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# ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION BACKGROUND PAPER

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Technical Paper 1 to support the ***Discussion Paper*** for the  
*Next Regional Transportation Plan*





## Executive Summary

### Background

The Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) is undergoing rapid growth and development. Population and employment are both increasing, with rapid growth forecasted from 2015-2041. In order to accommodate this growth, the region's transportation network must evolve. Metrolinx launched the 2015 regional transportation plan (RTP) review to ensure that the region's transport network is able to support the development of a region with a strong economy, vibrant culture, and sound environmental basis.

This paper is one of a series of working papers that discusses critical topics for reviewing the previous RTP, 2008's the Big Move, and developing a new plan. The focus of this paper is Active Transportation.

### Introduction

Almost all active transportation infrastructure in the GTHA is provided by the municipalities. Where a two-tier municipal government structure exists, then the lower tier is the primary provider.

Active transportation programs are provided by the municipalities, other levels of government,

and various third parties such as non-profit organisations.

Active transportation yields economic, social and environmental benefits. The economic benefits include road capital and maintenance cost savings, congestion reduction, increased support for local businesses, improved livability, and financial savings to individuals.

The social benefits include health improvements, increased personal safety (both perceived and actual), and better mobility opportunities for non-drivers. The environmental benefits arise from active transportation being emission-free, and hence helping reduce CAC and GHG emissions.

Active Transportation has numerous interfaces with other modes, including transit, general traffic, and trucks. Walking and cycling also interact with one another. These interactions can present safety risks to AT users. However, simple, effective measures exist to mitigate those risks.

Trips can involve both AT and transit. This creates a need for appropriate integration, both for high-order transit services, and local bus services. An effective sidewalk is a vital and necessary component of any transit trip.

### Contribution to the Regional Transportation Plan

*The Big Move* identified the need for significant improvements to active transportation provision and use throughout the GTHA. It contained one goal specifically targeted at higher active transportation use:

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Goal C / Active and Healthy Lifestyles: Walking and cycling will be attractive and realistic choices for all, including children and seniors.

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Two other goals relate strongly to active transportation. Goal D (Safe and Secure Mobility) states "Getting around will be safer and more secure. Parents will feel comfortable allowing and encouraging their children to walk, cycle or take public transit to school". Goal H (Foundation of an Attractive and Well-Planned Region) includes that "The transportation system will help us create valuable, beautiful and attractive places. Roads, streets, transit lines and stations will be designed to benefit both travellers and local residents"

Each Goal is supported by various Objectives and Priority Actions. Five years into *The Big Move*, Progress towards meeting the Objective and

implementing the Priority Actions has been mixed.

Assessing the Objectives and Priority Actions revealed the need for better data collection and availability, so that progress can be accurately measured.

A key finding from the assessment was that all but three GTHA municipalities have cycling plans; only half of GTHA municipalities have a pedestrian plan.

The proposed new Goals for the *Regional Transportation Plan* include several goals that guide active transportation facility planning and development, and several that are heavily influenced by the state of active transportation facilities.

Consequently, these goals should form a key part in active transportation planning and strategy development in the GTHA.

### **State of active transportation in the GTHA**

Across the GTHA, 56% of trips (by all modes and for all purposes) are short enough for cycling, and 22% are short enough for walking.

For pedestrians, the sidewalk network feature gaps, particularly in suburban employment areas and some older post-war residential

neighbourhoods. Commercial and employment buildings are often set back from the road, without suitable pathways between entrances and sidewalks. Freeways are generally a barrier to pedestrian (and cycling) accessibility.

In addition, a lack of mid-block crossings creates long distances between suitable crossing points. Further, the current standards for signalling crossings discourage signalisation of some intersections where pedestrians would benefit.

For cyclists, cycling infrastructure provision is the highest priority. There is sparse or disjointed provision of bikeways (e.g. bicycle lanes, cycle tracks, multi-use paths, etc.) in some municipalities, and across the regional network. Cross-border coordination is needed to maximise effectiveness of investment. Further, suitable routes within and near high-order transit station sites needed to connect with the wider bikeway network.

Cycle parking is as necessary for cycle trips as car parking is for car-based trips. A lack of parking at a site can preclude use of cycling as mode of travel to that site. Consequently, municipalities need standards for cycle parking provision, similar to standards for auto parking. Further, high-order transit facilities need to include appropriate

amounts of cycle parking, coupled with suitable access arrangements.

There are currently two bike share programs in operation (Toronto and Hamilton). More bike share programs are needed in other urban centres across the GTHA, and existing programs would benefit from expansion. Additional programs create a need for coordination, such as multi-program membership.

Three key success factors for high active transportation use emerged from the analysis:

- The trips that people desire to make have their destination within an appropriate distance or their origin.
- Useful infrastructure is present for the appropriate portions of the trip
- The general travel environment is conducive to active transportation use

### *Challenges*

Increased active transportation use in the GTHA faces four main types of challenges:

- **Challenge 1 – Gaps in the infrastructure network.** The analysis for this paper has revealed that considerable work is needed before there is a complete walking and bikeway network throughout the urban areas

of the GTHA. This will also support the use of transit. Creating an effective active transportation network comprises a large number of small-scale projects

- **Challenge 2 – Policy environment:** GTHA municipalities lacking active transportation plans face a significant impediment to increasing walking and cycling. In addition, active transportation plans need to be properly integrated into the wider policy environment – including transportation master plans and the land use planning process.
- **Challenge 3 – Marketing and promotion:** Active transportation infrastructure by itself is not always sufficient to increase usage. Municipalities in the GTHA have traditionally focused more on infrastructure provision than marketing and promotion of those facilities. Marketing efforts can be a highly cost-effective way to improve active transportation usage.
- **Challenge 4 – Data:** The assessment of progress since 2008 faced a recurring issue of data availability. Suitable data underpins sound policy development; data is also necessary to monitoring progress in implementing and achieving policy objectives.

### Jurisdictional review

A review was undertaken of four jurisdictions:

- **Philadelphia region (PA, USA):** Strong parallels with GTHA's transport network and region-level urbanisation pattern.
- **City of Oxford (UK):** High cycling usage levels but very limited roadspace. Small urban core and car-orientated suburbs parallels much of GTHA outside Toronto.
- **City of Vancouver (BC):** Similar regional land use patterns to GTHA; mix of policy- and infrastructure-orientated solutions.
- **New York City (NY, USA):** Significant increase in cycling in recent years, despite limited investment in bike lanes. Good example of policy-driven change in dense urban area.

#### *Philadelphia region*

Philadelphia's plans to build on existing high active transportation usage yields several lessons that can be applied to the GTHA's active transportation planning, both at a municipal and region-wide level:

- Goals in plans are accompanied by measures to quantify progress, and time-bound targets to indicate success.
- Policy proposals are highly specific, with a clear link to the relevant problem(s).

- Existing development is not excluded, with measures relating to retrofitting
- Large-scale projects (such as missing/substandard sidewalks) are transparently prioritised.

#### *City of Oxford*

Oxford provides many parallels with GTHA urban centres outside of downtown Toronto, because it is both an employment node and home to those commuting elsewhere. This, and other factors, lead to various key lessons that be applied to GTHA municipalities

- Effective walking facilities should be provided throughout the entire urban area, with no exceptions.
- High-order transit nodes offer the potential to encourage active transportation use for the access leg.
- Cycle parking facilities should be considered a prerequisite for active transportation use, in the same way as car parking is for car use.
- Responsibility for active transportation may fall primarily on one level of government, but that should not preclude other levels from involvement in enhancing and promoting active transportation.
- Auto needs should be prioritised below other modes where appropriate.

### *Vancouver*

Vancouver has clearly articulated a commitment to their Green City actions and brand. This policy commitment pervades the City's efforts in active transportation and brings walking and particularly cycling, to the forefront. Bike infrastructure on key routes and road closures for motorized users reinforce the image that Vancouver is a city for cycling, attracting more new bike users.

Safety has been a key issue in the past that has been addressed with separated bike lanes, with even small children cycling downtown. In addition, the extensive network of lanes, greenways and neighborhood routes provides interconnections throughout the city, with clear signage and wayfinding between infrastructure types.

### *New York City*

The key lessons from New York City were:

- Adopt a multi-program approach towards encouraging active transportation use, with programs targeted at different potential market segments
- Recognise that safety is a first step to widespread usage, and hence focus on reducing traffic fatalities through targeted infrastructure improvements in high-risk areas
- Engage a wide range of place-making activities
- Encourage residents and visitors to enjoy the communities they visit through the provision of seating, plaza designation and bench installations
- Implement widespread bicycle network improvements to raise the profile of cycling
- Create separated lanes to support the perception that cycling is for everyone.

### **Next steps**

This paper will feed into future analysis of potential projects or changes (the current gaps) that could enable active transportation provision in the GTHA to be better aligned with RTP goals.

Future work will also establish a recommended set of priorities (projects and policies) as well as a process to include them in future phases of the RTP review.