



# Pathways to Mobility

## Connecting older adults to active transportation in Toronto



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## Executive Summary

When the needs of seniors are better reflected in the public realm, everyone benefits. As Toronto's population ages, expanding active transportation options is crucial for supporting the health and wellbeing of people as they age. Concerns over road safety, a lack of senior-focused cycling programs, and limited access to bikes prevent many older adults from biking. Additionally, sociodemographic factors such as gender, income, race, language, culture and geography impact access to opportunities and resources.

The *Pathways to mobility: connecting older adults to active transportation* project explored ways to get more Toronto seniors cycling and create meaningful opportunities for them to discover cycling as a viable mode of transportation. It also aimed to make cycling more inclusive, equitable, and accessible for those aged 65+ by achieving these three objectives:

1. Build awareness among older adults through outreach to gain insights on their experiences and motivations on cycling.
2. Evaluate City of Toronto's policies and plans that support active transportation and seniors' health and wellbeing.
3. Develop practical recommendations that will improve access to cycling among seniors.

This report examines the health benefits, risks, and barriers to cycling for older adults. It draws on available literature, survey data, and insights from outreach activities. It also examines the following Toronto's policies and programs: The Third Seniors Strategy, Toronto Public Health's Strategic Plan (2024-2028), Vision Zero Road Safety Plan, TransformTO Net Zero Strategy, Cycling Network Plan, and Bike Share Toronto.

The four main insights gained from older adults about cycling are:

1. Safety concerns are the biggest barrier.
2. They want to bike but need resources and support as much as safe infrastructure.
3. E-bikes and adaptive bikes mitigate physical limitations like balance and mobility issues.
4. Expanding access to a range of e-bikes and adaptive styles is needed to make cycling a viable option for them.

Opportunities for improving access to Toronto's plans and programs include:

- Better integration among policies and programs is needed to support more seniors.
- Redefining what mobility means for older adults is needed to improve mobility options.
- Integrating senior programming with wider public programming to expand access to older adults who don't view themselves as "seniors".



This report presents five practical recommendations that outline ways the City of Toronto can enhance existing strategies for improving the health and wellbeing of older adults by improving access to active transportation:

1. Expand the City of Toronto's range of social and fitness programs to include cycling programs for adults and older adults.
2. Incorporate cycling as fitness and mobility options into the Third Seniors Strategy.
3. Promote cycling and walking programs to advance Toronto Public Health's Strategic Plan 2024-2028.
4. Expand access and inclusivity of Toronto's active transportation network.
5. Promote and encourage an inclusive age-friendly cycling culture.

Promoting cycling as a tool for aging in place will improve the health and wellbeing of Toronto's seniors by increasing their mobility options. This will contribute to creating a healthier, more equitable city that benefits people of all ages, abilities and incomes regardless of where they live.



## Introduction

Cycling is a form of recreation and active transportation that provides significant benefits. It improves physical and mental health, mobility, and supports aging in place. During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, Torontonians of all ages and abilities embraced cycling in large part due to successful municipal policies and programs that implemented open streets and implemented over 40 km of new bikeways (City of Toronto, 2024d). As cycling continues to grow in popularity, it is vital to consider the barriers and motivations experienced differently across the intersections of age, gender, race, culture, disability, and other social and economic attributes.

Older adults are a key demographic that can greatly benefit from cycling, not only for its physical and health advantages but also for its positive impact on social well-being. Despite the numerous benefits, this demographic is often overlooked in policies and planning that shape the public realm and road safety. This is relevant as older adults are disproportionately represented in traffic collision data. They also face other difficulties, such as financial constraints, access to health services, and social isolation (City of Toronto Medical Officer of Health, 2024). These barriers are reflected in broader health statistics: only 38% of Torontonians 65+ meet the recommended 150 minutes of weekly physical activity outlined in the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines (Statistics Canada, 2021). Similarly, the 2023 Aging in Canada Survey found that up to 40% of Canadians aged 50+ are at risk of social isolation (City of Toronto Medical Officer of Health, 2024).

Given these challenges, it is essential to address the gaps in policies and programs that support older adults and biking. This report examines how Toronto's existing strategies can integrate cycling for seniors, highlighting opportunities to enhance mobility, health, and social well-being. By analyzing current policies, engaging with older adults through outreach activities, and consulting with older adults, it provides recommendations to improve access to cycling and active transportation options for seniors.

A note on language: older adults and seniors are used interchangeably throughout this report and represent people aged 65+ unless otherwise specified. The use of older adults became the preferred term because this group expressed their disconnect with the term seniors. Biking and cycling are also terms that are used interchangeably.

## Older adults and biking

The benefits of cycling for older adults are well documented, particularly related to positive mental and physical health outcomes. Biking improves cardiovascular health and balance. It is also linked to lowering risks of type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and certain cancers (Baughn et al., 2022). It also improves mental health by reducing anxiety and depression, enhancing cognitive function, and improving sleep, all of which contribute to a healthier life as people age (Leyland, 2019; Kardan et al., 2023).

Falls are the most common cause of injury for older adults, making balance a critical concern as people age. This makes cycling particularly valuable as studies have shown that older adults who bike tend to rank significantly higher in balance metrics compared to those who do not. Additionally, cycling ranked higher than any other form of physical activity in improving balance, which demonstrates the potential for improving the health of older adults through biking (Baughn et al., 2022). While cycling carries some risk, including falls, its benefits can significantly outweigh the potential drawbacks for older adults.

Despite well-documented benefits, many older adults face barriers that limit their ability to bike more often. Safety concerns, often tied to inadequate infrastructure, are among the most significant. A study from Sydney revealed that the fear of cars, paired with the lack of safe cycling infrastructure, deterred older adults from biking. When participants were presented with alternate cycle paths and safe routes that were well maintained, and separated from traffic, ridership increased significantly (Zander et al., 2013). Another study in Munich found higher cycling rates among older adults in neighbourhoods with public realms that create a sense of comfort and safety. This includes having separated bike lanes, green spaces and safer traffic intersections (Baquero et al., 2024). However, even in countries with advanced cultures of cycling, safety remains a major issue. In a small German town, 67% of older adults reported feeling unsafe while cycling, leading many to quit (Keppner et al., 2023). These findings underscore how crucial the perception of safety is to getting more older adults cycling.

To address these barriers, one increasingly studied intervention is the adoption of e-bikes. Johnson and Rose found that e-bikes significantly reduce the effort required to cycle, allowing older adults with mobility, strength, or balance issues to bike longer distances and travel uphill with greater ease (Johnson et al., 2015). This increase in accessibility not only enhances mobility and independence but also makes cycling a more enjoyable and less stressful experience. The study from Australia found that e-bikes are a game changer for older adults overcoming the physical and psychological barriers to cycling.

Most studies on cycling and older adults focus on the health benefits as well as the associated risks around unsafe infrastructure. Far less attention has been given to educational bike programming, building awareness, and fostering a cycling culture (Kardan et al., 2023). This gap

is reflected in cycling policy and research, which have largely prioritized interventions around safety and infrastructure improvements, such as protected bike lanes, improved intersections and reducing traffic speeds. Creating sustainable change also requires initiatives that address personal motivations and raise awareness of cycling as a viable option for older adults. Studies have shown that the more people who use bicycles, the safer cycling becomes for everyone. This highlights the importance of building a culture of cycling in tandem with safe cycling infrastructure.

More studies on cycling and older adults within the North American context are needed.

## Pathways to mobility project overview

The Pathways to mobility project set out to create meaningful opportunities for older adults to discover cycling as a viable mode of transportation.

The three main objectives of the project were to:

1. Engage older adults through outreach and education to solicit their input and experiences.
2. Evaluate City of Toronto strategies, plans and programs that aim to support the health and well-being of seniors as they age.
3. Develop practical recommendations to improve Toronto's services and programs.

The desired outcomes of the project:

- In the short-term, generate awareness among older adults that biking for transportation is within their reach.
- In the long-term, improve Toronto's policies, programs and infrastructure so they better support cycling for older adults.

## Project Scope and Methodology

### Phase 1: Project scope

The first phase of the project reviewed City of Toronto policies and plans focused on older adults' well-being, including the Third Senior Strategy, Toronto Public Health Strategy, and Vision Zero Road Safety Plan. It also examined programs that support cycling, such as the Cycling Network Plan (CNP) and Bike Share Toronto.

Based on this work, Scarborough was selected as the project focus area for having:



- High concentrations of independent older adults (referred to as Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities\*, or NORC). A [map](#) outlining these concentrations was created.
- High population of equity deserving groups: immigrants, racialized, English as a second or third language, and low income households.
- An inhospitable public realm: high speed arterial roads, narrow sidewalks, few bike lanes or green spaces.
- Long distances to travel to connect to transit and community centres.

\*Naturally occurring retirement communities (NORC) are residential neighbourhoods that have large concentrations of older adults who live independently in housing that wasn't built for aging in place. The type of housing includes a wide range of rental apartment buildings, condominiums and houses. There is no consistent or systematic approach to how NORCs are defined or organized. In most cases socially active NORC buildings are either supported by the building management or by the residents.

NORCs gained prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic to deliver mobile vaccination programs to equity deserving older populations. The [NORC Innovation Centre](#) is Canada's first centre dedicated to advancing a model of integrated health and social care in NORCs. (National Institute on Ageing and NORC Innovation Centre, 2022)

## Phase 2: Community Outreach and Data Collection

The second phase of the project focused on developing meaningful outreach engagements and collecting qualitative data from the target group. This was done through interactive workshops titled "Discover the benefits of cycling as an older adult" developed and implemented in collaboration with a diverse group of Older Adult Cycling Facilitators. They helped shape the format and delivery of the outreach activities based on their experiences biking and aging in place in Scarborough.

The outreach activities included the four following components:

1. Panel discussion: participants learned about the project and heard firsthand from the Facilitators about their experiences with cycling at an older age.
2. Survey: participants were put in small groups and guided through a survey to capture their experiences, barriers and motivations about biking.
3. Try a bike: participants got to try riding different bikes.
4. Social interaction with food and beverages.

The four workshops were held at community centres with programming popular with older adults: the Agincourt Public Library, AccessPoint on Danforth, Malvern Family Resource Centre, and L'Amoreaux Community Recreation Centre.



Bike Share Toronto supported the *try a bike* component of all four workshops by bringing their classic and e-bikes for participants to try. This was an integral part of the workshops.

### Phase 3: Analysis & Reporting

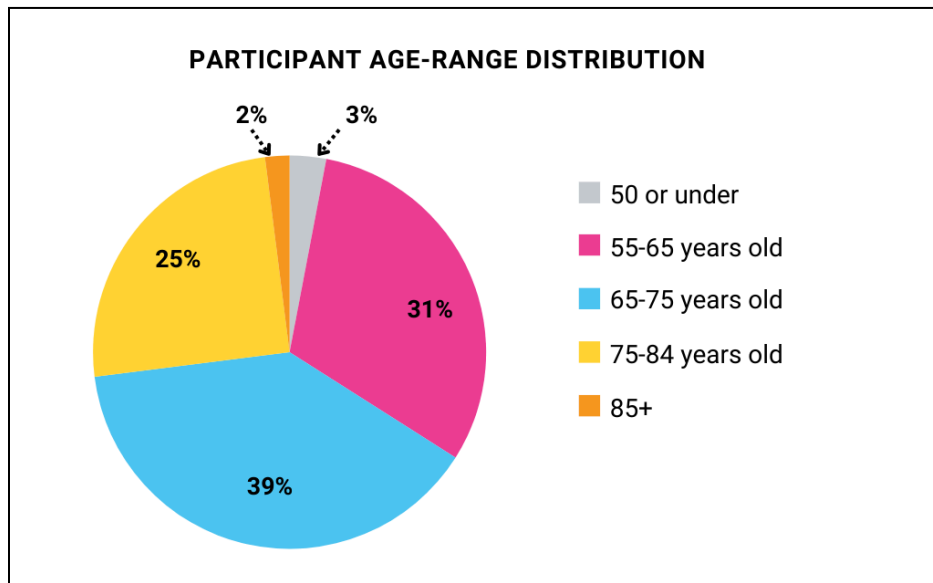
The third phase involved analyzing and synthesizing the survey results from our workshops as well as the data reviewed and evaluated in Phase 1.



## Older adult survey and workshop findings

In November and December 2024, Cycle Toronto held four "Benefits of Cycling for Older Adults" workshops in Scarborough. The objective was to explore cycling behaviours, attitudes, barriers and motivations among older adults who had never biked or stopped biking long ago.

A total of 72 participants attended the workshops and 64 participants answered the survey. 66% of survey respondents were within our target age range of 65 or older and 31% were between 55 and 65 years old.



67% of respondents had biking experience, while 33% had never biked. Women made up 67% of respondents, men 27%, and 6% chose not to disclose their gender.

Note: The overrepresentation of women survey respondents may reflect their greater participation in community programs, as women are typically underrepresented among people who bike. Many women who had biked in their younger years cited traditional gender roles: mothering, family duties, work, and a general lack of spare time as reasons for stopping.

The survey captured a culturally and racially diverse group, with over half identifying as South Asian (36%) or East Asian (19%). White participants comprised 22%, and the remaining 23% represented a range of other racial backgrounds.

Notable findings among the survey results:

- Gender as a barrier: women made up 86% (18 out of 21 survey respondents) of those who had never biked.

- Gender and income as a bigger barrier: 43% of participants were women aged 65+ from households with household income of \$30K or less.
- Cultural influences on cycling: South and East Asians made up the majority of those who had never biked compared to 100% of White participants who had biked.
- Economic barriers and cycling gaps: 42% of participants reported a household income of \$30K or less, underscoring the financial barriers faced by many older adults. Of this group, nearly half (48%) had never biked, compared to higher rates of biking among participants with higher incomes, which is consistent with the findings in the [City of Toronto's Cycling Study](#). (Clean Air Partnership, 2024)
- Safety as a persistent barrier: the most common barrier to cycling was finding safe places to ride.
- Regardless of biking experience, participants viewed existing roads without separated bike lanes as unsafe and a deterrent to biking.

Motivators for biking among survey participants:

- 88% of participants cited improving fitness as their primary reason for wanting to bike, highlighting health as the top driver.
- 86% of participants would like access to learn-to-ride programs.
- 76% of participants need access to a bike.

### Trying a bike, what we learned from the workshops

Before getting on a bike, participants did a warm-up to test their balance and loosen their joints. When it was time to try a bike, participants had the option of trying an adult trike, or the Bike Share Toronto classic and e-bike options. During the workshops it was observed that participants were at first hesitant to try a bike, but with encouragement from the facilitators once someone stepped forward, the group followed; and they had a great time.

#### Building confidence and connection

Participants expressed overwhelming enthusiasm after successfully riding a bike. Many who hadn't biked in years were excited to ride again, while first-time riders found it empowering. Many women who doubted their balance or strength were amazed at their ability to ride the e-trike, giving some the confidence to try one of the regular bikes. A few expressed that biking was part of their Canadian dream.

Beyond the physical benefits, the workshops fostered social connections. While some rode, others engaged in conversations, enjoying the chance to meet new people. Feedback emphasized a strong desire for more workshops, especially from those who felt isolated and



lacked community opportunities. In Scarborough, community spaces are limited and many older adults rely on public transit or Wheel-Trans to get around. These workshops offered not just an interactive learning opportunity but created a sense of belonging. Participants were eager to continue learning, explore recreational trails, and build connections with their peers.

By building confidence and fostering connection, the workshops addressed two vital aspects of healthy aging: promoting health and well-being, and reducing social isolation. These findings highlight the importance of tailoring cycling, and other fitness programs, to the specific needs of older adults aging in place so they are better connected to their communities.

Diversity and accessibility: trikes, e-bikes and adaptive bike styles

E-bikes and adult trikes (three-wheeled bicycles) are a game-changer for older adults. The adaptive e-trike provided by Cycle Toronto was integral to building confidence and balance among participants who had never biked before, and, or, who face mobility and balance issues. For those that were able to try the e-bikes, they discovered how easy and enjoyable it was to ride.

A barrier to trying a bike was the Bike Share Toronto “one size fits all” style of classic and e-bikes. In all four workshops, primarily among Asian and South East Asian women, the lowest seat height was too high and prevented them from being able to participate, despite their desire to try.

Inclusion and equity: adapting to the range of mobilities and backgrounds

The workshops revealed diverse mobility levels, cycling awareness, and social backgrounds among older adults in Scarborough. This was evident both within the general older adult population and across the different workshop venues. Of the four outreach events, two were held at public community centers that offer a range of programming for all ages (Toronto Public Library and the L’Amoreaux Community Center). The other two workshops took place at Senior Active Living Centres (SALC) offering dedicated senior programs (AccessPoint on Danforth and The Malvern Family Resource Centre).

- Participants at public community centers were more diverse in age, race, income, and biking experience. Many attended alone and didn’t know others, requiring more facilitation and a warm-up period to get comfortable. Most were White (57%) and generally more affluent, though 38% reported household incomes under \$30K.
- Participants from senior-specific programs were largely from racialized and equity-deserving communities, including many immigrants with language barriers and less biking experience. Unlike those at public centres, they already knew each other, which made them more eager to participate and boosted group confidence and enjoyment. They also faced greater economic vulnerability: 43% of Malvern participants and 71% of AccessPoint participants had household incomes below \$30K. Racial



diversity was significant, with no White-identifying participants at Malvern and only 9% at AccessPoint.

These findings highlight the need to consider socioeconomic inequities when designing programs, especially in diverse communities with limited biking opportunities. This ensures that cycling is better integrated into senior programs and tailored to the right audience. Additionally, not all older adults participate in senior-specific programming, as many don't identify with the term "seniors." Feedback from participants and stakeholders reflected this disconnect, leading to the use of "older adults" throughout this project and report.

## City of Toronto Strategies & Plans

This section examines Toronto's key strategies and plans supporting active transportation and older adults.

### Toronto Seniors Strategy

The Toronto Seniors Strategy aims to develop and adapt City programs, policies, and strategic initiatives to better support aging in place, particularly for seniors who belong to equity-deserving communities (Toronto Seniors Strategy, 2024). The Third Seniors Strategy, currently in development, will support creating an age-friendly city by improving accessibility, social inclusion, and essential services for older adults by addressing barriers and ensuring fair access to City programs.

The current [second Seniors Strategy](#) lacks an important connection to the city's Cycling Network Plan. Connecting older adults to active transportation is crucial to improve senior physical health and mobility. There are recommendations in the report that address active transportation by improving existing TTC senior programs, establishing Senior Safety Zones under the Vision Zero Road Safety Plan, as well as adding missing sidewalks (Seniors Transition Office, 2018), and would benefit from incorporating cycling to enhance mobility and social inclusion for older adults that are aging in place.

The third Senior Strategy (under development at the time of writing) could be a great opportunity for alignment in connecting more older adults to active transportation. Integrating TTC and Bike Share Toronto fares and expanding discounts to older adults would particularly benefit equity deserving seniors. It would connect more low income seniors to transit, reduce reliance on cars for those that can afford it, and improve the socialization that comes from using active transportation.

### Toronto Public Health's Strategic Plan 2024-2028

[Toronto Public Health's Strategic Plan 2024–2028](#) outlines a vision for improving the health and



well-being of all residents by addressing health inequities and focusing on prevention. Of the five priorities outlined in the plan, the second priority is most relevant to senior mobility: promote health and well-being across the lifespan by:

- a. Reducing the burden of chronic and infectious diseases across the lifespan.*
  - c. Advising on aging in place and age-friendly communities.*
  - d. Advocating for healthy social, natural, and built environments and collaborating with partners on initiatives that advance these goals.*
- (City of Toronto, 2024b)

During the Covid-19 lockdowns, Toronto Public Health supported the City's rollout of ActiveTO, which temporarily closed streets to cars, creating safer spaces for people to walk and bike. The program also introduced over 40 km of new bike lanes which provided residents and workers with a healthy and accessible way to get around. This approach aligns with Toronto Public Health's [Road to Health \(2012\) report](#), which highlighted the broad benefits of active transportation, including significant cost savings from improved road safety initiatives (Toronto Public Health, 2012).

The Ontario Ministry of Health provides the [Ontario Public Health Standards, 2021](#) to guide the work of public health across the province. This includes a mandate to promote physical activity and active transportation, e.g., cycling, walking. Toronto Public Health does not provide direct programming. Building on this, Toronto Public Health can advance its Strategic Plan 2024-2028 by promoting cycling and walking programs, particularly in equity-deserving communities in Scarborough, Etobicoke, and North York, to support older adults in staying active and mobile. It would also be beneficial for Toronto Public Health to promote cycling as a tool for aging in place to improve the health and wellbeing of Toronto's seniors by increasing their mobility options and social connections.

## Vision Zero Road Safety Plan

Toronto's [Vision Zero Road Safety Plan](#) aims to significantly reduce all traffic-related deaths and serious injuries by improving road safety for vulnerable road users (pedestrians, people who bike, children, older adults and people with disabilities). The plan emphasizes initiatives such as reducing traffic speed, better infrastructure, and effective traffic enforcement (Transportation Services, 2019). The most effective way to improve road safety, for all road users, is through road design that reduces traffic speed and improves visibility of vulnerable road users.

Citywide, [52% of traffic collisions involving pedestrians take place midblock](#) (Transportation Services, 2024), a trend that is particularly concerning in Scarborough, which has the highest rate of [traffic fatalities](#). Here, 90% of fatalities and 85% of Killed and Serious Injury (KSI) collisions take place on wide arterial roads that cut through communities (Vision Zero Road Safety Plan, 2019). Scarborough residents often face six lane arterial roads that bisect their

communities. Transit users face long distances between bus stops, and most transit stops are inhospitable and unsafe, with few seats or shelters to protect them from the elements.

Increasing the safety of older adults and other vulnerable road users requires enhancing comfort when navigating public spaces.

## TransformTO Net Zero Strategy

[TransformTO is Toronto's climate mitigation plan](#) that seeks to reach net-zero emissions by 2040 through greener buildings, clean energy, and sustainable transportation (City of Toronto, 2024c). TransformTO includes the goal of moving 75% of trips under 5 km by active transportation modes such as transit, walking and biking. This goal should be specifically linked to encouraging seniors to bike and reduce their car dependency.

The expansion of e-bikes and adaptive bicycle models has made cycling a viable opportunity for older adults and people living with accessibility issues. Expanding access to e-bikes and adaptive bike styles should become part of the city's sustainable transportation plans.

## Cycling Network Plan

The [Toronto Cycling Network Plan](#) (CNP) aims to provide safe and comfortable biking options for people of all ages and abilities. Biking supports Toronto Public Health outcomes by encouraging active transportation which is an integral part of creating healthy, livable and equitable cities (City of Toronto, 2024d).

The CNP includes a Long-Term Cycling Network Vision that states that all streets should be considered for cycling, especially through opportunities to redesign streets which can be capitalized through development applications and major capital projects. The CNP also includes Major City-wide Cycling Routes which includes 500 km of cycling routes, of which just 44% (220 km) have been implemented. These major city-wide cycling routes complement broader Provincial and City Plans including the Metrolinx Regional Cycling Network Plan.

The CNP also includes the Near-Term Implementation Program, which outlines the program and specific cycling routes for implementation every three years:

- *The current program (2025-2027) includes the objective of implementing 100 km of new and major upgrade bikeways, and 40 km of renewed projects.*
- *The 2022-2024 program implemented 75 km (from its 100 km goal) of new bikeways and 48 km of upgrades.*



- *The first Near-Term three-year implementation program (2019-2021) delivered 65 km of new bikeways, upgrades, and feasibility studies. Many lanes were implemented as temporary routes under the City's ActiveTO program during Covid-19 lockdowns. (City of Toronto, 2024d)*

A lack of safe cycling infrastructure is one of the biggest barriers to older adults biking. Implementing bike lanes improves the safety of all road users, in particular children, older adults and people living with disabilities, even if they themselves don't ride a bike. Etobicoke, York, North York, and Scarborough have few bike lanes, but face the bulk of dangerous arterials and traffic collisions. Until these communities gain access to safe infrastructure, Vision Zero and TransformTO goals will not be achieved.

To strengthen the importance of expanding the CNP and its interconnectivity to the City's wider Transportation Network, in addition to the number of kilometers of new or upgraded bikeways, it would be beneficial to set specific metrics such as the number of Bike Share stations and ridership data that is broken down geographically, as well as the installation and type of secure bike parking facilities. Additionally, adding metrics tied to the survey results from the [City of Toronto's Cycling Survey](#) will contribute to addressing gaps in access identified in the survey response data along with incorporating best practices or case studies from other municipalities regarding senior/older adult cycling programming.

## Bike Share Toronto

Since 2014, the City of Toronto has owned the bike share program, managed by the Toronto Parking Authority (TPA). It is now North America's third largest bike share system and is an integral component of Toronto's public transportation network. Their [2024 Business Review](#) reported a 285% increase in ridership between 2019 and 2024, while on- and off-street parking usage has only recovered to 84% of pre-pandemic levels (Toronto Parking Authority, 2024). Recognizing the growing demand for alternative transportation options, Bike Share introduced 300 e-bikes in 2020 as a pilot program. Their immediate popularity led to a significant [expansion plan](#), with the e-fleet set to grow to 2,000 bikes by 2025 (Toronto Parking Authority, 2022). E-bikes have played a key role in diversifying ridership, making cycling more accessible for those with longer commutes or limited mobility, and improving connectivity to transit and key destinations.

The popularity and practicality of biking for moving a diverse range of people and goods is growing. So too is the demand for accessing adaptive bikes. Bike Share's fleet of bikes is built on a standard best suited for men who commute. To ensure more equitable access, the system should expand its fleet to better accommodate people with smaller frames and different travel needs such as women, older adults, and those with diverse mobility needs. Additionally, integrating Bike Share Toronto with TTC fares will improve access and affordability for older adults, especially those from low income households. The 2026-2030 Expansion Plan is an



opportunity to reflect the growing population of people who want to bike if they have access to bicycles that meet their transportation needs.

## Connecting project findings to City Strategies

For the first time in Toronto's history, residents aged 65 and older now outnumber those under 15 years old. With this demographic expected to double by 2041, the city faces a growing need to support aging populations (City of Toronto Medical Officer of Health, 2024). The analysis of City strategies and their integration between active transportation and senior health revealed four important findings.

### 1. Senior health policies do not integrate cycling

Toronto policies on senior health do not integrate into the City's plans on older adult mobility. For example, the Second Seniors Strategy mentions active transportation but focuses only on walking and transit, overlooking cycling as a tool for improving senior mobility and health. The Public Health Strategic Plan 2024-2028 is a high level document that would benefit from an operational work plan that promotes and advocates for cycling's role in promoting physical activity and well-being across the lifespan. These policies can best shape and improve older adult physical activity, mobility and health.

### 2. Lack of integration between senior health and active transportation policies

Strategies like the Vision Zero Road Safety Plan, TransformTO, the Cycling Network Plan and Bike Share Toronto promote active transportation but lack integration with senior programming. For example, achieving TransformTO's goal of making 75% of trips active would benefit from increasing the number of older adults who bike. Achieving this would require alignment and cross-functional collaboration with a wide range of City departments, agencies and divisions in addition to the seniors strategy, to ensure older adults get the access and support they need.

### 3. Redefining seniors and mobility

The term seniors does not fully reflect the diversity of health, independence, and active lifestyles among those aged 65+. Many seniors prefer the term older adults, as they associate "seniors" with long-term care rather than active community living. Our workshops demonstrated the wide range of mobility levels, cycling awareness, and independence within this group. To be effective, mobility policies and programs must recognize these differences, ensuring that strategies are designed to meet the varied needs of older adults. A more inclusive approach will improve accessibility, raise awareness, and support aging in place.

#### 4. Connecting municipal policies to programming at community centres

Community centers play a vital role in delivering services, yet programs often operate in isolation of one another. Cycling initiatives mainly target children, while senior programming rarely includes biking, despite its health benefits. The city's extensive range of fitness and recreation programming also lacks cycling options.

To bridge this gap, bike programming should be integrated into Senior Active Living Centres (SALCs), which operate independently based on local needs. Similarly, Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC) remain disconnected from city programming, despite their increasing role in supporting seniors age in place. Expanding cycling access, especially in underserved areas like Scarborough, can enhance older adult mobility and well-being.

## Recommendations

The following five policy recommendations offer practical and cost-effective ways to enhance Toronto's existing strategies for supporting older adults. They aim to improve access to active transportation while addressing barriers shaped by age, gender, race, culture, location, and other social factors.

1. Expand the City of Toronto's range of social and fitness programs to include cycling for older adults by:

- Partnering with community organizations and collaborating with cross-functional City divisions and departments such as Parks and Recreation, to offer a range of cycling programs for adults and older adults.

2. Incorporate cycling as fitness and mobility options into the Third Seniors Strategy by:

- Including stationary bikes as part of senior-friendly fitness equipment in parks.
- Updating the [Seniors Transportation & Travelling Safely](#) website to connect seniors with resources and programs that will help them access cycling resources like Bike Share Toronto and community bike hubs.

3. Include cycling as a policy lever within the Toronto Public Health Strategic Plan 2024-2028 to promote health and well-being across the lifespan by:

- Advocating for the development and promotion of senior-focused cycling programs and creating connections among Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs).

4. Expand access and inclusivity of Toronto's active transportation network by:

- Expanding Bike Share Toronto's fleet of bikes to include frames that accommodate a wider range of people and uses including adaptive bike styles.
- Exploring cycling modality options by Bike Share Toronto in communities with high concentrations of older adults living in naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs).
- Expanding Bike Share Toronto 20% discount on annual memberships to older adults aged 65+.
- Integrating TTC fare with Bike Share Toronto.

5. Promote and encourage an inclusive age-friendly cycling culture by equitably:

- Expanding cycling education and engagement programs to older adults.



- Connecting people to cycling infrastructure by planning outreach and awareness activities throughout the project life cycle (planning, consultation, implementation and completion).
- Improving pedestrian and cycling safety and connectivity in suburban areas with high concentrations of NORCs.

## Conclusion

Cycling offers older adults significant physical and mental health benefits, including better balance, reduced risk of chronic illnesses, and opportunities for social connection. It also offers seniors with an affordable and healthy transportation option which is particularly important for those in low income households.

Older adults face barriers to cycling, including safety concerns, inadequate cycling infrastructure, and limited access to bikes. This report highlights ways the City of Toronto can address these challenges and help seniors enjoy the health benefits, improved mobility, and joy of biking. By doing so, Toronto can become a more age-friendly and equitable city.

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## Appendices

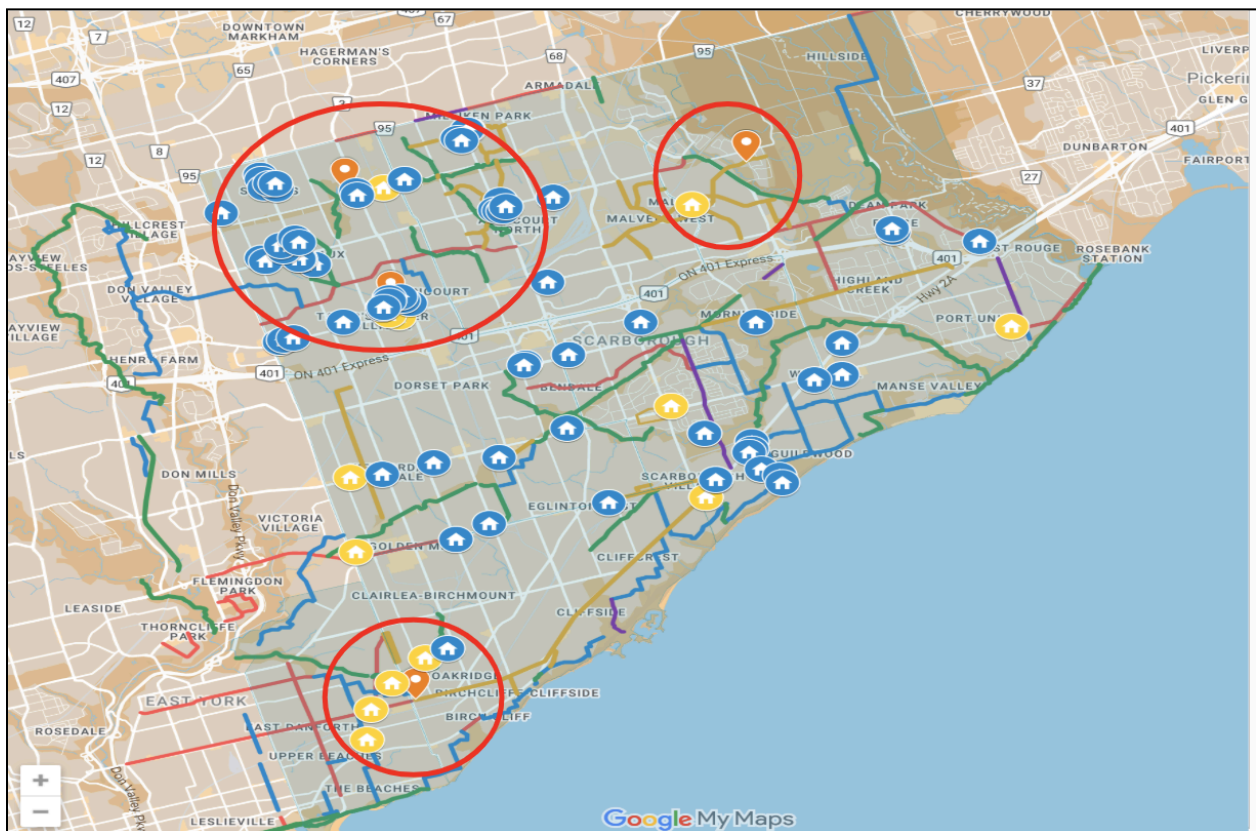
Appendix A: [Workshop Survey responses](#)

Appendix B: [Workshop Survey Questions](#)

Appendix C: [Pathways to mobility project team](#)

Appendix D: Project Area and workshop locations in Scarborough

This [interactive map](#) features the list of NORCs, which is maintained by the [NORC Innovation Centre](#), who provided the list of buildings within the project scope.



Map legend:

- The blue housing icons represent NORCs (Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities)
- The yellow icons represent the location of SALCs (Senior Active Living Centres)
- The orange icons represent the locations where our workshops took place