal trip by car or bicycle, to friends and neighbours close to their own homes, or if able, longer trips in the community. Getting around by bicycle is a more realistic option for many if it's safe.

The roads are naturally a direct connection for active transportation, but are limited in their effectiveness in capturing latent demand for walking and biking given how uncomfortable they can be to share with fast moving motor vehicles. In some cases, gravel shoulders can provide a more surface for people walking and biking, although vehicles parked in these shoulders may limit access to them.

The Trail Network

While the road network can be a direct travel choice for people walking and biking, the trail networks on the island offer routes that can be more comfortable and even in some cases more time competitive than sharing the roadway with vehicles.

Unpaved facilities such as trails are, however, less accessible than paved surfaces and are not generally suitable for people of all ages and abilities, particularly as adverse weather conditions deteriorate the trails over time. Other challenges that limit the accessibility of trails include irregular maintenance, overgrowth, and a lack of lighting after dark.

Transit

Transit can combine with active transportation to make longer trips more manageable. Apart from the Klahoose Community Bus, there is no formal transit service, taxi, or ride hailing services offered on Cortes Island. The only public transit service available is the BC Ferries service to and from Quadra Island.



A6. Gap Analysis

A traditional analysis would indicate the entire island is a gap in terms of providing comfortable active transportation infrastructure suitable for all ages and abilities. The roadways are shared with traffic moving at much higher speeds and through winding terrain. Additionally, the trail system will not be navigable by everyone in the community.

Gaps, therefore, must be considered in context and, ultimately, projects recommended in the Active Transportation Network Plan will need to consider what can be reasonably achieved. Gaps in the Island's active transportation network have been identified based on the previously prepared Active Transportation Conditions Report (2022), as well as both analysis and public engagement for this Active Transportation Network Plan. Findings are summarized below.

A6.1. Previous Conditions Report Gaps

The following gaps were previously identified by the 2022 Active Transportation Conditions Report:

- **Trails:** Key missing links include the connection from the Siskin Forest Trail to Mansons Landing and a new trail from Linnea Farm to Kw'as Park to provide safer alternatives to high-traffic roads.
- **Cycling Infrastructure:** There is a complete absence of marked or protected bike lanes. While some refer to road shoulders as bike facilities, these are often unpaved and insufficient in width or condition for safe travel.
- **Road Safety:** Speeds of 60 km/h are standard on most roads but are considered too high by many residents. Gravel shoulders, poor road conditions, and lack of lighting exacerbate risks for active users. Informal signs posted by residents reflect local safety concerns.
- **Pedestrian Infrastructure:** Pedestrian facilities such as crosswalks are nearly nonexistent outside of a small area in Mansons Landing. Areas with relatively high activity, such as Hague and Gunflint Lakes, the Gorge Harbour area, and trail-road crossings, lack basic pedestrian amenities.
- **Modal Integration:** Connections between walking/cycling routes and the ferry or school bus stops are poorly supported. Amenities such as bike racks, shelters, or signage at terminals are rare or absent.
- **Education and Promotion:** There is a clear opportunity for education campaigns to improve awareness and encourage active travel, though these are not currently active.

A6.2. Additional Gaps

The following additional gaps were identified based on technical analysis of existing conditions and through feedback received during both online and in-person public engagement opportunities.

- 1. Road Safety in Mansons Landing:** High speeds have been noted for the Island in general but are of particular concern in Mansons Landing where there are relatively more people walking and biking, and where the advisory speed limit is lower but there is no traffic calming to promote it.
- 2. Designated Space for People Walking & Biking in Mansons Landing:** Being the Island's main hub, Mansons Landing would benefit from space designated for people walking and biking. This would enable more comfortable access to nearby commercial businesses, parks and trails, and the school.
- 3. Enhanced Safety Near Squirrel Cove:** Traffic calming or separated space for people walking and biking would enhance safe access to Squirrel Cove from the Klahoose First Nation's Tork 7 IR.
- 4. Road Safety between the Island's Hubs:** While separated pathways between all the Island's hubs is desirable in the long-term, it is likely to present major financial barriers in the short- to medium-terms. Safer road conditions can be promoted through other means, however, such as lower regulatory speed limits, new signage to promote safer driving behaviour around people walking and biking, and possibly through the use of additional advisory speed limits near areas where sightlines are obstructed.
- 5. Trail Upgrades:** Existing trails that see relatively more usage from those commuting to daily needs could be upgraded (i.e., more accessible surface materials, greater width, additional maintenance) to improve the convenience of walking and biking.