

## **Strategy to Maintain Public Walkways in a State of Good Repair**

**Date:** August 27, 2020

**To:** Etobicoke York Community Council

**From:** Director, Operations & Maintenance, Transportation Services

**Wards:** 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7

### **SUMMARY**

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This report is to provide information on a City multi-divisional strategy to maintain public walkways, throughout the Etobicoke York area and across Toronto, in a state of good repair, including information on how these walkways are inventoried, inspected, and maintained by the Transportation Services Division.

While this report is specific to the Etobicoke York area, a comprehensive city-wide strategy to maintain public walkways in state of good repair would need be conducted for all public walkways across the City. As such, this report recommends that Transportation Services bring forward a report to Q3 2021 Infrastructure and Environment Committee on a framework for a city-wide strategy for the maintenance of public walkways.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Director, Operations & Maintenance, Transportation Services recommends that:

1. Request the General Manager, Transportation Services, to report back in Q3, 2021, to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on a framework for a city-wide strategy for the maintenance of public walkways.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

## DECISION HISTORY

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At its meeting on March 19, 2019 Etobicoke York Community Council requested the following:

General Manager, Transportation Services, to report to Etobicoke York Community Council by Q4, 2019, on the division's strategy to maintain public walkways throughout the Etobicoke York area in a state of good repair, including information on how these walkways are inventoried, inspected and maintained.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EY4.19>

Subsequently, at its meeting on July 9, 2020 Infrastructure and Environment Committee requested the following:

General Manager, Transportation Services to provide an update on walkways to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee, no later than the fourth quarter of 2020, including on: a. the current level of service, including seasonal and regular maintenance; b. the number of service visits.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.IE14.18>

## COMMENTS

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Public walkways are connection components of the pedestrian network and are located across all areas of the City of Toronto. Together with sidewalks, they form a walking network that provide pedestrians with connection points to important destinations such as access to transit, schools, parks and neighbourhood amenities people value. In many cases, public walkways provide pedestrians with timely shortcuts to key destinations and public amenities, as compared to walking along sidewalks around the neighbourhood block. This is particularly pronounced in residential areas where the streets are not laid out in a grid pattern, but are winding and contain multiple loops and cul-de-sacs. Public walkways can generally be categorized as being dedicated or undedicated. While these are not official designations, they are useful in providing context.

*Dedicated Public Walkways:* A dedicated public walkway is a walkway that has been by-lawed as being exclusively for the use of pedestrians, and is formally recognized as such in the City of Toronto's Official Record of Highways. A dedicated public walkway forms part of the municipal road allowance, with Transportation Services being the asset owner. According to the 2010 review, there are 576 dedicated public walkways in the City of Toronto, with 109 of these walkways located in Etobicoke York area. There are also a number of relevant City divisions (namely Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Solid Waste Management Services) and the Toronto District School Boards that are also involved with maintenance of pedestrian walkways and walkway connections as they exist between:

1. Street to street,
2. Street to park,
3. Street to school and/or
4. Street to stairs.

*Undedicated Public Walkways:* Undedicated walkways are those that have been formed and physically exist, however have not been formally inventoried and properly regulated as a public walkway, nor recorded as such in the Official Record of Highways. It is uncertain how many undedicated public walkways exist, but there are likely hundreds of pathways, foot paths or paved sections of the soft landscape that may exist and are regularly used by pedestrians (see Attachment 1).

## **2010 Review**

In 2010 Transportation Services conducted an exercise to visit each dedicated public walkway to verify and record the characteristics associated with the walkway, including length, width, material, and whether there were elements such as bollards, fences, stairs, retaining structures, or raised edge curbs installed at the walkway. For dedicated public walkways in Etobicoke York, it was found that there is extensive variability of the walkways in terms of materials (concrete, asphalt, sod, flagstones); lengths (ranging from 20 m to 248 m); and widths (ranging from 1 m to 20 m). The site visits also found that some walkways had been closed off with the erection of fencing and, in some cases, signage. There were also instances in which the public walkway identified in the Official Record of Highways did not exist in the field; instead, the walkway corridor was occupied by natural vegetation or by small structures, such as sheds, which had been erected by adjacent property owners. Similar to Etobicoke York area, many walkway connections across all areas of the City exist or remain undedicated, not properly registered or inventoried, and as such they do not get inspected nor maintained.

## **2020 Maintenance and State of good Repair**

At present time, there is no specific or comprehensive strategy to inspect, field verify and maintain the public walkways in a state of good repair city wide. In accordance with the Ontario Minimal Maintenance Standards (MMS), each year Transportation Services, Operations and Maintenance staff perform an annual inspection of the public sidewalks and dedicated (street to street) walkways only, (those typically constructed with a hard surface). In addition, prior to the commencement of winter maintenance services, Transportation Services and the City's winter contractors also conduct a pre-winter season review of the dedicated walkways with to identify and address any concerns with infrastructure facilities. Needless to say public walkways that are not dedicated, are not hard-surfaced or have been closed are not inspected, as they are not considered pedestrian thoroughfares (see Attachment 2).

With respect to maintenance of the four type of hard-surfaced dedicated pedestrian walkways, temporary repairs by the responsible Division are often made to ensure that the walkways are safe and passable. For instance, for Street to Street dedicated walkways repairs are made both - proactively - as a result of inspections undertaken by Transportation Services or its contractors, and also reactively - as a result of service requests/complaints made by the public. Historically, and in most cases, maintenance repairs often include encroachment issues such as hedge or brush trimming, grass cutting, overhanging branches, fence issues or tree trimming, all of which are generated on a reactive or complaint driven basis. Each year, these maintenance service requests create additional pressures on staff, resources and operations budget, as unplanned

walkway maintenance pulls both resources and staff away from their regular responsibilities (see Attachment 3). These pressures become even greater during winter season as most walkways are not able to receive mechanical snow clearing due to their narrow widths, stairs or encroachment issues. In these cases, manual snow-clearing (by-hand) is provided where feasible. Service requests and maintenance issues are further compounded by the fact that all existing lighting in the public walkways is owned, maintained and provided by Toronto Hydro and not the City of Toronto.

At present time, there is no dedicated capital budget for the state of good repair of public walkways; funding for these repairs are generally absorbed in the capital budget for sidewalk rehabilitation. As such, any development of a comprehensive or a city wide strategy to properly inspect, inventory and maintain public walkways (as well as clearly outline who does what between city divisions) would need to be appropriately funded, with dedicated staff and resources in the 2021-2022 operating and capital budget cycle.

## **Action Forward**

There are multiple sources of data related to dedicated and undedicated public walkways, such as, the inventory of dedicated public walkways; records from annual sidewalk and walkway inspections; records from inspections of snow routes, including walkways; and, lists of walkways that receive grass-cutting services and snow-clearing routes. However, it is recognized that the existing information is piecemeal; not easily retrieved or accessed; and is not cross-referenced to offer a fulsome picture of all the dedicated and undedicated walkways in Etobicoke York, in terms of location, condition, and activities performed. To that end, it is imperative to bring together all the relevant divisions/stakeholders and conduct an assignment to reconcile all the various sources of data for the purposes of maintaining an up-to-date database of dedicated and undedicated public walkways. Once this is completed, an annual maintenance plan, with clear roles and responsibilities between different divisions, and financial/budgetary implications, will need to be formulated and presented for consideration.

While this report is specific to the Etobicoke York area, a comprehensive city-wide strategy to maintain public walkways in state of good repair would need be conducted for all public walkways across the City. As such, Transportation Services will bring forward a report to Q3 2021 Infrastructure and Environment Committee on a feasibility study, implementation schedule and proposed funding strategy for the development of a city-wide public walkway strategy.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Vincent Sferrazza  
Director, Operations & Maintenance  
Transportation Services

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment 1: Undedicated Public Walkways  
Attachment 2: Inspection  
Attachment 3: Maintenance

## Attachment 1: Undedicated Public Walkways

The most common examples or scenarios of undedicated public walkways include:

- A foot path develops, typically as a shortcut between two sidewalks, as pedestrians find the shortest, most direct route they can. Eventually, as the foot path becomes more popular or more used, it may be paved over or replaced with a hard surface such as asphalt or concrete.
- Public walkways that were entirely or in-part constructed on public property owned by the City, however they were never officially by-lawed as dedicated public walkways. These walkways are thus not formally inventoried, remain unrecognized and do not receive any service or maintenance.
- There are discontinuous roadway corridors where the entire lengths are registered as public roads, for the use of all road users including vehicles. However, on site, the roadways are not always continuous and are not suitable for vehicles; instead, the roadway terminates on either side of an intermediate segment, with this intermediate segment consisting of a public walkway.
- There are public walkways on land owned by other jurisdictions, such as the Ministry of Transportation, Ontario (see Figure 2). These walkways do not receive inspection or maintenance service from the City.



Figure 2. An undedicated public walkway, including stairs, at the northwest quadrant of the interchange of Highway 427 and Dundas Street West; the walkway is within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Transportation, Ontario

## **Attachment 2: Inspection**

Public walkways, both dedicated and undedicated, that are typically constructed with a hard surface, such as asphalt or concrete, are supposed to be inspected annually. Similar to public sidewalks, public walkways are subject to the Province of Ontario's Minimum Maintenance Standards (MMS) for Highways in the City of Toronto, Regulation O. Reg 612/06, which mandates the inspection, along with the inspection schedules, of the various facilities within the road allowance.

In addition to annual Transportation Services staff (Field Investigations and summer students) inspections under the Minimum Maintenance Standards (MMS), dedicated public walkways that receive winter maintenance services are also reviewed and inspected by the Operations and Maintenance Winter contractors who undertake snow-clearing activities. These inspections are generally conducted in the Fall each year, well in advance of any anticipated winter related events. The Winter contractors are required to report any issues that they observe, including issues that relate to the condition of the facilities.

Public walkways that are not hard-surfaced or have been closed are not inspected, as they are not considered pedestrian thoroughfares.

## **Attachment 3: Maintenance**

For both dedicated and undedicated hard-surfaced walkways that are used by pedestrians, temporary repairs with asphalt are made to ensure that the walkways are safe and passable. Temporary repairs are made as a result of inspections undertaken by Transportation Services or its contractors, or as a result of complaints made by the public.

Historically, permanent repairs of public walkways are typically generated on a reactive basis. When an inquiry is received, Transportation Services undertakes a field verification and, subsequently, a determination about the type and extent of work necessary. In other instances, walkway repairs have also been performed when the walkway location is adjacent to a capital road rehabilitation project. There is no dedicated capital budget for the repair of public walkways; funding for these repairs are generally absorbed in the capital budget for sidewalk rehabilitation, which is approximately \$15,000,000 annually.

Other miscellaneous maintenance activities include grass-cutting, tree trimming, and cutting back of hedges or brush. Grass-cutting is undertaken to maintain grass at an appropriate height adjacent to asphalt and concrete walkways or for aesthetic reasons to keep sodded walkways from becoming unsightly, as these walkways may be adjacent to residential homes. Transportation Services maintains a list of walkway locations where this activity is performed, and has a contract to undertake the work in the summer seasons. Transportation Services also undertakes trimming of tree branches that overhang into the walkway and cutting back of hedges or brush that encroach onto the public walkway; these activities are not undertaken on a regular schedule but are complaint-based.

## **Winter Operations**

Most concrete walkways that are used by pedestrians, whether dedicated or undedicated, are cleared of snow during the wintertime if they are within an area in which Transportation Services provides mechanical sidewalk snow clearing. In some cases, due to restrictions such as reduced widths or the presence of stairs, snow clearing is required to be completed by hand. Transportation Services has lists and maps of all public walkways that receives snow-clearing.

Non-concrete walkways, such as asphalt or sodded walkways, are not cleared of snow during the winter season.

## **Lighting**

All existing lighting at public walkways are owned and maintained by Toronto Hydro, and are typically legacy lighting Toronto Hydro inherited when lighting within the municipal right-of-way was transferred from the City to Toronto Hydro in 2005. Toronto Hydro does not install new lighting at public walkways.