

DI19.5.1 and DI19.6.1



Walk Toronto Comments on DI19.5 Accessibility- Bloor Street Bike Lane, Shaw Street to Avenue Rd.; and DI19.6 Accessibility at Construction Sites

To: Members of the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee

From: Walk Toronto (Steering Committee)

Date: April 18, 2018

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

Introduction

The accessibility of Toronto's streets and sidewalks is a concern that Walk Toronto advocates for in everything we do. In this submission we are focusing on issues beyond those covered in staff's April 19, 2018, presentation to TAAC for item DI19.5 (Accessibility - Bloor Street Bike Lane, Shaw Street to Avenue Road). In particular, we are bringing up the design of loading zones and lay-bys for people with disabilities. Likewise, we are making concrete suggestions for item DU16.6 (Accessibility at Construction Sites) that are far more detailed than the ideas presented by staff in their presentation.

DI19.5 - Accessibility - Bloor Street Bike Lane, Shaw Street to Avenue Road

Universal Design and Complete Streets

Walk Toronto supports the principles of Universal Design. We believe that the planning of our city's streets should improve safety and accessibility for all – including pedestrians with and without disabilities and chronic health conditions. We encourage all forms of active transportation because it improves physical fitness, something that is especially valuable to those who are not capable of extreme exertion. We also appreciate the psychological benefits of walking, wheeling and cycling, as they foster a sense of independence and self-reliance. We do not discriminate between the forms of active transportation, and we consider the safety and the value of the lives of people travelling on foot to be just as important as those using wheels to get around.

Although it is not designated by the AODA as a mobility device, we recognize the bicycle as such because it supports the body weight (much like a wheelchair), enabling some people who cannot walk far to comfortably cycle decent distances. If the proper protected cycling infrastructure is provided for people with disabilities and chronic health conditions such as arthritis, significant numbers will choose to get around using practical bicycles, tricycles, tandems, easy-on-the-back recumbents and hand-pedal bikes. This is the case in the Netherlands. In choosing designs that are compliant with Complete Streets principles, we want to be making transportation safe for everyone who has a disability – regardless of the type of wheels that they choose to use.

Increasingly, travel on a street like Bloor is multimodal, transitioning from one form of transportation to another. People who are using the sidewalk as pedestrians may become transit riders by hopping on a night bus, cyclists by renting a Bike Share, or paratransit users if they are picked up by WheelTrans. In all cases, access to the curb is an important consideration.

Now let's apply these principles to the three options for Bloor Street being presented by staff.

Option 1

We have mixed reactions to the proposal for a stepped grade separation between the cycle track and the sidewalk. Our concern is for people with disabilities who are accessing parked vehicles from the sidewalk. While a bevelled, semi-mountable step may make wheelchair crossing easier, we have doubts as to whether the angled design will be cane-detectable. On the other hand, a sheer, 90-degree step (or lip) is going to create problems for wheelchairs, though white cane users would no doubt prefer it.

We are also concerned at the narrow width of the buffer strip separating cars from the cycle track. 0.6 metres is simply not sufficient to prevent cyclists from being hit (and being gravely injured or killed) by opened vehicle doors that can stick out as much as 1.15 metres. By the same token, a 0.6 metre buffer is not adequate for people entering or getting out of parked vehicles. They need more standing space to avoid getting hit by passing cyclists (especially if they are using devices like a walker or a stroller). In short, the buffer serves two purposes. The current width is deficient on both counts,

Option 2

This design, which places the cycle track and the pedestrian clearway at the same level, is common in Europe. It will work if proper separation is maintained on a continuous basis using, say, yellow tactile strips. However, we do not approve of mixing zones (as exist on Sherbourne St.) where pedestrians are expected to cross the cycle track in order to access a bus. People using the Bloor night bus in low-visibility, dark conditions might not be seen by cyclists when they walk onto the cycle track. Considering that night bus users may be tired or inebriated, it is clear that designing bus stops as mixing zones is a collision waiting to happen.

On the plus side, Option 2 should result in better winter maintenance than Option 1, as snow plow operators can work freely clearing and storing snow on a flat grade, without worrying about plow blades hitting the raised step proposed in Option 1.

Option 3

Protected bike lanes are part of the Complete Streets framework. If they are blocked by vehicles, those cyclists who do not dare to risk venturing into traffic on vehicular lanes are likely to end up on the sidewalk, and this would have serious negative implications for some vulnerable road users, including pedestrians who are blind or

seniors. Also, bikes on sidewalks can potentially injure a guide dog or damage a person's mobility aid, such as a cane.

Therefore, we recommend that concrete curb separators be chosen for this option, as it is the separation method that is most effective in preventing vehicular incursions into the bike lane – which in turn reduces the likelihood that cyclists will take evasive action by riding on the sidewalk.

It should be noted that Options 1 or 2 generally make it easier to load and unload a wheelchair from a vehicle's side door directly onto the sidewalk, whereas this can be problematic with Option 3.

Rethinking space allocation

As we have noted above, curbside bike lanes can create problems for other vulnerable road users, including pedestrians with disabilities. The basic issue is space, and the solution lies in re-allocating space and in creating purpose-built loading facilities to fulfill certain functions.

We would never suggest that wheelchair users be required by law to travel on the roadway between a lane of parked vehicles and a lane of moving vehicles. Likewise, progressive transportation planners do not consider it best practice to require vulnerable cyclists (who may be a child, a senior, have a disability, or a chronic health condition) to ride between car lanes. Canadian research has shown that a properly protected bike lane located next to the curb dramatically improves safety for cyclists of all abilities.

Although the staff presentation does not provide many specific details about the potential design of accessible parking spaces, loading zones, or lay-bys for vehicles to pick up or drop off people with disabilities, in this submission we would like to underscore the potential impact on vulnerable road users of any design that would create gaps in the bike lanes. We fear that if cycling infrastructure becomes effectively interrupted by numerous loading areas, bike lane users will be exposed to increased danger and the route can no longer be considered protected. In consequence, it would not be safe for use by:

- Children, who would have to continue biking on crowded sidewalks rather than being able to ride safely with their parents on the bike lane/ cycle track
- Power wheelchair users (who are fond of using bike lanes in many European countries, and should have that option in Toronto)
- Cyclists with disabilities using low-slung bikes that drivers may not notice when they are cutting through a badly 'protected' bike lane
- Seniors riding tricycles

A safe bike lane or cycle track is like a sidewalk: it should be as continuous as possible, and the fewer opportunities that vehicles have to drive over it or park on it, the safer it is.

Recommendations

The City should consider solutions that have already been implemented elsewhere in progressive jurisdictions such as Vancouver and Amsterdam. This is an opportunity to have serious discussions about accessible public space, including the pedestrian realm. Above all, as we work out the design for the permanent Bloor bike lanes/ cycle tracks, we need to make safety of all vulnerable road users the paramount consideration – over and above mere convenience.

- On stretches of Bloor St. such as between Avenue Rd. and Spadina Ave., there is enough road space to allow for on-street parking and also to create proper buffer zones that will prevent collisions between the different modes of travel.
- West of Spadina, we should consider eliminating all regular on-street parking in order to create safe buffers and allow for adequate separation between road users.
- Instead, accessible parking spaces should be created on every side street near its intersection with Bloor, using a design that is common in Vancouver. (See illustration below).
- Accessible mid-block drop-off and pick-up lay-bys should be built in locations where the need is most felt. The floating island design is safest for cyclists, as it does not create holes in the bike lane. The loading zone at Trinity-St. Paul's Church (see p. 3 of the staff presentation) has the right idea, though it lacks the conspicuous pavement markings that we like about the Massachusetts design (see below.) The alternative, a curbside design, is the most convenient for vehicle users, but should be used sparingly.
- To dramatically improve the street for pedestrians, it is necessary to widen the sidewalks appreciably. While it may not be feasible to include this measure as part of the work on Bloor happening in 2019 – which is a repaving project of limited scope and budget – we do recommend that major sidewalk expansion be included in any future reconstruction of Bloor St.

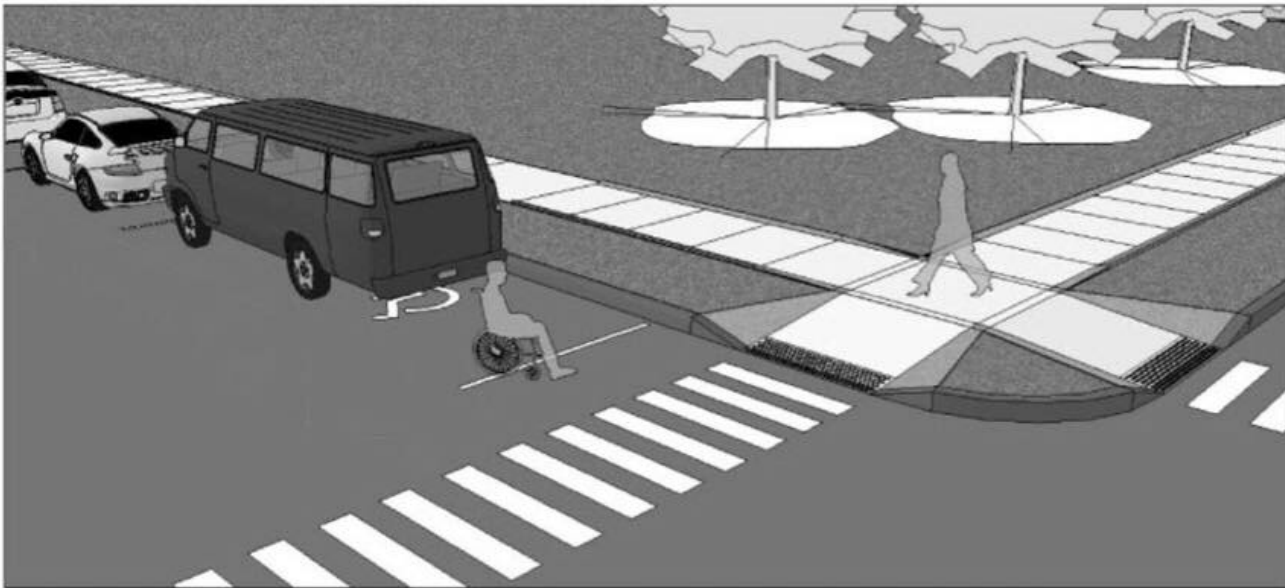
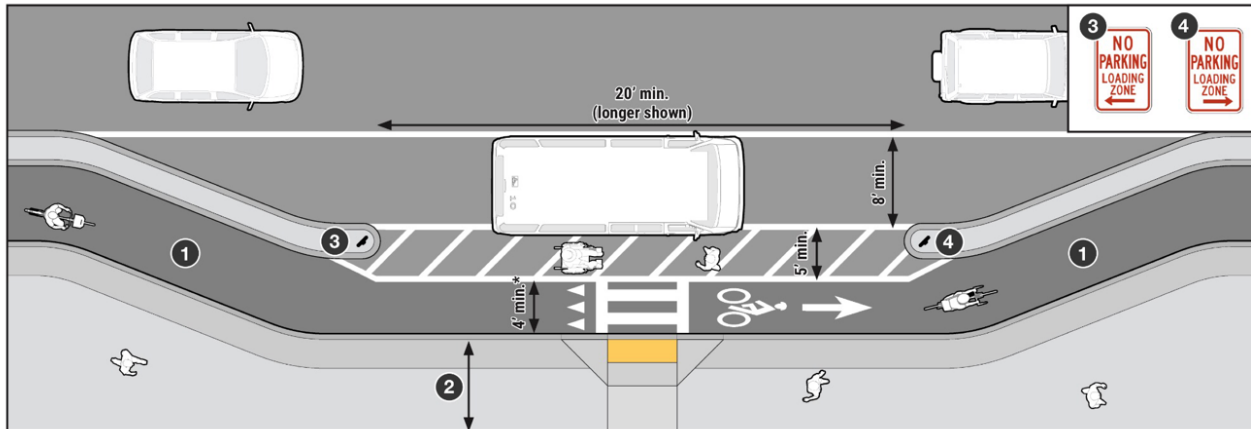


Figure 1 - Vancouver side street accessible parking design allows vehicles to park on side streets close enough to the intersection for people in wheelchairs to make use of corner curb cuts. There are no conflicts with cyclists on bike lanes.



* A bike lane width narrower than 5 ft. requires a design exception.

Figure 2 - Massachusetts design for “floating island” mid-block accessible parking. It allows vulnerable cyclists to ride safely next to the curb without encountering vehicles, which are given their own area with a wide buffer zone that can be used by people with disabilities who are being dropped off or picked up. Note the pavement markings that indicate which zone is for bikes, and which is for vehicle parking.

DI19.6 - Accessibility at Construction Sites

Accessibility barriers for pedestrians with disabilities at construction sites pose a significant risk to this segment of the population. It should also be noted that temporary conditions caused by filming activities and road closures due to special events can have a similar impact on pedestrians with disabilities. We will limit the scope of our comments to construction, which is responsible for the placement of hoarding, fences, equipment, parked trucks and other work vehicles that can severely obstruct the pedestrian clearway, making it difficult to use for people with disabilities. In extreme cases, the sidewalk can be totally blocked, rendering it altogether unusable. This has various potentially significant implications for the safety of people with disabilities:

- They may become disoriented or stranded in the middle of an impassable sidewalk
- If the only alternative is to venture onto the roadway, people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable in situations where they are walking or rolling along a vehicular lane that is not protected from moving traffic.
 - Those with vision impairments may lack the ability to see oncoming cars
 - while those with mobility impairments may be able to see traffic and yet may not be nimble enough to dodge it.
 - People using mobility devices such as wheelchairs may not be able to get back on the sidewalk when the construction zone ends in the middle of the block

Although permits issued by the City for the use of the public right-of-way are subject to compliance with the provisions of the Highway Traffic Act and Book 7 (“Temporary Conditions”) of the Ontario Traffic Manual, accessibility barriers are encountered all too frequently in the vicinity of construction sites.

Recommendations:

- That TAAC advise the City to require managers of all construction projects to submit a detailed plan to explain how they will ensure safe passage for people with disabilities, including specific mitigation measures for each barrier, anytime one encroaches on the pedestrian right-of-way. City inspections for compliance should also be conducted.
- That TAAC advise that the City should investigate immediately after receiving a report of barriers at construction sites that block the sidewalk or that impede safe crossings, and consider significant fines to those blocking the pedestrian right of way
- Care should be exercised in construction zones to lay out pedestrian detours and temporary walkways protected by barricades, hoarding and scaffolding such that:
 - surfacing is relatively smooth so that the operation of wheelchairs, walkers and other mobility devices is not hindered, and no significant tripping hazards exist
 - the temporary pedestrian clearway is:
 - at least 1.8 metres in width, as recommended for commercial areas by the Ontario Traffic Manual, Book 7 (wide enough to enable one wheelchair to pass another, or to pass two people walking together)
 - rather than the OTM minimum temporary clearway width of 1.2 metres, which is not sufficient in a large city such as Toronto that experiences significant pedestrian activity
- Outright closure of sidewalks or walking routes due to construction should be avoided. Total closure should be treated as a last resort, and its effects can be mitigated in two ways:
 - The City of Toronto should create a list of sidewalks that are blocked by construction, filming activities and and special events, posting the list on its website for public access. The list should be accurate and reflect the most current information, including specific details about the location, the nature of the obstacle, the expected duration of the closure, and any detours or measures being undertake to mitigate the impact of the barriers. This would allow people with disabilities to plan ahead, and know what they may encounter as they go about their business.
 - Conspicuous signs giving details of the closure should be posted at the location. When access to a mid-block segment of a sidewalk is totally blocked, signs should be posted at the intersections too.
- Noise is a barrier for some people with disabilities, especially for those who have a visual impairment. Consequently, the City should require construction projects to include measures to mitigate the adverse effects of noise on pedestrians who are blind, or seniors with cognitive issues. In places where the noise related to construction projects prevents blind people from listening to accessible pedestrian signals or to the flow of traffic in order to assess when it is safe to cross the street, these projects should have a crossing guard or paid duty police officer to ensure that these pedestrians can cross safely.