

# *Steps Towards a Walkable City*

**Proposed Framework for a Toronto Walking Strategy**





## Steps Towards a Walkable City

### Introduction:

This document presents a proposed framework for creating a Toronto Walking Strategy and outlines potential actions that could implement the strategy. This is not the Walking Strategy. It's a framework for discussion. We want your feedback on the framework and the actions proposed in this document. What's most important to you? Have we missed anything?

Over the next two months the City of Toronto will use this document as a discussion paper to engage the public, external organizations and relevant City divisions and agencies in determining recommended actions, implementation priorities, and resources required for a Toronto Walking Strategy.

### Vision:

**“An urban environment that encourages and facilitates walking supports community health, vitality and safety. It will increase use of public transit; decrease car dependence; reduce conflict between vehicles and pedestrians; lead to cleaner air; green public space; and support green tourism. Such an environment creates opportunities for the informal social interaction that is one of the main attributes of a vibrant, liveable city.”**

Toronto Pedestrian Charter, 2002

### Toronto Has a Strong Foundation for Walking

Toronto has a strong foundation on which to create a comprehensive Walking Strategy. The City's Official Plan provides an excellent policy framework for achieving a more intense, mixed use pattern of development which will increase opportunities for better pedestrian, transit and cycling conditions. In 2002, Toronto City Council adopted the Toronto Pedestrian

Charter which reflects the principle that a city's walkability is one of the most important measures of its health and vitality.

Toronto's recently adopted reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions (80% percent reduction from 1990 levels by 2050) contained in the Climate Change, Clean Air and Sustainable Energy Action Plan (the “Climate Change Plan”) calls for a new way of thinking about transportation and community planning and design.

Toronto has many policies, programs and projects to focus growth to transit served-areas, support healthy neighbourhoods, and build vibrant pedestrian environments. The Vibrant Streets Guidelines; Coordinated Street Furniture Program; Essential Sidewalk Links Program; Audible Pedestrian Signals; Urban Design - Streetscape Design Guidelines, Discovery Walks, and Active and Safe Routes to School are just a few examples of ways in which the City has recognized the importance of designing and supporting walkable communities.

### Why Toronto Needs a Walking Strategy

To translate the Official Plan policies into action the City has adopted action plans for transit and cycling; the TTC Ridership Growth Strategy, Transit City Plan and the Toronto Bike Plan. Providing and maintaining a high quality walking environment is a critical part of promoting a culture of walking which is essential to achieving Toronto's city building goals and climate change targets. A Toronto Walking Strategy would coordinate improvements to Toronto's walking environment and help achieve the Official Plan objectives for walking.

### Challenges and Opportunities

Toronto's city structure consists of two distinct patterns of development. The first city is an older, more compact, mixed land-use city with its structure based on a fine grain of streets and transit – streetcar neighbourhoods. Toronto's newer, suburban neighbourhoods are based on a separated land use strategy and have significantly lower levels of pedestrian activity than the older parts of the city. However, even in Toronto's most walkable neighbourhoods, there is so much more that can be done to give pedestrians a higher priority and to raise the quality of urban design in the public realm.



Toronto faces many of the same challenges as other cities around the world. Increasing distances to travel to jobs, school, shopping, recreational facilities and other services has contributed to automobile dependence and poor pedestrian environments. One measure of this change is that only 36% of children and youth walk to school today, a figure which has declined steadily from 80% thirty years ago.

The decrease in walk-to-school trips is part of a much larger societal trend towards decreasing levels of physical activity, by all ages. Decreasing levels of physical activity is a contributing factor to higher levels of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and other chronic health problems. Increasing motor vehicle traffic and higher levels of ground level pollution and noise in all parts of the city have also contributed to a deterioration of the walking environment. Toronto Public Health estimates that 1,700 people die prematurely each year due to smog-related causes.

There is a growing body of research that shows that people who live in the most walkable neighbourhoods drive less, walk more and are less likely to suffer obesity and other chronic health problems. Neighbourhood characteristics such as road traffic, sidewalk safety, proximity to parks and other services can either support or create barriers to walking and other physical activity. In addition, more people on the street also can lead to an increased sense of neighbourhood safety.

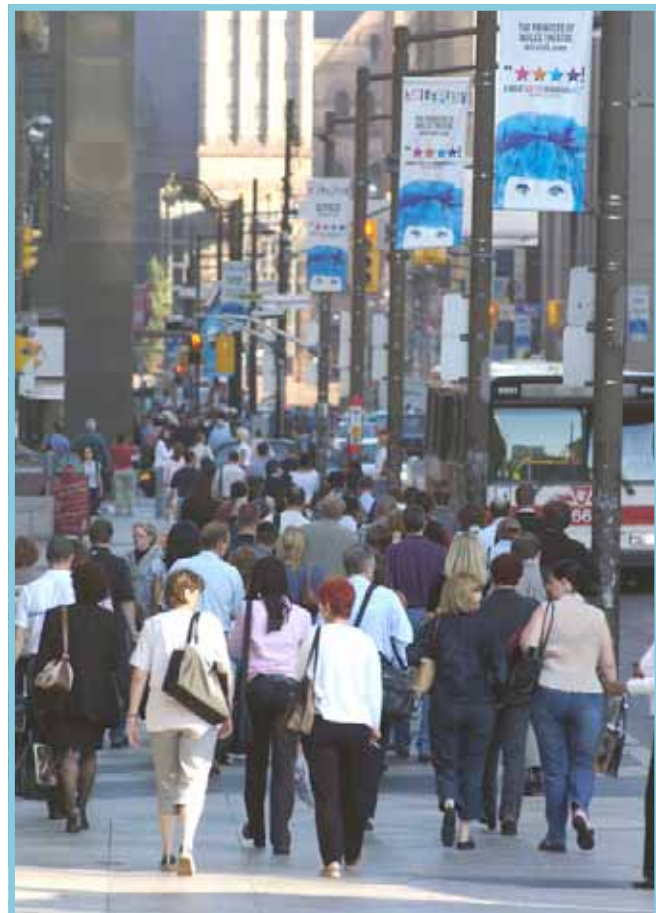
Walkable communities also support public transit because most transit trips begin and end in a walking trip. The most vibrant, economically successful commercial streets depend on high levels of foot traffic. Toronto's Business Improvement Areas have long recognized the benefit of providing a high quality walking environment to attract customers. Cities which have dynamic, interesting walking environments attract millions of visitors every year. To compete globally, Toronto needs to invest in becoming a great walking city.

In the first Toronto Walking Strategy public consultation session, on April 25, 2007, Toronto citizens told staff that their top three priorities for the Walking Strategy were to:

- involve Toronto citizens at every stage of the Walking Strategy;
- place pedestrians at the top of the transportation hierarchy in Toronto; and
- re-allocate road space by narrowing roads and widening sidewalks;

This document has attempted to reflect these three priorities in setting out a proposed framework and potential actions for a Toronto Walking Strategy. The proposed actions are grouped in six "action areas."

- 1 Promoting a Culture of Walking
- 2 Leadership and Support for Walking
- 3 Integrating Networks for Walking
- 4 Making Toronto Streets for Pedestrians
- 5 Creating Spaces and Places for People
- 6 Implementation Strategies





## Section I – Promoting a Culture of Walking

### Introduction:

The International Charter for Walking outlines, as one of its eight strategic principles, “promoting a culture of walking” by providing up-to-date, good quality, accessible information on walking, and opportunities to celebrate and enjoy walking as part of every day life.

The Toronto Pedestrian Charter describes walking as “the most ancient and universal form of travel” and “an important form of exercise and recreation.” One of the key themes of this Discussion Paper is that “everyone is a pedestrian”. As the Toronto Charter states, “every personal trip involves walking, alone or in combination with taking public transit, driving or cycling.” Yet, walking is all too often taken for granted and many people don’t identify themselves as pedestrians.

Walking can be a practical and healthy means of access to community services and amenities, especially for distances up to 2 kilometres. However, almost one-third of automobile trips in Toronto are 2 kilometres or shorter. Many of these trips could be made on foot.

Walking is about so much more than simply getting from one place to another. Walking promotes the goals of civic life by providing opportunities for face-to-face contact, casual interaction and public participation. People on streets and in public places are an essential ingredient for vibrant, economically vital and safe communities. The positive benefits of walking should be promoted to foster a culture of walking within the city.

### Key Principles:

- Celebrating walking creates a positive image of walking
- Well designed and managed public spaces encourage walking
- A culture of walking supports local business and safe streets

### Current/Ongoing Actions:

- 1.1 Expand and raise the profile of the Active and Safe Routes to School program.
- 1.2 Continue to work within Business Improvement Areas to create attractive and lively streets and explore potential partnerships with local businesses to promote walking in the City.

- 1.3 Building on the Discovery Walks map series, produce a series of walking route maps to encourage Toronto residents and visitors to explore the city’s many features on foot. The walking map series would highlight key cultural and heritage points of interest, the city’s diverse neighbourhoods and natural area.
- 1.4 Continue to work with local employers and Smart Commute organizations to develop programs to encourage walking to work and during work.

### Proposed New Actions:

- 1.5 Promote an annual celebration of walking in partnership with all City divisions, external agencies and community walking groups.
- 1.6 Strengthen the links between the various promotional campaigns (Walk Into Health initiative of Public Health in collaboration with other City divisions and community organizations, Transportation Services’ safety campaign, and other physical activity promotional campaigns such as, Get Your Move On) to develop higher profile consistent messaging to encourage walking as part of everyday life.
- 1.7 Create a City of Toronto Walking Website to provide “one-window” access to comprehensive, up-to-date information on walking policies, programs and services and to encourage walking by Toronto citizens and visitors.



## Section 2 – Leadership and Support for Walking

### Introduction:

Implementing the Walking Strategy will require leadership from City Council and Senior Management to support and encourage this “culture of walking” among the Divisions and agencies that deliver City programs and services. It will require extensive collaboration amongst City Divisions, a commitment by City staff at all levels, and cooperation by other agencies and stakeholders.

One of the key objectives of the Walking Strategy will be to link together Toronto’s many pedestrian-related policies, guidelines, programs and services. At the April 2007 Walking Strategy staff consultation workshop, staff identified the need for leadership at the highest level of the organization and the creation of an administrative structure to coordinate the City’s existing pedestrian activities and to implement an integrated Walking Strategy.

The new Public Realm office, proposed to be established within the Transportation Services Division in the coming year, could play a key role in coordinating implementation of the Walking Strategy. All of the City divisions involved in implementing the Walking Strategy projects will need to work together to keep citizens informed and involved.

Cooperation across divisions and agencies will also be necessary to develop new tools and processes for evaluating pedestrian impacts and opportunities. A continuous training approach will be required to keep staff abreast of international best practice regarding pedestrian planning, design and engineering and to foster a culture based on innovation and sound design principles.

### Key Principles:

- Leadership by City Council and Senior Management is essential
- A strong organizational structure is needed to coordinate implementation of the Walking Strategy by the relevant City Divisions
- Ongoing support and resources are needed to implement the Walking Strategy

### Current/Ongoing Actions:

- 2.1 Establish the Public Realm Office within Transportation Services to coordinate the Walking Strategy, and to monitor and evaluate the progress and success of the Strategy.
- 2.2 Maintain and formalize the intra-divisional Walking Strategy Working Group to ensure ongoing divisional coordination of Walking Strategy projects. City divisions and agencies represented on the Working Group should include: Transportation Services, City Planning, Public Health, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Toronto Transit Commission, Toronto Environment Office, Economic Development, Municipal Licensing and Standards, Toronto Parking Authority, Toronto Conservation Authority and Toronto Hydro.

### Proposed New Actions:

- 2.3 Produce Annual Walking Strategy Progress Reports to document achievements, identify future priorities and the resources required to implement the Walking Strategy.
- 2.4 Establish continuous staff training programs and materials to equip all staff with the necessary information and tools to make sound decisions with respect to pedestrian improvements and potential impacts of planning and transportation proposals.
- 2.5 Develop a comprehensive data collection and analysis program to inform investment decisions and to monitor the progress of the Walking Strategy. This information is required to set targets for increasing walk trips, determining barriers to walking, identifying behaviours, measuring progress towards targets, and setting priorities for development review, pedestrianization projects and neighbourhood action plans.
- 2.6 Develop a “walkability audit” tool and process to assess site-specific pedestrian needs and determine investment priorities.
- 2.7 Review all City buildings and properties to assess opportunities for improvements to the pedestrian environment to improve walkability at these sites.



## Section 3 – Integrating Networks for Walking

### Introduction:

A well-connected network, composed of direct, convenient, safe and accessible walking routes, is one of the key ingredients of a walkable community. Toronto's street network forms the backbone of the walking network. However, there are many other networks used by pedestrians, including: hundreds of kilometres of walkways and trails in and along parks, ravines, the waterfront and natural areas; linkages to public transit; the downtown PATH network of underground walkways connecting major office buildings and subway stations; laneways; public mid-block walkways; and publicly accessible walkways through private development sites.

Toronto also has several networks, including ravines, highways, rail and hydro corridors, which often create barriers between communities, but also present opportunities for new walking routes. North-south "green corridors" to provide walking and cycling access to the waterfront are being developed incrementally by the City and Waterfront Toronto. New walking routes and improvements to existing routes can be secured and developed through the development review process and links with existing programs, such as the annual road reconstruction program.

Several City divisions and agencies, and private landowners, often with very different objectives, manage the different networks that support walking. However, from the pedestrian's perspective, what's important is that walking routes function as a fully integrated, accessible network. Walking routes need to be maintained to enhance safety and encourage year round use.

### Key Principles:

- Toronto's pedestrian networks must be fully integrated.
- Pedestrian wayfinding information is essential to make walk trips simple and direct.
- Universal accessible design principles are a primary objective of all public works.

### Current and Ongoing Actions:

- 3.1 Evaluate and enhance the Essential Links Sidewalk Program to accelerate the construction of missing sidewalk links on Toronto streets which do not have sidewalks.
- 3.2 Expand current initiatives by the City and Waterfront Toronto by developing a comprehensive "green corridor plan" that would establish priority north-south green corridors across

the waterfront and identify opportunities to link these initiatives with capital works and development-related projects.

- 3.3 Develop a master plan for the PATH system to identify opportunities for expanding underground connections through the development review process.
- 3.4 Review the current maintenance policies and practices, including winter maintenance, for sidewalks and walkways with a goal to establishing consistent maintenance levels across the integrated walking network.
- 3.5 Develop a phased plan and strategy to complete gaps in the Ravine pathways and route network.

### Proposed New Actions:

- 3.6 Develop a comprehensive wayfinding system for the City of Toronto, featuring pedestrian scale signage to mark walking routes and show direction, distance/time, and access to: points of interest, community services, public buildings, transit, trails and parks, and commercial centres.
- 3.7 Develop new walking maps which feature connected, integrated and accessible walking routes connecting streets, public mid-block walkways, parks and open space, private property links and transit nodes.
- 3.8 Develop a multi-year plan to improve links between trails systems, adjacent neighbourhoods, the street network and public transit, including: developing trail access guidelines; conducting an audit of pedestrian access to trails and trail-road crossings; and identifying opportunities to implement trail access projects.
- 3.9 Conduct an audit of pedestrian access to public transit stations (TTC and GO) and develop a multi-year plan for implementing projects to improve the links between major public transit nodes and adjacent neighbourhoods and the street network.
- 3.10 Produce an inventory of potential walking routes across railway, hydro and highway corridors; and develop a multi-year plan for implementing projects to improve access across major corridors, linking with development applications, capital works projects and other opportunities.



## Section 4 – Making Toronto Streets for Pedestrians

### Introduction:

The City's streets and sidewalks are the most important component of Toronto's public realm. Public streets comprise almost 25% of the City's land and they connect virtually every destination. For this reason special emphasis must be focussed on making Toronto streets great places for walking, shopping, socializing and exploring the city's many great places, whether as a resident or a visitor.

The design of Toronto's streets has gradually shifted from an automobile-centred focus to achieving a balance between the needs of drivers, transit riders, cyclists and pedestrians. This document proposes to continue the shift towards a transportation system that puts pedestrians' needs first, at the top of the transportation hierarchy. In practical terms, "putting pedestrian first" means that every transportation project should strive to improve the pedestrian realm or, at a minimum, to maintain the existing conditions.

Achieving pedestrian improvements is often a challenge in Toronto's built environment and must be considered in context with the City's goals to improve transit service and cycling conditions. The many City divisions and agencies that have a hand in making Toronto's streets need to work collaboratively and with the development community to make streets that support walking, transit and cycling.

Streetscapes and sidewalks also need to be maintained and kept clear of obstructions to encourage walking. The myriad of sidewalk obstructions, such as A-frame signs, news vending boxes, boulevard café fences and bike racks, must be removed or reorganized to achieve the "pedestrian clearway" objective of the Vibrant Streets Guidelines.

### Key Principles:

- Everyone is a pedestrian
- Pedestrian safety should be paramount
- Pedestrians should be placed at the top of the transportation hierarchy

### Current and Ongoing Actions:

- 4.1 Implement the Coordinated Street Furniture Program over the next 20 years.

- 4.2 Continue to install enhanced streetscapes including decorative materials, street trees, and a consistently wide "pedestrian clearway" zone on sidewalks, consistent with the Vibrant Streets Guidelines and the Streetscape Manual.
- 4.3 Review enforcement of bylaws relating to sidewalk obstructions, such as vehicles parked on sidewalks, A-frame signs and vendors.
- 4.4 Continue to install and evaluate enhanced pedestrian features for traffic control signals, including: pedestrian countdown signals, zebra crosswalk markings, "leading pedestrian intervals" which gives pedestrians a "headstart" to begin crossing, expanding the audible pedestrian signal program, installing new accessible pedestrian pushbuttons, increasing pedestrian walking times to cross signalized intersections, and implementing and evaluating pedestrian scramble phases (also known as the Barnes' dance) which enable pedestrians to cross at a signalized intersection in all directions at the same time while drivers are stopped.
- 4.5 Complete the Pedestrian Crossover (PXO) Enhancement Program that will replace many PXOs with traffic control signals and install zebra crosswalk markings and higher visibility LED flashing beacons at the remaining PXO locations.

### Proposed New Actions:

- 4.6 Review existing pedestrian related design principles and guidelines to ensure consistency across City divisions and incorporation in all relevant studies including, Site Plan Review, Avenues Studies, Environmental Assessments, Community Improvement Plans, and Traffic Impact Studies.
- 4.7 Review traffic signal design and operating practices to identify and evaluate other potential measures to give greater priority to pedestrians, including reduced wait time for pedestrians, and alternative pedestrian detection technologies and practices.
- 4.8 Examine opportunities to achieve improvements to the pedestrian environment (including wider sidewalks, enhanced landscaping and narrower pavements, where feasible) in the design of all road reconstruction projects, through the development review process, Environmental Assessment studies, Avenues and transportation studies.



## Section 5 – Creating Spaces and Places for People

### Introduction:

To be a great walking city, Toronto's streets and public places need to spark the imagination and make walking a pleasure. The first priority is building beautiful and functional streetscapes. This is generally achieved through the development review process, road reconstruction projects or partnerships with business improvement areas.

Going a step further, making great spaces and places could involve something as simple as converting a boulevard parking space into a beautifully landscaped green space or having artists paint traffic control signal cabinets. It could also involve something much larger, such as acquiring land and building Dundas Square.

There are many examples of pedestrianization projects in cities around the world that we could learn from. For example, many of the world's great cities have dynamic and prosperous pedestrian streets. These are the very areas sought out by tourists and visitors to cities. Establishing a successful, permanent pedestrian street is complex and requires a supportive community and an extensive consultation and design process to address parking, transit and traffic diversion issues.

Pedestrian streets can also be established on a temporary/periodic basis such as the Kensington Market Pedestrian Sundays. These temporary street closures are intended to operate like traditional market streets, where merchants spill out onto the sidewalk and pedestrians have full access to stroll on the roadway. Regular Pedestrian Sunday events could be encouraged and supported by developing criteria for these events and developing special signs and barriers for events that meet the criteria, and assisting with promotion.

Pedestrianizing a street does not necessarily require the removal of cars. The "shared street" concept has successfully transformed streets and squares in European cities, and improved safety, by mixing vehicles and pedestrians rather than separating them. Toronto should investigate innovative measures that could potentially be applied on Toronto streets and public spaces.

### Key Principles:

- Streets can accommodate and encourage social activity as well as serve as transportation corridors and facilities
- High quality urban design encourages more active public spaces and places
- Vibrant streets foster a sense of community and enhance local economy

### Current/Ongoing Actions:

- 5.1 Expand support for Pedestrian Sundays by developing criteria for recurring Pedestrian Streets events; providing support for the events that meet this criteria including: assisting in the promotion of the events; and investigating attractive, cost-effective barriers and signs for regular events.
- 5.2 Continue Urban Design, Civic Improvement and Clean and Beautiful City programs to create small-scale neighbourhood beautification projects that enhance the pedestrian environment, in conjunction with the development review process, road reconstruction projects and other opportunities.

### Proposed New Actions:

- 5.3 Review international best practice and identify innovative pedestrian projects that have the potential to be showcased in the City.
- 5.4 Involve the development community in the creation of new pedestrian routes and places by encouraging public-private partnerships and other initiatives.
- 5.5 Identify potential opportunities for building public squares and plazas at key pedestrian-heavy intersections in the city, through the development review process, and public-private partnerships.



## Section 6 – Implementation Strategies

### Introduction:

Toronto is just too big to implement these potential Walking Strategy actions everywhere at once. One of the next tasks in developing the Walking Strategy Action Plan will be to identify priorities based on available resources, political and public support and strategic opportunities to link with other existing programs. For example, many of the pedestrian improvements proposed in this document can be implemented incrementally through annual road reconstruction projects, the Civic Improvement Program and Business Improvement Area programs.

Securing walkability and streetscape improvements through development review will be critically important, especially in the areas designated for growth by the Official Plan, including Downtown, the Centres, the Avenues, and Employment Districts.

In addition, there are opportunities to link future Walking Strategy projects with community-focussed programs such as the Priority Neighbourhoods Program. The Priority Neighbourhoods Program is particularly relevant because “walkability” was one of the key criteria for selecting the 13 neighbourhoods. Linking with the Priority Neighbourhoods Program would also help to shift the focus from the generally walkable downtown neighbourhoods to the more challenging suburban neighbourhoods.

The “Live Green” program being developed as part of the Climate Change, Clean Air and Sustainable Energy Action Plan presents another opportunity for collaboration. The “Live Green” Program, will work with Toronto neighbourhoods to make lifestyle choices that reduce carbon footprints. Projects that promote environmentally sustainable transportation such as walking, cycling and transit will be an important component of the “Live Green” program.

### Key Principles:

- Walking provides basic mobility and is universally affordable
- High quality accessible pedestrian infrastructure promotes social equity
- Walking is central to making neighbourhoods more livable, more inclusive, more sustainable and secure.

### Current/Ongoing Actions:

- 6.1 Continue to support the Walk Into Health walking promotion and pedometer-lending program, initiatives of Public Health in collaboration with other City divisions and community organizations, in the Priority Neighbourhoods.

### Proposed New Actions:

- 6.2 Undertake a pilot project in one of the priority neighbourhoods to improve walkability by implementing a range of pedestrian infrastructure improvements, services and programs. The pilot project would include:

Preliminary survey work to assess general walkability of the community: what are the conditions of the walking environment, residents' attitudes towards walking and pedestrian needs and evaluation of potential pedestrian audit tools under development.

Emphasis on a community led process. Identify with community leaders, hotspots in the neighbourhood of poor walking environments or areas for enhancement. Walkability audits would be undertaken to identify the key issues.

Map target areas and identify priority, place emphasis on chance of successful outcome.

Link with other City programs (Capital Budget construction projects, Health Promotion programs, Active and safe Routes to School, transit projects, etc.) to implement improvements

- 6.3 Based on the outcome of the pilot project, develop a framework and funding approach for community focussed pedestrian improvements in the other priority neighbourhoods (and other neighbourhoods) The Implementation Framework would be developed in consultation with other City divisions and agencies, and would identify criteria and funding strategies for a 10 year program targeting 1-2 priority neighbourhoods each year:
- 6.4 Coordinate work with Live Green Program to promote neighbourhood action plans that are environmentally sustainable and seek to reduce the carbon footprint of Toronto neighbourhoods through the promotion of walkability projects.



## Your Opinion Matters

The City invites your comments on the actions proposed in this discussion paper and your participation in the development of the Toronto Walking Strategy. For information on how to comment and get involved in future consultations, please see below.

### Send your comments:

by email to [pedplan@toronto.ca](mailto:pedplan@toronto.ca)

by mail to: Walking Strategy, c/o Transportation Services,  
22 Floor East Tower; City Hall, 100 Queen Street West,  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2.

### Toronto Walking Strategy Background Information:

Toronto Walking Strategy

([http://www.toronto.ca/transportation/pedestrian/walking\\_strategy/](http://www.toronto.ca/transportation/pedestrian/walking_strategy/))

Toronto Pedestrian Charter

(<http://www.toronto.ca/pedestrian>)

International Charter for Walking

(<http://www.walk21.com/charter>)

### Related Background Information:

Toronto Official Plan

([http://www.toronto.ca/planning/official\\_plan/introduction.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/planning/official_plan/introduction.htm))

Change is in the Air: Climate Change and Clean Air Action Plan

(<http://www.toronto.ca/changeisintheair/>)

Active and Safe Routes to School (Toronto Public Health)

([http://www.toronto.ca/health/walking\\_to\\_school/index.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/health/walking_to_school/index.htm))

Coordinated Street Furniture

(<http://www.toronto.ca/involved/projects/streetfurniture/>)

Walk21 Toronto 2007 International Conference

Conference proceedings, research reports, etc

[www.toronto.ca/walk21](http://www.toronto.ca/walk21) and [www.walk21.com](http://www.walk21.com)



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