

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

**Date:** December 20, 2021

**To:** Infrastructure and Environment Committee

**From:** General Manager, Transportation Services

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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This report is in response to City Council request for the General Manager, Transportation Services, to provide information on maintenance service levels for public walkways. In addition, the report discusses the need to develop a multi-divisional city-wide strategy to maintain public walkways in a state of good repair, including information on how these walkways are inventoried, inspected, and maintained.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The General Manager, Transportation Services recommends that:

1. The Infrastructure and Environment Committee receive this report for information.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no financial implications resulting from the information in this report.

### **DECISION HISTORY**

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On November 9, 10 and 12, 2021 city council adopted the following:

City Council request the General Manager, Transportation Services, to provide an update to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee no later than January of 2022 on:

- a. the current level of service for public walkways, including seasonal and regular maintenance; and
- b. a framework for a City-wide strategy for the maintenance and capital renewal of public walkways.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.IE25.24>

City Council on September 30, October 1 and 2, 2020, adopted the following:

1. City Council request (which was recommended by Etobicoke York Community Council) the General Manager, Transportation Services to report in the third quarter of 2021 to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on a framework for a City-wide strategy for the maintenance of public walkways.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.IE25.24>

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>

## **COMMENTS**

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Public walkways are connections within the pedestrian network and are located across all areas of the city. Together with sidewalks, they form a walking network that connect pedestrians to transit, schools, parks and neighbourhood and other popular amenities. In many cases, public walkways provide pedestrians with timely shortcuts to their destinations, 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. A dedicated public walkway has been designated by a by-law as being exclusively for the use of pedestrians, and is formally recognized as such in the City of Toronto's Official Record of Highways, and forms part of the municipal road allowance, with Transportation Services being the asset owner. Undedicated walkways may physically exist but not formally planned and constructed, and are not formally inventoried and

properly regulated as a public walkway, nor recorded as such in the Official Record of Highways.

There are a number of relevant City divisions - Transportation Services, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Solid Waste Management Services, along with the Toronto District School Boards, that are involved with maintenance of pedestrian walkways and walkway connections as they exist between streets, that connect a street to a park, that connect a street to a school or that connect a street to a public stairway.

## Current 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. In accordance with the Ontario Maintenance Standards (MS), each year Transportation Services, Operations and Maintenance staff perform an annual inspection of the public sidewalks and dedicated (street to street) walkways that are 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 to identify and address any concerns with the infrastructure. Public walkways that are not dedicated, are not hard-surfaced or have been closed are not inspected, as they are not considered pedestrian thoroughfares.

Maintenance of hard-surfaced, dedicated pedestrian walkways are typically accomplished through temporary repairs by the responsible Division to ensure that the walkways are safe and passable. Maintenance repairs also 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 service requests. Each year, these maintenance service requests create additional pressures on staff, resources and operations budget, as unplanned walkway maintenance that redirects resources and staff away from their regular responsibilities. These pressures become even greater during the 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. Maintenance issues for all existing lighting in the public walkways is owned, maintained and provided by Toronto Hydro and not the City of Toronto. Although the programming of sidewalk works is primarily reactive at this time, there is a dedicated capital budget for the state of good repair of public walkways. The 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 included in the 2024 operating and capital budget cycle, along with all required additional staffing and resources for consideration.

## Action Forward

There are various 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 the city, 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.

Maintaining Public Walkways in a State of Good Repair

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 in the second quarter of 2023 to 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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