CITY OF TORONTO

HIGH PARK MOVEMENT STRATEGY
FINAL REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

April 4, 2023

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FINAL REPORT

CITY OF TORONTO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT NO.: IM21202061
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

High Park is one of Toronto's largest public parks, combining environmentally significant areas with maintained parkland, recreational facilities, and popular attractions. As a regional destination offering a range of travel options, High Park is one of the most visited parks in Toronto.

WSP E&I (formerly Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions) was retained as a consultant in Fall 2021 to support the City of Toronto in developing a Movement Strategy for High Park. The High Park Movement Strategy (HPMS) (the "Study"), a project co-led by the Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Transportation Services Divisions, will rethink the travel network within the park in the context of growing populations, shifting travel patterns, and impacts from COVID-19. The project was initiated in Summer 2021 in response to the weekend road closures which sparked a broader conversation about the role and function of the road network in High Park. Park users were interested in exploring a broader range of options for managing movement to, from and within the park, while minimizing impacts to surrounding communities and naturalized areas.

This summary will provide an overview of the goals and objectives, engagement process, existing conditions assessment, strategy development and evaluation, and the preferred solution.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study is to improve the travel network to better serve park users and the surrounding community, with a focus on safety and accessibility while prioritizing the park's ecological integrity. The intent of this study is to address mobility concerns with the existing road network, vulnerable road user safety and comfort, site access, improved wayfinding, infrastructure consistency, and ultimately to provide a comprehensive mobility strategy for High Park.

The study explores issues related to park access, road safety, and promotion of active transportation. Particular attention has been paid to improving safety conditions for vulnerable road users, reducing motor vehicle traffic, ensuring site access, upgrading transportation infrastructure to meet accessibility standards, and minimizing travel conflicts among users. This will be done in the park context; the study will explore options that maintain or enhance ecological integrity in the park, all while respecting the environmental significance of High Park. The study will advance through early and ongoing engagement with internal partners, external stakeholders, and the broader public.

The objectives and deliverables will be pursued within the context of the City's guiding principles for Transportation: safe and healthy communities, quality service, access for everyone, and resilient solutions. This is understood to include a Vision Zero orientation to road safety, a multi-modal orientation to mobility, and a diversity and inclusion orientation to accessibility.

ENGAGEMENT

Public and stakeholder engagement and consultation formed an integral part of the HPMS process. The study has been supported by a multi-phase engagement process that has reached thousands of park users through online and in-person engagement events over the course of two years. The objective of the engagement strategy was to gather information on

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 3

the mobility needs of park users and understand the common issues faced today. The engagement process followed the phases listed below:

- Round 1: Online survey, consultation with identified external stakeholders, and consultation with internal City Divisions. Initial outreach to a Rights Holders, Indigenous groups and First Nations representatives to inform them of the study and invite future participation.
- Round 2: Continued engagement with external stakeholders to better understand problems and opportunities.
- Round 3: Widespread public consultation through in-park activations, an online survey, and a virtual open house focused on presenting the draft strategies and collecting public feedback.
- Round 4: Detailed feedback on emerging directions from external stakeholders and internal City Divisions. An open house with Indigenous groups was also held at this time.
- Round 5: Public Open House that shared materials on the preferred strategy with the public.

Feedback from each step in the engagement process informed development of draft strategies, evaluation criteria, the refinement of strategies and the selection of the preferred strategy.

The prevailing themes of discussion throughout the engagement process were centred on:

- Improving road user safety, with a specific emphasis on vulnerable road users. Opportunities to improve the experience and comfort of pedestrians were highlighted, like improving pedestrian crossing areas and ensuring pedestrians have the right-of-way, adding more street lighting to improve visibility, widening sidewalks and adding connections where sidewalks abruptly end.
- Reducing motor vehicle volumes in the park, especially cut-through, commuter traffic. Participants agreed that some degree of road rebalancing would be acceptable to mitigate motor vehicle volumes.
- Traffic calming and road redesign measures that reduce conflict among the different modes of travel, especially around the Grenadier Café and Bloor Street West entrance. Participants also expressed concerns about the cycling behaviours in the park, specifically travel speeds and non-compliance with stop signs.
- Improved transit and/or shuttle service in the park, and interest in pursuing low-emission vehicle options.
- Accessibility accommodations to ensure those with varying mobility needs can continue to access the park.
- The appropriateness of sport/recreational cycling in the park, specifically on the High Park Loop.
- The appropriateness of by-law and police enforcement in High Park.
- The impacts of car-free park days and whether visitor vehicles should be removed from the park entirely.
- The environmental impact of proposed changes and opportunities to enhance the park's natural environment and re-naturalize space.
- Re-programming space for Indigenous place-keeping.
- Parking options in High Park

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 4

BACKGROUND ANALYSIS AND EXISTING CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT

Background analysis completed for the HPMS included a wide scope of information gathering on the current conditions in High Park, Indigenous significance, environmentally significant areas, park usage and comparative case studies. Early in the process, jurisdictional scans yielded examples of similar projects in North America and Europe where municipalities were studying the role and function of park road networks and opportunities to prioritize non-auto modes of travel.

An assessment of existing transportation conditions in the study and context areas was completed to evaluate the current and future needs of movement within and around High Park. The assessment included the review of the City's existing policies, goals and objectives for the study and context areas. Data collection was completed to understand and display travel patterns, assess infrastructure conditions and evaluate compliance with City standards. The transportation assessment considered the following:

- Road geometry: roadway characteristics (lanes, access, etc.) and features (sight distance, shoulders, sidewalk width, etc.), and traffic safety;
- (Multi-modal) Traffic management system: traffic controls, regulations, and other related mechanisms;
- Multi-modal traffic patterns: vehicle counts, observational studies and multi-modal traffic analysis;
- Road safety: collision history and observational risk assessment;
- Accessibility: requirements and compliance with AODA standards;
- Parking: parking utilization counts, demand and policies within the study and context areas, probability of spillover in the context area;
- Transit: location and service levels of TTC stops and stations.

High Park is often recognized as a centerpiece of the City's open space network. The park contains a distinct variety of natural features and habitats. Most of the natural areas within High Park are designated as Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) through the City's Official Plan. Provincially identified Areas of Natural or Scientific Interest (ANSI) are closely related to ESAs. This layer generally overlaps with the regulated ESAs within High Park and represents areas with notable biodiversity and natural landscapes.

High Park is situated upon the traditional territories of the Wendat, Haudenosaunee, Anishnabeg and the Mississaugas of the Credit. It is an area with a significant pre-colonial Indigenous history, with archaeological evidence and oral history establishing activity and inhabitation by Indigenous people for thousands of years. The Humber River watershed, within which High Park is located, provided connection to a vast and vital network of trade and travel routes including the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River.

The HPMS is not contemplating changes to the naturalized areas. Other important park matters such as land use, conservation and facility maintenance will continue to be addressed through established City plans and policies including the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan, Parkland Strategy and Ravine Strategy.

To support the existing conditions assessment, the consultant team had access to the City's suite of datasets available on the public Open Data website, Environics data from years 2018 to 2021, and performed site visits at High Park throughout the duration of the study. The assessment of existing conditions includes a review of the impacts of the ActiveTO closures, and potential changes in behaviour caused by or correlated to restricted park access for vehicles.

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 5

To provide a deeper understanding of park users and their patterns, analysis on park visits and visitors was conducted using Environics Analytics MobileScapes data. The data was used to learn about the demographics of park users and distanced travelled to High Park. Information about park users collected through Environics Analytics MobileScapes data was compared to the demographic and location data survey respondents. Responses to these survey questions were voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were given an option to select 'prefer not to answer' for all demographic questions. The standard demographic questions help the City understand who the survey reached, whose feedback may be missing, and how this compares to the demographic/geographic information of park users through Environics.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT, REFINEMENT AND EVALUATION

Building on initial findings and comments from early engagement, the existing conditions assessment and the review of City plans and policies, the project team prepared an inventory of possible interventions for improving the travel network in High Park. This served as a basis for the development of draft strategies. Four draft strategies were prepared and presented to stakeholders and the public in summer 2022:

- Draft Strategy #1: Full road closures at all times
- Draft Strategy #2: Time-based road closures
- Draft Strategy #3: Area-based road closures
- Draft Strategy #4: Full road re-opening

Each strategy presented a unique approach for managing travel within High Park while responding to priorities of safety, accessibility and environment. A complete return to the pre-pandemic travel network in High Park was not advanced given the mobility issues highlighted through the existing conditions report.

Findings from the existing conditions assessment and feedback collected from divisional and agency partners, external stakeholders and the public informed several conditions that would be met with all strategies:

- Traffic calming measures;
- Improved transit and shuttle service;
- Removal of angled parking configuration;
- Implementation of paid parking;
- Access for service vehicles (for example: ambulance, fire, police, forestry, operations, delivery, etc.)
- Visitor vehicles access to the Children's Garden and the Spring Road parking lot.

Refinements to the draft strategies were informed by input from City divisions and agencies, and public feedback. City divisions and agencies were consulted to better understand their mobility needs to operate and support City services in High Park. This helped define a base level of "technical viability", the ability to support High Park's operational and servicing needs. All strategies were refined to meet the technical viability requirement and support the core operations, maintenance, emergency and programmatic functions of the park.

Engagement activities in summer 2022 asked the public about their level of support for the draft strategies, and their perception of the safety, accessibility and environmental benefits they would provide. Feedback was incorporated through the strategy refinement process. A summary of the publicly-informed refinements is below:

Refined Strategy #1: Full road closures at all times

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 6

- In response to concerns about accessibility accommodations a shuttle/transit service would service park destinations to enhance site access and provide mobility accommodations for people with differing mobility needs.
- To mitigate conflicts between people cycling and pedestrians near the Grenadier Café intersection, a pedestrian plaza would be installed to prioritize pedestrian movements and mitigate potential conflicts.
- To provide people cycling with a continuous route with fewer traffic controls a cycling by-pass route would be implemented north of the Grenadier Café.

Refined Strategy #2: Time-based road closures.

- Feedback around time-base road closures suggested that closure days should be shifted to accommodate people travelling to the park by motor vehicle on non-school days.
- Road closure days were shifted to Sundays and Mondays, year round, to reflect the requests to provide expanded visitor vehicle access on weekends. Data suggests that event permits and park are more frequent on Saturdays; the shift in car-free days would facilitate direct vehicular connection to internal park destinations when events and activities are taking place.
- To increase predictability of motor vehicle movements and reduce motor vehicle volumes, Centre Road was converted into a one-way road for motor vehicles, permitting westbound traffic. People cycling would be permitted to travel in both directions.

Refined Strategy #3: Area-based road closures

- In response to requests to optimize vehicle movements to provide access to interior facilities and destinations in the park, Colborne Lodge Drive between Centre Road and Bloor Street West would remain open to visitor vehicles.
- In response to requests for quality, car-free spaces, West Road would be permanently closed to visitor vehicles and become an active transportation route.
- To reduce motor vehicle volumes and respond to concerns about cut-through traffic, motor vehicles would be required to follow a one-way route through the park.
- To mitigate conflicts among people driving, cycling and pedestrians near the Grenadier Café intersection, motor vehicles would not be permitted to drive south of Centre Road and a pedestrian plaza would be installed to prioritize pedestrian movements.
- To provide people cycling with a continuous route with fewer traffic controls a cycling by-pass route would be implemented north of the Grenadier Café.

Refined Strategy #4: Full road re-opening

- To increase predictability of motor vehicle movements and reduce motor vehicle volumes, Centre Road was converted into a one-way road for motor vehicles, permitting westbound traffic. People cycling would be permitted to travel in both directions.

A comprehensive evaluation process was developed to standardize the analysis of all four refined strategies scenarios. The strategies were evaluated to determine the degree to which each met the goals and objectives of the study. The evaluation tool quantified the impact of each strategy by analyzing the holistic and integrated system changes that would be stimulated by the implementation of the group of interventions.

The seven categories and criteria for evaluation are below:

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 7

Category	Criteria
User Safety (focus on vulnerable road users and mitigating conflict between users)	Adheres to policy objectives for improving pedestrian realm
	Provides buffer space from other travel modes
	Safe crossing opportunities at key destinations
	Welcoming and safe environments on shuttle/transit vehicles and at stop locations
	Reducing potential conflicts among road users
	Improve the predictability of road conditions for all modes
Access and Equity (reducing spatial, economic, temporal, physiological, cultural barriers)	Provides access to park destinations through active transportation routes
	Provides access to park destinations through transit routes
	Provides site access accommodations for park users with varying mobility needs
	Reduces time taken to access park destinations
	Provides consistent and predictable travel times
	Promotes low or no cost travel options
	Provides free family priority and accessible parking spaces
	Provides opportunities to implement universally accessible active transportation infrastructure and improved feelings of safety.
	Provides opportunities to expand or improve rest areas along exterior paths of travel
	Supports accessible Pick-up/Drop-off (PUDO) spaces
	Provides opportunities for public realm improvements that support a more welcoming environment (Indigenous place-keeping, public art, street furniture)
Environment	Opportunities to enhance the City's green canopy and/or green infrastructure

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 8

Category	Criteria
(preserving and enhancing naturalized areas)	Noise and air quality impacts
	Aligns with the principles of the Green Streets guidelines and City's TransformTO and Net Zero Strategy
	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions to achieve net zero GHG emissions by 2040
Mobility (supports travel demand management, minimizes impacts to surrounding areas)	Supports multi-modal travel.
	Design and public realm improvements around key destinations
	Supports public transit access and demand
	Supports shuttle options
	Prioritizes non-auto travel modes
	Considers the traffic impacts of network connections on adjacent neighbourhoods
Implement-ability (complexity, timing, and cost to fully deliver)	Anticipated capital costs for full implementation
	Phasing requirements & optimizations
	Communication and enforcement requirements
	Impacts to park maintenance and operation requirements.
Impacts to Programs and Permitting (supporting High Park as a destination)	Impacts to existing City facilities and programs within the park.
	Impacts to existing businesses within the park
	Provides new opportunities for programming and local economic development.
	Supports High Park as a local and regional tourism destination.
	Creates opportunities for revenue generation for the City.

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 9

Category	Criteria
Technical Viability (pass/fail supporting core operational needs)	Conforms to design standards: • Improves conditions for people living with disabilities and aligns with the 2021 TADG and AODA • Aligns with current best practices in active transportation design (Complete /Green Streets guidelines; Vison Zero Strategies; and the principles of OTM Books 15 &18)
→	Addresses seasonal operation needs
→	Addresses vehicle access for Emergency Services (Police, EMS, Fire, Forestry)
→	Addresses day-to-day vehicle access requirements and ease of use

STRATEGY EVALUATION

After the evaluation criteria were set in place, each of the refined strategies were evaluated and discussed with the project team. The approach relied on a combination of subjective, objective, and comparative points to provide a complete picture of each strategy's performance.

Each individual criteria could be scored using a simple numbering system:

- 0 = This strategy has a negative impact
- 1 = This strategy maintains current conditions
- 2 = This strategy is an improvement over current conditions
- 3 = This strategy is a significant improvement over current conditions

However, not every criterion could be rated using these descriptions. Some criteria were either pass or fail (and were awarded either a 1 or 0), while other criteria were better suited to comparisons against each strategy and were assessed a score of 0-3 based on the performance of each strategy compared to the others.

Additionally, some of the evaluation categories had more criteria to score compared to others (cost has three criteria, while access & equity has 13). To ensure each of the categories are weighted equally, a multiplier was applied so that each category had a maximum score of 30, regardless of the number of criteria. This ensures that categories like environment and cost are given an equal footing with categories like equity and safety.

Strategy 1: Full Road Closures

Full road closures scored well for prioritizing non-auto travel modes, and restricting all visitor vehicle movements in the park. The removal of motor vehicles would reduce the opportunities for conflicts with other road users and provide the most opportunity to rebalance road space for active transportation, which also contributed to a positive score. However, full road closures would impact traffic and parking spillover in the surrounding

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 10

context area, particularly in the short term, as park visitors become accustomed to the new network.

Full road closures provides the greatest number of opportunities for reprogramming and re-naturalizing hardscaped areas. It also provides the potential for a broader variety of initiatives in the park, such as farmer's markets or small-scale performances.

The main detractors to implementing full road closures as the immediate preferred solution are the impacts to equitable access for all park users. This strategy relies accessibility upgrades and motorized transportation accommodations to provide access to the park's interior. Changes that respond to these deficiencies can be implemented but take time, resources and planning. Visitors with varying mobility needs, young children, or equipment to carry would be notably impacted by a lack of motorized transport would benefit from the delivery of an improved transit and a shuttle service to accommodate mobility needs.

Full road closures would rely on an automated gating system that can be used by all service vehicles and respond to the varying needs of services like emergency, operations, delivery, and transit vehicles. Existing gates in High Park are manually operated; implementation of a gating solution is imperative to maintain service levels and access to authorized vehicles.

Once these issues are resolved, a review of further road closures in High Park will be considered, given the opportunities for safety improvements and environmental benefits.

Strengths: Removal of all visitor vehicles reduces potential for conflict among road users. Offers the most opportunity to re-program and re-naturalize paved areas.

Weaknesses: Greatest complexity and timing to fully implement. Creates gaps in providing inclusive mobility options at this time until shuttle/transit service and pedestrian infrastructure upgrades are implemented, including access to permitted facilities and destinations in the interior of the park.

The evaluation results for full road closures are summarized below:
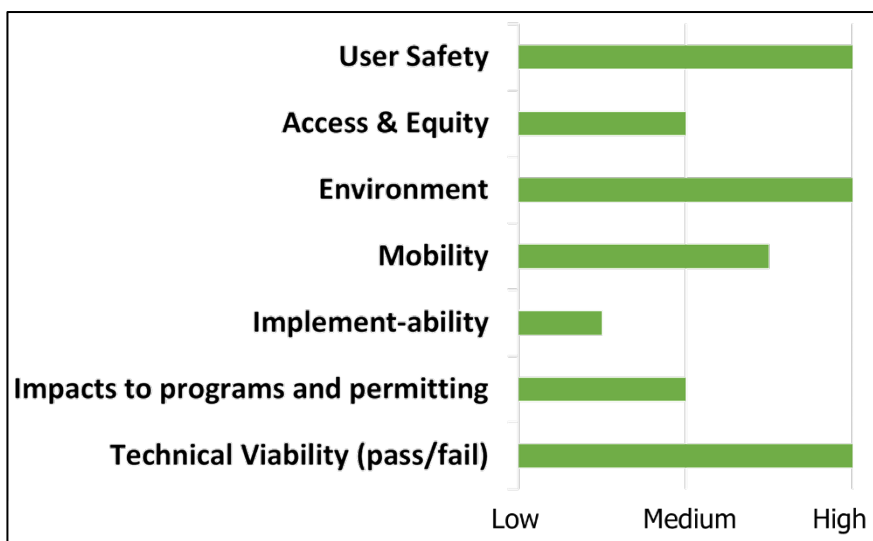
Strategy 2: Time-based Road Closures

Time-based road closures largely represents the existing conditions of High Park, with the addition of dedicated infrastructure changes to support active transportation users and enhanced transit/shuttle services.

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 11

It scores well for its capacity to be quickly implemented but does not notably advance or encourage opportunities for prioritizing non-auto modes of travel. The need to accommodate all travel mode types on all park roads limits the potential to reprogram or renaturalize hardscaped areas throughout the park. Maintaining all motor vehicle routes through the park does not provide opportunities to reduce the number of conflict areas, or provide transformative changes to the atypical intersection near the Grenadier Café. The strategy scores lower on user safety because motor vehicle movements would be permitted on all roads at most times.

Improved facilities for pedestrians and other active transportation modes represents the biggest road safety change being advanced in this strategy. However, the presence of motor vehicles on all park roads during non-closure times does not contribute to reducing motor vehicle use, modal shift, and reduction in emissions.

Strengths: Removal of visitor vehicles from park roads on car-free days. Design changes could improve designation of zones for different modes.

Weaknesses: Maintains all mode types on roads and does not address major conflict areas on days when motor vehicles are present. Would not discourage motor vehicle travel, except on car-free days. Provides minimal opportunity for environmental improvements

The evaluation results for time-based road closures are summarized below:
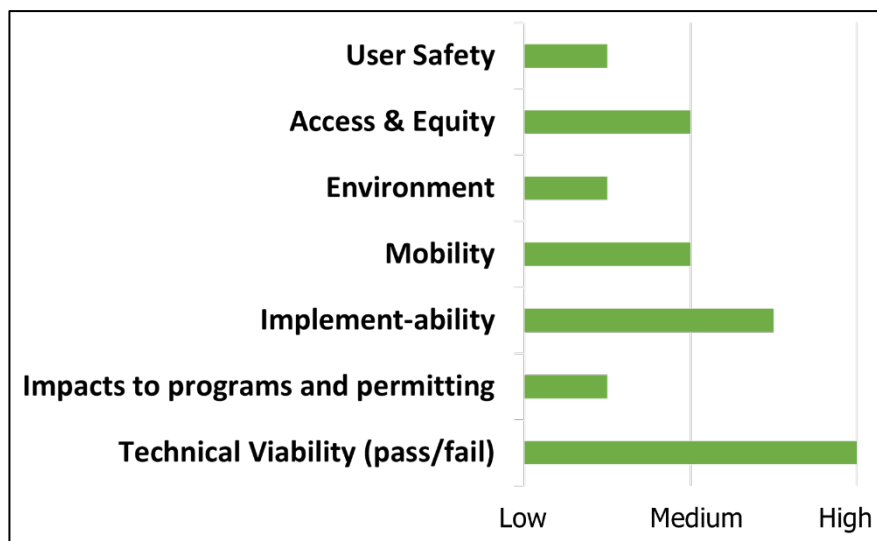

Strategy 3: Area-based Road Closures

Area-based road closures performed the strongest in evaluation and provided opportunities to advance the project goals and balance the needs of park users. Below is information on its alignment with the evaluation categories:

- User Safety: Proposes car-free roads and designated infrastructure for vulnerable road users in areas of mixed use. Enhances safety and visibility of pedestrians at crossing points and improves predictability of vehicle movements.
- Access and Equity: Provides immediate and continued measures to address barriers with inclusive mobility options. Prioritizes active transportation, and opportunities for safer and more accessible.

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 12

- Environment: Uses travel demand management techniques to reduce volume and impacts from motor vehicles. Provides opportunities to re-naturalize and reprogram hardscaped spaces.
- Mobility: Active transportation and transit is prioritized. The reduction of parking capacity and introduction of paid parking will help discourage visitor vehicle use and improve modal split.
- Implement-ability: Can be successfully implemented in phases. Minimal impact on staffing.
- Impacts to Programs: Few immediate impacts to existing permitting groups. Pedestrian plaza provides opportunities for new cultural activities. Paid parking would generate revenue.

Area-based road closures balances the competing interests of regional park visitors, regular park users, park programs/groups, and the surrounding neighbourhood. Dedicated spaces for car-free park use are made available for the enjoyment of all, while access is maintained for those with limited mobility and rely on personal vehicle access.

The evaluation results for Strategy 3 are summarized below:
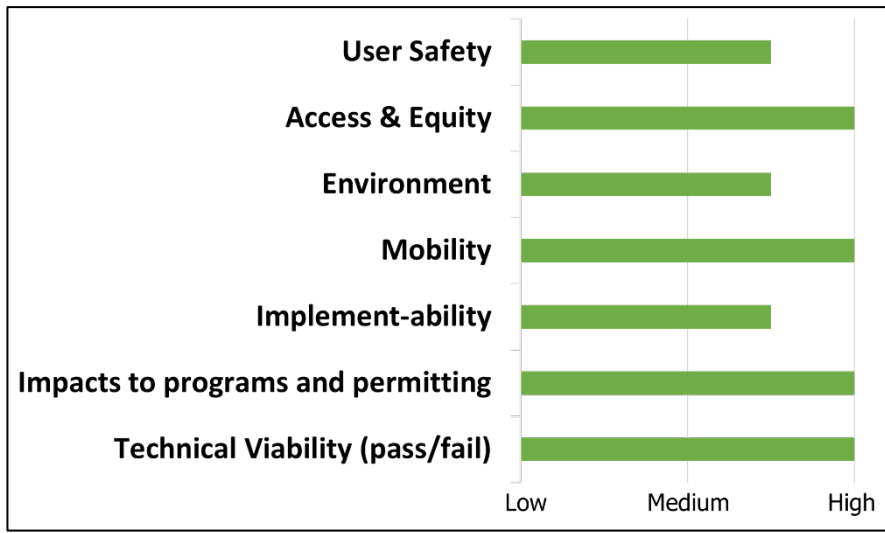
Strategy 4: Full Road Re-Opening

Full road re-opening relies on design improvements to designate space for active transportation use. It does not provide opportunities to rebalance the road and reduce points of conflict, or to reprogram and renaturalize space. This strategy was not found to prioritize use of active transportation and transit and did not align with goals of environment and mobility. It did not offer improvements to discourage the use of visitor vehicles. This strategy was determined to be highly implementable due to its similarities to existing conditions in the park.

Strengths: Quickest and most simple to fully implement. Design changes could improve designation of zones for different modes. Majority of parking inside High Park would be maintained.

Weaknesses: Maintains all mode types on roads and does not address major conflict areas. Does not discourage motor vehicle travel and provides minimal opportunity for environmental improvements.

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 13

The evaluation results for full road-reopening are summarized below:
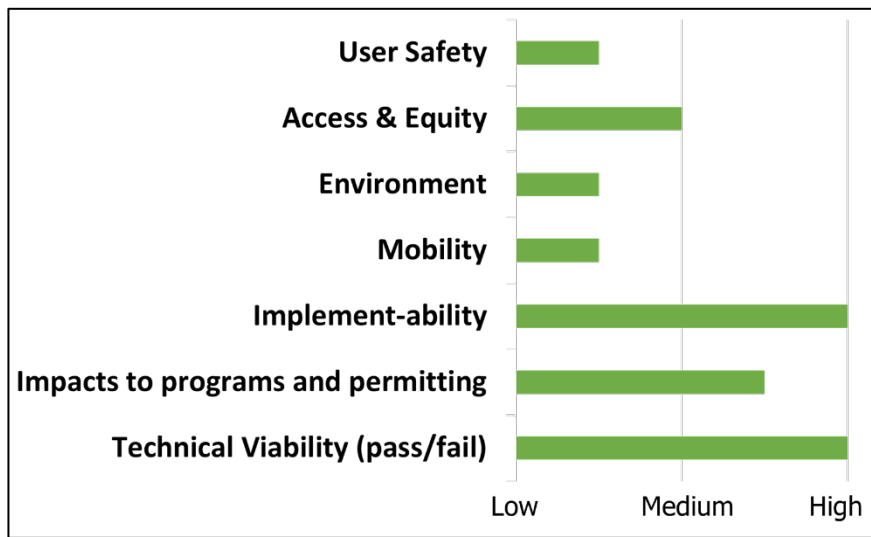
PREFERRED STRATEGY RECOMMENDATION

The preferred strategy, a combination of area and time- based road closures balances the project goals and meets the core needs of park users. It also recommends a study of future road closures when area and time-based closure elements are fully implemented.

Area-based closures will see the road network reconfigured to limit motor vehicle movements through the park and prioritize non-auto modes of travel. Motor vehicles will be able to access the interior park destinations by entering via Parkside Drive, travelling one-way westbound on Centre Road, and one-way northbound on Colborne Lodge Drive. The main exit will be located at Bloor Street West. Motor vehicles will no longer be able to enter the park via Bloor Street West. This routing maintains access to the two major parking lots near the High Park Zoo and the Grenadier Café. Pedestrians, cyclists and other non-motorized modes will be able to enter and exit at any point. West Road and the portion of Colborne Lodge Drive between The Children's Garden and Centre Road will remain closed to visitor vehicles at all times.

Time-based closures will restrict all visitor vehicle access on Sundays, year-round. Only authorized vehicles like emergency services, transit and parks operations will be able to access Centre Road and Colborne Lodge Drive during these periods.

Once the preferred strategy is fully implemented, consideration will be given to further road closures in High Park. Key conditions to support access and operational activity must be met before additional road closures can be considered. They include but are not limited to:

Transit and Shuttle Service:

- The introduction of a universally accessible, all season and affordable shuttle service. A shuttle service would provide direct connections to key destinations within the park. The shuttle would need to provide frequent service with convenient stop locations.
- Expansion of TTC operations to include year-round bus service.
- Completion of the accessibility upgrades at High Park subway station, planned for end of 2024.

Infrastructure Changes:

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 14

- Delivery of an effective automated gating solution for service vehicles that responds to day-to-day operational and emergency access needs without relying on active enforcement.
- Coordination with the outcomes of the Parkside Drive Study.
- Implementation of the City's Green Fleet Plan in High Park.
- Reconstruction of pedestrian infrastructure to meet accessibility standards.

Travel Behaviour Changes:

- Increased modal shift to non-auto modes like active transportation and transit.
- Reduced demand for motor vehicle parking.
- Alternative options for pick-up and drop-off with a motor vehicle.

Park Programming:

- Consideration of impacts to existing facilities and permitted recreation and cultural activities (e.g., rink, outdoor pool, allotment garden).

Public Support:

- Strong public support for further road closures, demonstrated through engagement.

High Park is a destination with diverse amenities and functions, thus attracting visitors with varied needs and preferences. The preferred strategy balances the needs of park users by providing designated car-free areas, limited visitor vehicle access and continued road closures on Sundays.

High Park Movement Strategy
Project No. IM21202061
City of Toronto

WSP
April 2023
Page 15