



TO: Chair Shiner and members of the Planning and Growth Management Committee
FROM: Walk Toronto (Steering Committee)
DATE: Oct. 11, 2017
RE: PG23.9 – Toronto Green Standard Review and Update

Walk Toronto is a grassroots, volunteer pedestrian advocacy group that works to improve walking conditions and pedestrian safety in Toronto.

RECOMMENDATION

Walk Toronto supports the adoption of the Toronto Green Standard (“TGS”) because it contains a number of environmental performance measures that will improve walking conditions in Toronto by promoting the construction of pedestrian-friendly real estate development. We also see more widespread sustainability benefits flowing from new built form facilitated by the TGS.

TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT

Toronto’s *Official Plan* emphasizes the necessity for the City to take a **proactive** approach to transportation planning using a Transportation Demand Management (“TDM”) strategy. We are delighted to see this approach replicated in the TGS, which aims to reduce single occupancy vehicle trips generated by proposed development by 15% (Tier 1) or 30% (Tier 2) through a variety of multimodal infrastructure strategies and TDM measures. We hope to see a modal shift occur that results in an increasing number of Torontonians who use walking for at least part of their trips.

PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Walk Toronto very much approves of the TGS pedestrian-specific infrastructure proposals to improve:

- Pedestrian connectivity through the provision of accessible walking routes, safe crosswalks and mid-block crossings that connect new developments to the pedestrian network and important walking destinations. These improvements are possible both on-street and inside the street grid.
- Protection for pedestrians from inclement weather
- Pedestrian-specific lighting

PEDESTRIAN CLEARWAY

We do feel, however, that the one TGS proposal is not specific enough:

Provide a context-sensitive pedestrian clearway that is a minimum of 2.1 m wide, to safely and comfortably accommodate pedestrian flow.

The public discourse in Toronto on transportation has tended to centre on vehicular congestion and the excessive numbers of cars clogging Toronto's streets. In the downtown area, street gridlock has induced many residents to abandon the automobile and some are now getting to the majority of their destinations on foot. As a result, **some downtown sidewalks (such as on Yonge St.) are affected by congestion due to high volumes of pedestrian traffic that is more acute than the congestion occurring in the adjacent motor vehicle traffic lanes.**

The number of pedestrians is increasing most quickly in areas where new condo and office developments are being built. Because the TGS is intended to provide guidance to developers, properly drafted provisions in the TGS have the potential to facilitate the creation of building setbacks and other measures that can help alleviate local sidewalk overcrowding. Therefore, it is essential to address sidewalk capacity issues seriously.

First and foremost, the TGS should properly identify the need for areas where a continuous, unobstructed, universally accessible pedestrian clearway greater than 2.1 metres in width may be necessary. It should be explained that these standards are in reference to planned sidewalks that are to be permanent (as opposed to the different, less adequate standards associated with construction or temporary conditions).

Sidewalk overcrowding is most notable at locations where high pedestrian traffic volumes exist in proximity to:

- Rapid transit stations and transit stops
- Sidewalk patios and cafes
- Major entertainment venues
- Entrances to large retail stores and shopping centres
- Corners at certain especially busy intersections
- Significant concentrations of street furniture, marketing signs and displays

It would be beneficial if the TGS referred to these kinds of examples in order to illustrate situations where pedestrian infrastructure of exceptional capacity is required in order to avoid bottlenecks that already are constricting the flow of walkers. It is to be emphasized that **if developers are not given specific guidance as to contexts where a clearway in excess of 2.1 metres may be required, they will be less likely to provide the additional walking space.** Inadequate pedestrian infrastructure will hamper the achievement of TDM goals such as bringing about a modal shift away from single-occupant cars. In turn, this could curtail progress in meeting the City of Toronto's greenhouse gas reduction goals.

URBAN FOREST TREE CANOPY

We note that measures to increase the coverage of the urban forest tree canopy will not only reduce the urban heat island effect – they will also improve walking conditions by helping to protect pedestrians from the elements during extremely hot or windy weather, which is likely to become more frequent as the effects of climate change become more pronounced. Furthermore, a greater number of trees improves air quality for all street users. Tree planting and maintenance should therefore be seen as measures worth including in the TDM toolkit.

While we encourage the generous planting of street trees as part of new development projects, it also should be stressed that this should be done in accord with accessibility best practices. We recommend that tree pits be covered by hard, permeable grates that can be easily walked or rolled over, and do not pose a tripping hazard. Likewise, trees in planters should not impede pedestrians or constrict the clearway unduly.