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# Healthy *Communities*

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And Planning For

## Active Transportation

Moving Forward on Active  
Transportation in Ontario's  
Communities

**A Call To Action**



Ontario  
Professional  
Planners  
Institute



The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) calls upon planners, the provincial government, municipalities, other related professionals, and members of the public to make active transportation a core mode of transportation for people of all ages across Ontario.

### **What is Active Transportation?**

Active transportation is defined as “non-motorized travel, including walking, cycling, rollerblading and movements with mobility devices,” according to the Ontario Ministry of Transportation’s [Transit Supportive Guidelines \(2012\)](#). The provincial active transportation network is shaped by many elements. These include sidewalks, on-road bicycle lanes and routes, off-road trails, multi-use pathways, bike parking, effective signage, transit equipped to support cycling and pedestrian crossings, as well as human-scaled and pedestrian-oriented development patterns.



Photo courtesy of Darryl Young

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## Why is Active Transportation Important?

Active transportation, particularly cycling and walking, is fundamental to healthy and sustainable communities. Building on the direction of OPPI's previous report—[Healthy Communities and Planning for Active Transportation - Planning and Implementing Active Transportation in Ontario Communities: A Call to Action, June, 2012](#)— the Institute is issuing this follow up Call to Action. OPPI continues to advocate moving forward on a province-wide active transportation system that is safe,

secure, efficient, convenient and equitable. Ontario needs a system that is based on good policy, planning principles and data that will serve present and future generations. This is key as many Ontario municipalities have established, or are in the process of establishing, policies and practices to place active transportation firmly within their regulatory frameworks. Further progress is needed, however, as few communities have implemented these policies in the development of their transportation network.



Photo courtesy of Darryl Young

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## Role of Planners in Active Transportation

Planners recognize the relationship between how communities are designed and built and the transportation choices that people make. Planners can make a positive contribution by helping to implement the provincial Cycling Strategy, in response to the recommendations in the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario's [Cycling Death Review](#) (June 2012) and [Pedestrian Death Review](#) (September 2012). The Office of the Chief Coroner reports that 129 cyclist deaths occurred between 2006 and 2010 and 95 pedestrian deaths occurred in 2010. In 2009 alone, over 26,000 people in Ontario visited an emergency department for the treatment of an injury sustained while cycling. The Office of the Chief Coroner states that "100% of [pedestrian and cyclist] deaths were preventable."



Widespread action is needed to implement an active transportation system that reduces automobile dependency, increases use of active transportation modes, addresses sedentary lifestyle issues, and decreases pedestrian and cyclist injuries and deaths throughout the province. Shifting public policy to prioritize a "complete streets" approach for the design of roadways and a human-centred approach for community development is a critical next step. The complete streets concept advocates that users of all ages and abilities be able to safely travel along or across roadways whether they are pedestrians, cyclists, public transit riders or motorists.



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## **Challenges for Ontarian's Using Active Transportation**

Opportunities for cycling and walking influence the physical activity levels and health of communities. As planners supporting the creation of healthy communities, it is critical that our actions support active transportation.

The Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario reports that two-thirds (66%) of Canadians are inactive and almost one-quarter (24%) of Canadians are obese. Active transportation as part of a daily routine can have a significant positive impact on an individual's health. Ontarians need their communities to be supportive of active transportation and they need their roadways safe for walking and cycling. The Chief Coroner, however, also notes that many people perceive safety as an issue with cycling/walking on the street network. As a result these people are less likely to cycle/walk themselves and likely to discourage their children from cycling and walking.

Planners need to be involved in addressing the complex factors at play which influence people's behaviours and choices related to walking and cycling on our roadways. Planners also need to understand the characteristics of a community that supports active transportation. These involve built form, culture and the interconnectivity of the various networks of transportation modes.

To succeed, planners must focus on the needs and capabilities of individuals, as well as entire communities. We need to shift the way we define land use patterns. We need to shift the emphasis from planning and designing roads for ease of use by people in motor vehicles, to planning and designing roads for the convenience and safety of each person, without one transportation mode dominating another.



Photograph courtesy of Loretta Ryan

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## The Planner's Role

Active transportation planning, design and promotion does not reside solely in the realm of planners. To implement it requires a multi-disciplinary approach involving engineers, urban designers, architects, landscape architects, public health professionals, politicians and members of the public. Within this context, the professional planners' roles are many and varied and encompass: Leadership, Legislation, Infrastructure, Education and Enforcement.

### Leadership

Working with other professionals, including engineers, planners should provide leadership to advance the adoption of active transportation supportive standards and implementation of complete streets design frameworks.

Many Ontario municipalities have established, or are in the process of establishing, official plans, secondary plans, transportation master plans, active transportation plans, urban design guidelines and zoning by-laws to institutionalize the complete streets approach as part of their public policy documents. Now planners must work to advance the adoption of these more progressive and equitable approaches to roadway design, and also work to have them implemented through (re)development projects.



Photo courtesy of Darryl Young

### Infrastructure

Planners should facilitate the incorporation of active transportation elements into plans at all scales (from site plans to municipal-wide or region-wide plans). Site plans, at a minimum, should support walking and cycling by including connections and end-of-trip facilities, direct sidewalk access from the street and between buildings, bike parking and benches, and protection from the elements.

At the broader scale, design standards should be revised to define requirements for bicycle and pedestrian facilities within both the public and private realms. Also, land use patterns should be defined so as to create supportive interrelationships that make active transportation modes efficient and desirable.

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## Legislation

Planners should be involved in creating plans and design standards that will define a framework for safer pedestrian and cycling conditions across Ontario communities. To this end, they should also bring forward amendments to municipal by-laws, the *Municipal Act* and the *Highway Traffic Act* as appropriate.



Photo courtesy of Nick Fegan

## Education

Planners should help establish public awareness and education programs associated with active transportation and safe road use. This may be best achieved through working partnerships with public and private sector organizations and professions whose mandates are specifically focused on community education, health and safety.

## Enforcement

Planners should help to establish targeted safety interventions directed at reforming local or site-specific pedestrian, cyclist or driver behaviour. This should be done through initiatives that are supported by data, recognized best practices and/or professional standards. The intent is to reduce the need for enforcement by influencing people's behaviour in a positive way and make all modes of transportation safer in communities throughout Ontario.



Photo courtesy of Darryl Young



Photo courtesy of Alice Thurnberry

### **OPPI's position**

OPPI supports the creation of communities with active transportation networks that are safe, efficient, convenient and equitable, based on good policy and planning principles, and will serve present and future generations. In this regard, OPPI supports the recommendations outlined in the reports from the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario's *Cycling Death Review* (June 2012) and *Pedestrian Death Review* (September 2012).

This Call to Action asks planners, the provincial government, municipalities, other related professionals, and the public to aggressively engage in implementing active transportation modes throughout the province. Planners are asked to make this a key part of their practice and fully integrated into key aspects of their work. In this way Ontario's communities, where citizens of all ages and abilities have a range of transportation options, can become healthier and more sustainable.



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*OPPI is the recognized voice of the Province's planning profession. Our more than 4,000 members work in government, private practice, universities, and not-for-profit agencies in the fields of urban and rural development, community design, environmental planning, transportation, health social services, heritage conservation, housing, and economic development. Our Members meet quality practice requirements and are accountable to OPPI and the public to practice ethically and to abide by a Professional Code of Practice. Only Full Members are authorized by the Ontario Professional Planners Institute Act, 1994, to use the title "Registered Professional Planner" (or "RPP").*

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Photo courtesy of Darryl Young

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