

Healthy *Communities* AND PLANNING FOR Active Transportation



Planning and Implementing Active Transportation in Ontario Communities

A Call To Action



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Ontario Professional Planners Institute
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The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) calls upon planners, the provincial government, municipalities and the public to make non-motorized forms of travel a mainstay of daily life throughout Ontario communities.

Active transportation, particularly cycling and walking, is fundamental to healthier communities and sustainable city regions. To that end, OPPI sets out this Call to Action in support of an active transportation system that is safe, efficient, convenient, equitable, and based upon good policy and planning principles that will serve present and future generations.

Policies and practices established through official plans, transportation plans, design guidelines and engineering standards often highlight the value of active transportation but too often fail to provide the tools required for implementation. To take active transportation from policy to action, requires a multi-modal transportation system and both “hard” (infrastructure) and “soft” (programs) interventions to reduce automobile dependency and dominance by the single-occupant vehicle.

As “every trip begins and ends with active transportation,” particularly public transit journeys, it is imperative that a comprehensive walking and cycling network be an integral part of the planning process in every community in Ontario.

What is Active Transportation?

As planners, we recognize the relationship between how communities are developed and the transportation choices that are being made. Striving for a balance that ensures the needs of all transportation users are met, or at least considered, has placed a new emphasis on active transportation options.

Active transportation is “non-motorized travel, including walking, cycling, rollerblading and movements with mobility devices,” according to the Ontario Ministry of Transportation’s *Transit Supportive Guidelines*. Sidewalks, on-road bicycle lanes, off-road trails, multi-use pathways, bike parking facilities, and crosswalks are all part of the active transportation network.

Playing complementary roles, public transit and transportation demand management programs—aimed at decreasing single-occupant vehicle use—supplement this network by supporting a linked system of trips. This enables the traveller to reach a more distant destination and/or facilitates a door-to-door journey.

What are the Benefits of Active Transportation?

Active transportation is recognized as an increasingly relevant issue in light of ever increasing traffic congestion issues and environmental concerns, the rise in obesity and chronic diseases associated with a lack of physical activity, and the need for personal mobility choices. This will be exacerbated by an aging population, challenging an individual’s quality of life and enhancing the appeal of compact, walkable communities.

Planners and decision makers are being asked to recognize the challenges associated with active transportation and translate them into on-the-ground improvements to local mobility, the built and natural environment, health and a sense of community.

The community benefits of active transportation are significant.

Health benefits—The transportation choices people make can impact their health and overall well-being in significant ways. Walking and cycling are excellent forms of exercise that can be incorporated into daily routines, contributing to recommended physical activity levels and combating the rise in obesity and the incidence of diabetes. Active transportation can also contribute to improved mental health by increasing opportunities for social interaction, which can reduce social isolation.

Safety benefits—Well-designed and purposeful infrastructure can reduce the frequency and severity of pedestrian and cyclist injuries and fatalities, especially for vulnerable road users such as children and seniors. Research shows a “safety in numbers” effect whereby the greater the number of pedestrians and cyclists on the road, the safer the road is for these users.

Environmental benefits—Active transportation is a sustainable transportation mode that produces fewer greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution than motorized travel. Thus, planners can help to reduce communities’ carbon footprints by ensuring there are policies, planning and design standards and guidelines that enhance cycling and walking opportunities. Further, an increase in the use of active transportation modes (e.g. bicycling) results in a reduction in the wear and tear on the road system, meaning less maintenance and fewer resources are required.

Social/community benefits—Active transportation modes offer an intimate perspective of communities beyond the confines of the automobile. Going for a bike ride or a walk around a neighbourhood puts more “eyes on the street.” It encourages social interaction, fosters a sense of place and increases the perception of personal safety. Additionally, active transportation is accessible and economical for people of all ages and abilities. Active transportation can also be the only transportation choice for many because of age, health or income.

Economic benefits—The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development reported traffic congestion in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area is costing the Ontario economy an estimated \$3.3 billion per year in lost productivity. Adding to that cost is the construction and maintenance costs of transportation infrastructure for motor vehicles, which are considerably more expensive on average and per capita than those for active transportation facilities.

In Canada, the majority of trips made by the automobile are short trips—each Canadian makes an average of 2,000 car trips of less than 3 km each year, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada. Therefore, a shift towards active transportation modes for utilitarian trips (e.g. work, school, errands) or recreational purposes, coupled with public transit and the use of transportation demand management programs (e.g. carpooling) would increase the capacity and efficiency of the transportation system. As an added benefit, bicycle tourism can have positive impacts on local economic development.

What is the Planner’s Role in Active Transportation?

Active transportation planning, design and promotion is not solely the realm of planners, rather it requires a multi-disciplinary team including engineers, urban designers, architects, landscape architects, public health professionals, politicians and members of the community, together with planners. Within this context, the professional planners’ roles are many and varied, encompassing research, policy and plan development and implementation, facility design and integration, promotion and education, performance measurement and financing options. Whatever the task at hand, planners should keep in mind the following axioms:

Shifting behaviour—While providing active transportation infrastructure can influence travel habits, it is more effective in combination with a built form that incorporates compact growth, higher density, network connectivity, human-centred public realm, and transit.

Make it visible—Develop well-designed, purpose-built infrastructure, whether small or large scale, that will create opportunities for safe, efficient and convenient cycling and walking. New bicycle lanes, bicycle parking, multi-use trails, pedestrian bridges, transit stations and other active transportation facilities situated in highly visible locations will attract users.

Focus on short trips—Active transportation modes should be encouraged for short trips (generally less than 7 km for cycling and 2 km for walking) within a community and promoted for trip linking with other transportation modes (e.g., carpooling, transit) for longer/commuter trips. Suburban areas or those with lower density may benefit from building off-road paths to cover the longer distances required for typical utilitarian trips.

Integrated transportation and land use—More efficient land use patterns, better human-centred positioning of built form and the integration of residential, educational, and employment uses can create an environment that is more conducive to active transportation. Large-format retail developments, for example, often have front doors oriented towards a parking lot with less regard for pedestrian access from community streets and sidewalks.

Planning ahead—Too often pedestrian and bicycle considerations are overlooked because they are not part of the plan from the beginning. While facilities can be retrofitted to accommodate these transportation modes, it is more expensive than upfront planning. Care needs to be taken to incorporate active transportation elements into plans at both the site plan and secondary plan levels.

A site plan for a single development can invite walking and cycling by including connections and end-of-trip facilities. This may include direct sidewalk access from the street and/or between buildings, or by providing a bike rack, bench, or awning to give protection from the elements. At the secondary plan level, policies and urban design standards and guidelines can be used to ensure bicycle and pedestrian facilities are integrated into all relevant aspects of the public and private realms throughout the community, including the public right-of-ways.

Complete Streets lead to Complete Communities—The concept of Complete Streets advocates that users of all ages and abilities should be able to safely travel along or across roadways whether they are pedestrians, cyclists, public transit riders or motorists.

New planning and engineering policies and standards are being developed throughout North America and globally, not only to allow, but to require the safe, efficient and effective accommodation of active transportation modes within the shared right-of-way. Planners in Ontario should be facilitating adoption and implementation of similar requirements, plans, and projects.

Official plans, secondary plans, transportation master plans, active transportation plans, urban design guidelines and zoning by-laws are starting points to institutionalize active transportation as part of a complete streets approach on a routine basis, rather than as an exception to be accommodated as an afterthought or for recreational purposes only.

Multi-modal trips—Walking and cycling can complement other modes of travel including public transit and carpooling in completing longer-distance trips. By providing pedestrian and cycling amenities at bus stops and transit stations, such as secure bicycle parking, a bench and/or connected sidewalks, it invites their use and improves functionality.

Promotion and education—Individual travel behaviour is influenced by a combination of factors—infrastructure, promotion, education—all of which are integral to increasing the number of active transportation users. In addition to building new active transportation infrastructure, it is important to promote new facilities and offer information on safe cycling skills and sharing the road. This information can be provided in print, on-line and in person (e.g., through school-based programs and CAN-BIKE courses). Promotional events that celebrate walking and cycling can also be effective tools for raising awareness and encouraging more people to get active.

Implementing Active Transportation Plans

Across Ontario, active transportation planning at both large and small scales is being recognized as central to addressing major transportation and related health and environmental challenges. Active Transportation Plans, detailing single initiatives or packages of infrastructure, policies, programs, educational and promotional features, are being developed to increase the use of active transportation modes and address these challenges. Some Ontario examples include:

Active transportation facilities/network development, design and funding— Complete Streets Policies and Design, City of Ottawa’s Segregated Bike Lane Pilot Project, Complete Streets for Niagara, Haliburton County Active Transportation Initiatives, Huron County TDM Plan, City of Toronto Bicycle Cordon Counts, Metrolinx BikeLinx Program, provincial TDM Municipal Grant Program, York Region’s Pedestrian and Cycling Municipal Partnership Program, City of Guelph’s Bike Box and Raised Bicycle Lane.

Active transportation programs— Safe and Active Routes to School, Smart Commute, Individualized Marketing/Community-Based Social Marketing.

Active transportation safety education—CAN-BIKE Program, Thunder Bay Safe Cycling Program.

Active transportation campaigns, promotions and incentives—Open Streets Hamilton, Share the Road’s Bicycle Friendly Communities Awards, Bike to Work Day.

Legislation and Requirements—*Section 51 (25) of the Planning Act* says that plans of subdivision approvals can allow for pedestrian and bicycle pathways and public transit rights-of-way through land dedications as the approval authority considers necessary; York Region’s Travel Demand Management Plan is becoming a required part of the development and site plan application process. Collingwood’s Urban Design Manual, for example, integrates active transportation requirements for both subdivision and site plan approvals that are required by law.

OPPI's Position

OPPI supports an active transportation system that is safe, efficient, convenient and equitable, based on good policy and planning principles that will serve present and future generations. This Call to Action is directed at planners, the provincial government, municipalities and the public. It asks each person and organization to do their part in transforming communities into healthy and sustainable places where citizens of all ages and abilities have a range of transportation options. Strong policy direction and practical implementation mechanisms are needed if walking and cycling options are to be appealing, accessible and convenient mobility choices across Ontario communities.

OPPI's 2012 Symposium - "Healthy Communities and Planning for Active Transportation – Talking the Talk and Walking the Walk" - Hilton Suites Markham Conference Centre.- The Symposium celebrates active transportation in all its many forms. Participants will explore a new paradigm for connecting destinations and shaping communities. Join experts and colleagues in examining challenges and identifying emerging opportunities. Further information on the symposium can be found at: www.ontarioplanners.on.ca/content/symposium/index.aspx

Established in 1986, OPPI is the recognized voice of the Province's planning profession and provides vision and leadership on key planning issues. The Institute's almost 4,000 members work in government, private practice, universities, and non-profit agencies in the fields of urban and rural development, urban design, environmental planning, transportation, health and social services, heritage conservation, housing, and economic development.

For further information, please contact:

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The following active transportation resources may prove useful in planning, policy and implementation.

Policies and Guidelines

Provincial Policy Statement: www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page1485.aspx.

Ontario Ministry of Transportation. Transit-Supportive Guidelines:
www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/transit/supportive-guideline/index.shtml.

Ontario Ministry of Transportation. 1996. Ontario Bikeways Planning and Design Guidelines.

City of Toronto. 2008. Guidelines for the Design and Management of Bicycle Parking Facilities.
www.toronto.ca/planning/pdf/bicycle_parking_guidelines_final_may08.pdf.

Metrolinx. Mobility Hub Guidelines:
www.metrolinx.com/en/projectsandprograms/mobilityhubs/mobility_hubs.aspx.

Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach:
www.ite.org/emodules/scriptcontent/orders/ProductDetail.cfm?pc=RP-036A-E.

Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals. 2002. Bicycle Parking Guidelines.

Transport Canada. 2011. Active Transportation in Canada: A Resource and Planning Guide:
www.tc.gc.ca/eng/programs/environment-urban-guidelines-practitioners-atg-2671.htm.

National Association of City Transportation Officials. 2011: nacto.org/cities-for-cycling/design-guide/.

City of Ottawa. 2000. Regional Road Corridor Design Guidelines:
www.ottawa.ca/en/city_hall/planningprojectsreports/planning/design_plan_guidelines/completed/regional_roads/index.html.

Articles and Reports

Toronto Centre for Active Transportation. 2012. Complete Streets Gap Analysis: Opportunities and Barriers and Ontario: tcat.ca/gapanalysis.

Toronto Centre for Active Transportation. 2012. Complete Streets by Design: Toronto streets redesigned for all ages and abilities: tcat.ca/completestreetsbydesign.

Transportation Association of Canada. Active Transportation: Making it Work in Canadian Communities

Toronto Centre for Active Transportation. 2009. Bike Lanes, On-Street Parking, and Business.
www.cleanairpartnership.org/pdf/bike-lanes-parking.pdf.

Ontario Professional Planners Institute. 2009. Planning by Design: A Healthy Communities Handbook. www.ontarioplanners.on.ca/content/Publications/innovativepolicypapers.aspx.

Transport Canada. The Links between Public Health and Sustainable and Active Transportation.
www.tc.gc.ca/eng/programs/environment-utsp-publichealth-995.htm.

Canadian Institute of Transportation Engineers. 2004. Promoting Sustainable Transportation Through Site Design: An ITE Recommended Practice.

www.cite7.org/resources/documents/ITERP-PromotingSustainableTransportationThroughSiteDesign.pdf.