TORONTO

STAFF REPORT
INFORMATION ONLY

Active Transportation Demonstration Projects

Date:	June 20, 2013
To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	8, 20, 23, 43, All
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SUMMARY

In April 2012, the Board of Health adopted the *Road to Health: Improving Walking and Cycling in Toronto* (http://www.toronto.ca/health/hphe/pdf/roadtohealth.pdf), a report which identified the health benefits of active transportation and actions to enable increased and safer walking and cycling in Toronto. In response, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health and the General Manager of Transportation Services to report back on a pilot program to implement measures such as reduced speed limits, traffic calming and safer intersections. This report, prepared in collaboration with the Transportation Services division, provides an update on the development of the Active Transportation Demonstration Projects, the selection of demonstration areas, and the progress in community engagement and partnership building to date.

Four Active Transportation Demonstration Projects have been identified. These projects represent different types of social and geographic communities across the city. Each community has unique built form, health status, patterns of walking and cycling, and potential needs for active transportation. Community engagement facilitators will work with Transportation Services, Toronto Public Health (TPH), and community members to help share knowledge about the health and safety benefits of active transportation, the range of feasible design options, and community needs and preferences. The project partners will report back on one or more preferred infrastructure changes for active transportation in each area. The project partners will also consider barriers to implementation and ways to overcome these barriers.

Financial Impact

This report has no financial impact beyond what has already been approved in the current year's budget.

DECISION HISTORY

In April 2012, the Board of Health adopted the *Road to Health: Improving Walking and Cycling in Toronto* (http://www.toronto.ca/health/hphe/pdf/roadtohealth.pdf), a report in the "Healthy Toronto by Design" series. This report reviews the health evidence related to active transportation and health and sets out recommended actions to support increased and safer walking and cycling in the city.

One of the Board of Health's decisions in response to the Road to Health report was to request "The Medical Officer of Health and the General Manager of Transportation Services to jointly examine specific approaches to enhance pedestrian and cycling safety and to report back to the Board of Health on the possibility of a pilot program, including measures identified in this report, such as reduced speed limits, traffic calming, safer intersections, etc. in selected residential neighbourhoods, as identified through public outreach and consultation and an evaluation of public safety and transportation needs" http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.HL13.1.

On April 9, 2013, the Toronto & East York Community Council directed Transportation Services staff to investigate the change of speed limits to 30km/hr on several Annex roads: http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.TE23.83.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The *Road to Health* report, prepared by TPH in collaboration and consultation with Transportation Services, reviewed the health evidence related to active transportation (AT) and health and found that:

- Physical activity from active transportation has very important health benefits, including significantly reducing the risk of all-cause mortality, cardiovascular disease, obesity, type II diabetes, and certain types of cancer.
- Increasing the use of active transportation can also generate significant social, environmental, economic and transportation system benefits.
- In North America, users of active transportation generally face greater risks from traffic collisions than users of other modes (such as cars and transit). However, the health benefits experienced by individuals who increase their physical activity through the use of active transportation greatly outweigh the risks.
- Walking and cycling infrastructure investments are extremely cost-effective, even when considering the health benefits alone.
- Better design for active modes, such as walking and cycling, can greatly increase safety for all modes; increasing the proportion of trips made by walking and cycling can also independently lower collision and injury rates (the 'safety in numbers' effect).[1]

The *Road to Health* report also set out recommended actions to support accessible and safe walking and cycling in the city. These included:

- Making active transportation safer (reducing vehicle speed limits, calming traffic, separating pedestrians and cyclists from traffic, increasing safety at intersections),
- Making active transportation more attractive (improving route quality and speed, integrating with public transit – especially in suburbs where active transportation

distances are longer, ensuring adequate end-of-trip facilities, and engaging in marketing and education programs),
- Enabling active transportation through land use planning (destination accessibility, street connectivity and density), and
- Making active transportation more accessible (ensuring walking and cycling facilities accommodate vulnerable users, linking active transportation with affordable housing in vibrant communities, and conducting competent community-based programs).[2]

The *Road to* Health showed that public health improves when shared spaces are made better for the pedestrians and cyclists who incorporate physical activity in their everyday trips. However, before widespread interventions are implemented, more information is needed about how decisions are made regarding active transportation as well as how different kinds of active transportation interventions might work in different kinds of communities across the city. Following the adoption of the *Road to Health* report, the Board of Health requested that TPH work in cooperation with Transportation Services and community partners to develop demonstration projects in different Toronto neighbourhoods. The Active Transportation Demonstration Projects will help the City of Toronto understand the feasibility, sustainability and impact of implementing the recommendations of the *Road to Health* report at the neighbourhood level.

COMMENTS

Overview

The Active Transportation Demonstration Projects will identify specific policy and infrastructure interventions to enhance pedestrian and cycling safety in residential neighbourhoods. The *Road to Health* report outlines some potential interventions, such as reduced speed limits, traffic calming, and safer intersections. The demonstration projects will engage four local communities in identifying locally appropriate and feasible interventions for active transportation.

The demonstration projects will inform future policies and practices for active transportation in Toronto. Through the Active Transportation Demonstration Projects, TPH and its partners will identify policy barriers, best practices and new opportunities for improving the built environment to support active transportation in the city. The projects also aim to build stronger collaborations and support community involvement in active transportation decision making. These partnerships are necessary for achieving and sustaining policy and infrastructure changes that will improve pedestrian and cycling safety because they engage those who will implement and maintain the interventions alongside those who will use them.[3] Through processes of partnership and engagement, the Active Transportation Demonstration Projects will facilitate the exchange of knowledge between stakeholders (for example, about the local needs and interests in a particular neighbourhood, about the health benefits of active transportation, or about the engineering requirements for specific street changes).

Site Selection

TPH developed an eligibility and selection tool for selecting Active Transportation Demonstration Projects. Drawing on maps and data produced by TPH and the City of Toronto, potential projects were reviewed on the basis of factors related to health, safety, equity, readiness and potential for innovation.

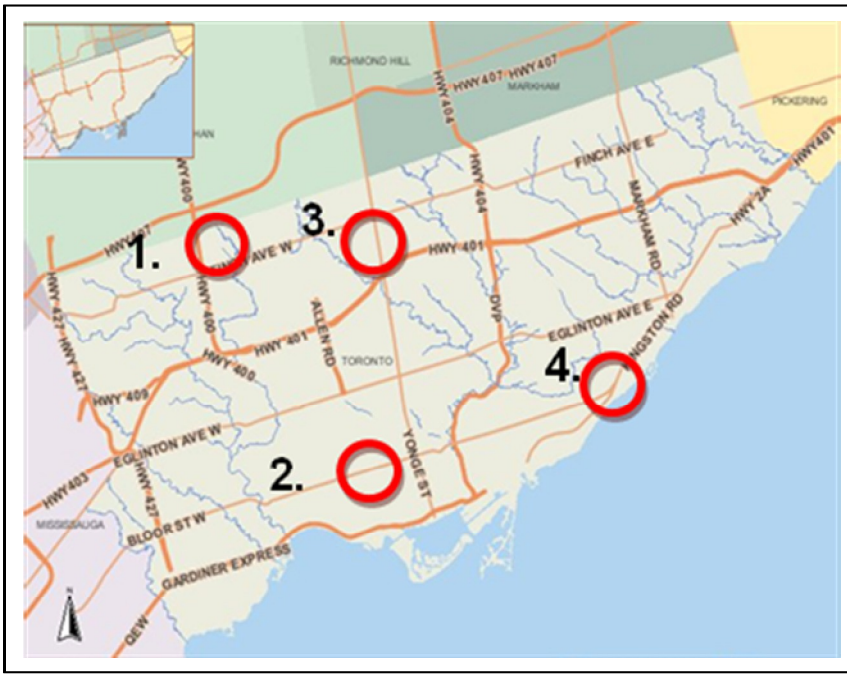
Table 1. Site selection criteria

Readiness	The project is likely to be addressed by the City of Toronto or partners in the near term. There is a pre-existing community group prepared to work on issues of active transportation. There is the potential for future funding or partnership with City partners, local agencies, and/or community groups. The local city councillor is engaged.
Innovativeness	The project reflects new or innovative approaches or ideas. Or, the project reflects approaches that have been established or tested elsewhere but are new or uncommon in the City of Toronto. There is potential to include specific interventions as requested by the Board of Health
Evidence base	There is evidence to suggest the proposed project will improve active transportation safety and/or uptake.
Walkability/bikeability	There is a demonstrated need to improve walkability and/or bikeability.
Rates and risks of chronic disease	There are high rates of or risk factors for morbidity/mortality from chronic diseases.
Safety	There are high rates of or risk factors for morbidity/mortality from active transportation-related incidents.
Mix of social and income groups	Selected projects represent a range of social and income environments.
Mix of community types and project scales	Selected projects reflect a diverse set of geographic communities and scales.

Eligible projects were considered by advisors from Transportation Services and Toronto Public Health according to the following priorities: project and community readiness; potential for partnership building between TPH, Transportation Services, and community partners; and health equity. The four identified projects represent different types of social and geographic communities with different built forms, health needs, patterns of walking and cycling, and potential priorities for intervention.

Project Sites

The Active Transportation Demonstration Projects are expected to take place in parts of the following neighbourhoods: Black Creek,[4] the Annex[5,6], North York Centre[7,8] and Cliffside.[9,10]



Active Transportation Demonstration Project Sites

1. Black Creek
2. Annex
3. North York Centre
4. Cliffside

Figure 1: Active Transportation Demonstration Project Sites

1. Black Creek: Pedestrian-Focused Prevention

The Black Creek Community Farm[11] is a new, community-oriented urban farm opening in the spring of 2013 on a formerly underused parcel of land belonging to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. Over time, the farm expects to draw a large number of both local pedestrians and cycling and transit commuters. However, the site and surrounding neighbourhood face challenges to safe, active transportation. For example, there is no crosswalk linking the farm entrance to the residential communities on the west side of busy Jane Street. There is little parking space at the farm; visitors from outside the area are likely to arrive by public transit.

Black Creek is a culturally diverse community characterized by lower density development and tower neighbourhoods, high numbers of children and youth, and lower-than-average income. It is part of the Jane-Finch Priority Neighbourhood. The community has high levels of overweight/obesity and diabetes. The built environment in Black Creek is not very walkable. The Jane/Steeles intersection, for example, has a high pedestrian incident rate despite a low number of walkers. There is a need for walkable and bikeable routes in the community – particularly for residents who depend on active transportation and public transit to get around.

Any major new development provides an opportunity to consider improvements for active transportation. This project poses an opportunity to take a preventive approach to active transportation in a suburban area with a particular focus on equity and local pedestrian traffic.

2. Annex: Traffic Calming for Cyclist and Pedestrian Safety

Since 2011, Annex residents have called for specific measures to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists.[12] Although many people walk and cycle in this area, collision rates and community-reported feelings of lack of safety demonstrate a need to improve safety for active transportation in the neighbourhood.

The high density, low-rise residential neighbourhood is a relatively high income residential and business area characterized by small and medium-sized businesses and single-family homes. Residents of the Annex tend to have lower than average risks from chronic diseases like diabetes, although some parts of the neighbourhood have higher rates of overweight and obesity than others. The area has lots of walkable destinations and many people who rely on active transportation to get around (particularly students and seniors). The area is also a corridor for vehicular and cycling traffic along major arterial roads including Bloor Street West.

This project is an opportunity to improve safety in an urban environment. The project also poses an opportunity to leverage high levels of community engagement and to broaden community consultation to stakeholders within and beyond the Annex community.

3. North York Centre: Bikeway Network Development

There is strong community interest in North York Centre for the development of new cycling infrastructure. In particular, the community has identified a need to develop a connected network of bikeways linking neighbourhoods with existing and proposed trails and routes. Transportation Services experts have determined that there is potential for cycle tracks (separated bike lanes), painted bike lanes and bicycle boulevards (greenways) on the local streets to be developed in the near term.

North York Centre has a well educated population with a high number of young adults, a significant population of seniors, and a higher than average number of recent immigrants. High-rise buildings along Yonge Street make this the primary dwelling type in the Ward; areas off of Yonge are dominated mainly by low-rise residential buildings. Residents have lower than average rates and risks for chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes. The neighbourhood is characterized by low walkability and bikeability and low rates of walking and cycling. A number of pedestrian and cyclist collisions have been reported along major arterials such as Yonge Street.

This project represents an opportunity to understand local cycling needs as part of a connected network of cycling infrastructure across the city. The project also poses the opportunity to demonstrate the support TPH can give to priority projects identified by local communities and experts in Transportation Services.

4. Cliffside: Pedestrian Safety at Sidewalks and Intersections

Pedestrian and cyclist safety has been a community concern in Cliffside for several years. A 2009 Planning study for Kingston Road between Danforth Avenue and Chine Drive outlined community support for active transportation and the need to improve safety and infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists.[13,14] Parents in the area have organized in support of sidewalks in the area, a campaign that gained urgency following the death of a 5-year-old girl who was hit by a garbage truck while crossing legally at the intersection of Cliffside Dr. and East Haven Dr.[15] There is also organized community resistance to sidewalks on certain residential streets.[16,17] A May, 2013 report adopted by the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee named St. Clair and Brimley, in the Cliffside community, as one of Toronto's top ten worst intersections for pedestrians.[18] The report sets out a plan for immediate actions to improve safety at this intersection.

The Cliffside community has a diverse mix of very low income, mid and high income residents. Most buildings are low-rise, single detached, single family housing; the area also includes social housing, seniors' buildings and a proposed new condominium development.[19] The community is characterized by low rates of walking and cycling, low safety for walking and cycling and a high pedestrian priority rating. Levels of walkability and bikeability are highly variable depending on local conditions.

This project represents an opportunity to support the work of Transportation Services in an area where both they and the community have identified immediate, short-term needs for pedestrian safety and active transportation.

Project Plan

Community Engagement
In the community engagement stream of the project, TPH and Transportation Services will use community engagement facilitators to build local awareness of the benefits and opportunities for active transportation and health in selected Toronto neighbourhoods. Two of the projects will be facilitated as part of the "Healthy Canada by Design" Coalition Linking Action and Science for Partnership (http://hcbd-clasp.com/).

Project facilitators will find out about local knowledge, policies, patterns and needs by interviewing community leaders in active transportation, public health and civic engagement. They will conduct workshops and activities with interested community stakeholders to refine this knowledge about neighbourhood conditions and needs. They will share knowledge and expertise that will help community members make informed decisions, and bring community members and decision makers together to share options for improving the built environment that meet the needs identified by the community. By the end of the first year of the projects, communities will have identified one or more preferred infrastructure interventions for active transportation in their areas.

Partnership Building, Data Evaluation & Policy Analysis

A key goal of the Active Transportation Demonstration Projects is to understand and improve policies and procedures for traffic calming and reduced speed in residential neighbourhoods. TPH will work with Transportation Services and other partners to identify the data and evaluation requirements for the project, support the consideration of feasible intervention options; and learn about the decision-making process for local infrastructure interventions that support active transportation. In addition, project partners will consider the lessons from these projects for future active transportation interventions in other areas of the City.

Communities can and should be engaged and able to make recommendations that improve their health through neighbourhood improvements for active transportation. Through the Active Demonstration Projects, city divisions are working together with local communities to improve the built environment with active transportation in mind. These local projects can help identify policy changes and opportunities to benefit the entire city.

TPH, in collaboration with Transportation Services, will report back to the Board of Health in 2014 on the description, evaluation and outcomes of the community engagement and capacity building process; the identification of potential/proposed active transportation interventions; and the identification of policy and/or practice barriers and opportunities to partnership and implementation of the potential/proposed interventions. Implementation of any proposed infrastructure changes will be subject, where required, to Council approval and the availability of funding.

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SIGNATURE

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Endnotes

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