



From: Walk Toronto steering committee
To: Members of Toronto Council
Re: Millwood Road Safety Improvements Project (IE3.8, Recommendation 4)
Date: May 9, 2023

Walk Toronto is a grassroots pedestrian advocacy group that works with various levels of government, community groups and citizens to improve walking conditions and safety in Toronto.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WalkToronto recommends that Council approve staff’s proposals as set out in the Feb. 6, 2023 presentation, “Millwood Road Safety Improvements.” <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/8ea7-2023-01-25-Millwood-Presentation-Final-AODA.pdf>

However, we note that certain necessary, additional accessibility improvements are possible, and there are several omissions that have negative impacts on pedestrians.

LEASIDE BRIDGE

Improvements to the Leaside Bridge may be seen as complementary to the work being done on the Overlea/ Charles H. Hiscott Bridge at the the other end of Overlea Blvd. Together, these bridges provide the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood with some of its few links to other parts of the city.

Slide 29 of the staff presentation makes it clear that the width of the sidewalks on Leaside Bridge will not be changed. Ideally, Walk Toronto would like to see the pedestrian clearway on the bridge increased beyond the present 2.0 metre width. However, we do not consider this measure to have the same urgent priority as on the Hiscott Bridge — which is used intensively by schoolchildren and carries far higher pedestrian volumes than the Leaside Bridge.

INTERSECTIONS — ACCESSIBILITY CONCERNS

Walk Toronto has been involved in the redesign of the protected intersection at St. George and Bloor streets with the aim of improving safety and accessibility for pedestrians with disabilities. The St. George intersection is designed in a traditional “+” configuration. In contrast, both of the intersections of the Millwood project are designed in a “Y” configuration. This creates geometric challenges. Planners have had to deal with many oblique angles, which are more

difficult to navigate for people with low or no vision than the perpendiculars more typical of + intersections. Fortunately, the inner suburban locations of the Millwood intersections are subject to fewer spatial constraints than the downtown St. George intersection. This opens up options to improve accessibility. We feel that it is important to get the accessibility aspects of the designs for the Millwood intersections right, since they could serve as a Toronto prototype for other “Y” intersections in the future.

From the accessibility standpoint, the pedestrian clearways of an intersection should be as straight as possible, and should meet at right angles. The geometry of staff’s proposed design for the Overlea intersection (slide 23) is deficient in these regards. A possible solution is to preserve the position of the crosswalk across Overlea Blvd. but move the sidewalks that lead out of the north and south ends of the crosswalk a bit to the east onto the areas that staff are currently planning to leave as grass lawns that serve no useful purpose. This would align the north-south pedestrian clearway along an easily navigable, straight axis. (Note that this change may necessitate a slight shifting of the columns that will support the overhead Ontario Line tracks.)

Also on slide 23, the sidewalk at the apex of the northeast corner seems to narrow unduly, and may create bottleneck problems when pedestrian volumes are high. Moving the sidewalks to the east would give more space to planners and would allow a removal of the apex bottleneck.

The second major intersection that is being redesigned is located at the south end of the Leaside Bridge (slide 37). This has always been extremely troublesome for pedestrians because no crosswalks at all were provided for crossing Pape Ave. and Millwood Rd. — and to get across Donlands Ave., people on foot must currently traverse three separate sections, only two of which have crosswalks. We are thankful that staff are planning to remedy these deficiencies, including the reduction of the Donlands crossing to two signalized sections.

From the geometrical point of view, the pedestrian clearways are reasonably straight, and should not present excessive navigation problems for people with visual impairments. However, we suggest that the island’s bus stop area and the short crosswalk (connecting the island to the south side of Donlands Ave.) would benefit from a slight reconfiguration in order to align the pedestrian clearway with the crosswalk that runs west from the island.

INTERSECTIONS — MISCELLANEOUS CONSIDERATIONS

Walk Toronto is supportive of staff’s plans for four additional measures that will improve the intersections for pedestrians at both intersections:

- raised crossings
- new trees and plantings
- reduced curb radii; and
- the inclusion of accessible pedestrian signals (APS)

At the Overlea intersection, Walk Toronto agrees with remedying the missing sidewalk on the west side of Millwood, where a beaten dirt ‘desire line’ indicates the need for real infrastructure. However, we believe that a pedestrian crosswalk should also be added on the south side to connect to the new sidewalk (slide 26), so that pedestrians do not have to walk an extra distance to use the north crosswalk.

NORTHBOUND LANE ON MILLWOOD ROAD

Walk Toronto has not yet seen the supplementary report that the IEC requested from the General Manager, Transportation Services for the City Council meeting of May 10 and 11. This will present alternative options to the proposed additional, northbound, one-way cycle track on the east side of Millwood Road (north of the bridge). As a matter of principle, Walk Toronto supports designs that prioritize space for pedestrians and widen sidewalks. However, if these measures are undertaken while removing the northbound one-way cycle track, then we predict that many northbound cyclists will take advantage of the widened sidewalk and will ride on it — a result that is counterproductive to the stated aim of “prioritizing space for pedestrians.”

In order to ensure that impacts on pedestrians are positive, we recommend that the sidewalk on the east side of Millwood Rd. be widened, while the abutting northbound cycle track be retained. An added benefit of keeping the protected cycle track is that it will provide a buffer for pedestrians, distancing them from the northbound vehicular lane on Millwood, which is heavily used by TTC buses, trucks and other fast-moving vehicles turning east onto Overlea Blvd.

MILLWOOD RD. SEGMENT SOUTH OF THE CPR UNDERPASS

We understand that the scope of the present Millwood Road Safety Improvements project excludes the segment of Millwood Rd. that runs from Overlea Blvd. northwest to the CPR underpass. This stretch plays a vital role in connecting the Thorncliffe Park, Flemingdon Park, Leaside and Danforth neighbourhoods. Slide 8 identifies Future Cycling Connections, including the present Millwood Bridge project, as well as proposed projects on Laird Dr., Donlands Ave., and Broadview Ave. No plans are indicated for Millwood Rd. west of Overlea Blvd., even though a two-way cycle track is mooted for the south side of this segment of Millwood. (See amendment approved at the April 26, 2023 meeting of the IEC.)

Walk Toronto recommends that improvements to the sidewalk on the north side of Millwood (running southeast from the CPR underpass) should be undertaken as soon as possible. At regular intervals, recesses have been built into the retaining wall that were originally meant to accommodate street trees. Unfortunately, some of the trees have died and in their place debris and litter has been allowed to accumulate. The recesses need to be cleaned up, and dead or dying trees should be replaced. If remedying the sidewalk problems on this section of Millwood Rd. cannot be included in any project that Transportation Services has in the works, then it should be undertaken as an independent measure.

* * *

Walk Toronto contact:
Michael Black — michaelblack@sympatico.ca