TransformTO

Climate Action for a Healthy, Equitable and Prosperous Toronto

TransformTO Community Conversations

SUMMARY REPORT OF FOUR CITY-HOSTED EVENTS

TORONTO

Live green Toronto

TORONTO ATMOSPHERIC FUND

About TransformTO

TransformTO is a collaborative project engaging the community in achieving an 80% reduction in Toronto's greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It's not just about climate change. We are looking for low-carbon solutions that support public health, our local economy, and social equity.

The project will be supported by community consultations and technical scenario modelling to help understand how deep carbon reduction will affect Torontonians over the long term. The outcomes will inform a pathway to reach the 2050 target.

The City of Toronto's Environment and Energy Division and the Toronto Atmospheric Fund are co-leading this initiative. TransformTO will lead to a long-term climate strategy that will update the existing City of Toronto Climate Change Action Plan.

"Each building is a source of power"

1. Overview of City-hosted Community Conversations

The early phase of TransformTO community consultation included an online TransformTO Workbook Survey (from August 2015 to February 2016) and three TalkTransformation! speaker events. During these community events in the Fall 2015, residents called for more in-person opportunities to contribute their ideas to the TransformTO recommendations. In response, TransformTO Community Conversations were created.

The Community Conversation events were designed to consult interested residents in order to generate feedback for integration into TransformTO technical scenario modelling. In addition to the four City-hosted events, feedback from all the Community-hosted conversations will be captured in technical scenario modelling and reported to City Council.

EVENT SUMMARY

Four Community Conversation events were held around the city in April and May. The events built on the ideas and suggestions that were submitted by residents as part of earlier engagement efforts (TransformTO Workbook Survey and TalkTransformation! Speaker Series).

The evening events were organized in three parts: (1) An open-house exhibit featuring 11 informational boards that summarized the TransformTO project and relevant City initiatives; (2) City staff presentation on TransformTO overview and timelines (3) City-staff facilitated roundtable conversations.

Approximately 200 residents attended the Community Conversations. The events were open to the general public, promoted online and with posters in Community Centres throughout the city.

Facilitators guided roundtable community dialogues to identify a shared vision for Toronto in 2050 and actions that are required to achieve it. Community members were also asked to provide ideas on climate-change focused communication methods and messages that the City could use as a part of the TransformTO initiative.

Discussions were initiated with the following prompt: Imagine we have succeeded. By working together, community leaders, local organizations, corporations and residents have created a prosperous, healthy and equitable Toronto that has low greenhouse gas emissions. As participants responded to the open-ended questions, facilitators guided and recorded their responses. The TransformTO Conversation Kit was used to guide the conversations.

Of those attendees who filled out a post event survey, 35% were 25 to 34 years old and 30% were 55 to 74 years old. The survey also demonstrated that the events were well-received overall, and some participants noted that the positive and inclusive atmosphere played a role in their ability to share their ideas.

2. Our Shared Vision of Toronto in 2050

The descriptions below were assembled using common key phrases shared by the participants to paint a picture of a low-carbon Toronto in 2050. This is a snapshot of the future Toronto that participants envisioned:

VISION OF TORONTO IN 2050…

Communities are compact, dense, walkable, self-sufficient and quieter. There are many community hubs and community meeting spaces. Our communities are diverse, equitable, caring and accessible to all residents. People think differently (living more sustainably is a norm) and work differently (working from home and working less hours overall is more common).

Our neighbourhoods are surrounded by green space; such as parks, naturalized spaces, green roofs and green walls. Most of our food is grown and sourced locally. We produce almost no waste.

We move by using clean (electrified) transit and driving electric vehicles. Overall, there are less cars on the road. There are more bikes and pedestrians on our streets and many designated car-free zones.
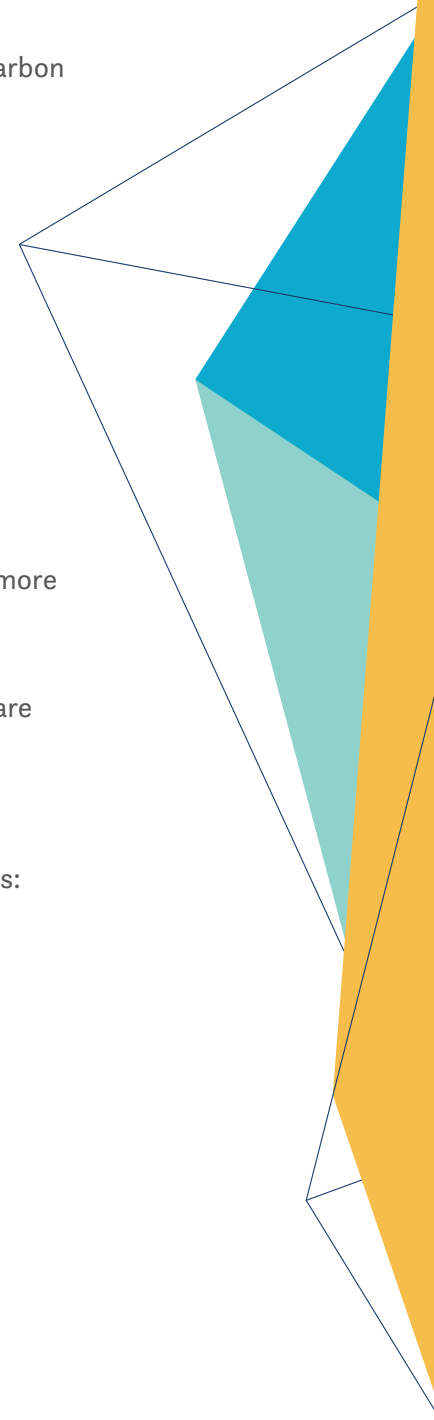
Older buildings have been retrofitted and new ones are built to be energy-efficient. There are many net-zero buildings that are powered by local renewable sources of energy, such as solar or wind energy.

IDEAS AND ACTIONS DISCUSSED

The ideas and actions identified by Community Conversation participants have been organized into in to five main categories:

- Where We Live
- How We Live
- How We Move
- How Our Buildings Operate
- What We Do with Waste

Participants' responses related to each of the categories is represented in Figure 1, with larger-sized dots representing the most common responses. Dots in Figure 1 are also grouped together to reveal priority themes associated with participants' responses.

FIGURE 1: KEY IDEAS AND ACTION AREAS

Where We Live
- Green space everywhere
- Walkable, dense, complete communities
- More community hubs
- Quieter, less noise
- Less condos
- Narrower streets
- Self-sufficient communities
- More naturalized space
- Green roofs and green walls

How We Move
- More bikes and bike lanes
- Electric vehicles and charging stations
- Trains and regional transit
- Pedestrians and pedestian infrastucture
- Clean transit
- No cars
- Less cars

How We Live
- Food is sourced locally
- Equitable, inclusive and caring communities
- Diverse, multi-cultural communities
- People think differently
- Flexible work hours
- Sharing economy
- Healthier residents
- Affordable housing
- More, green jobs
- Better access to information

How Our Buildings Operate
- Solar energy
- Energy efficient buildings
- Retrofitted buildings
- Net-zero buildings
- Renewable energy
- District energy
- Wind turbines
- Clean fuel
- Energy storage

What We Do With Waste
- Zero waste
- Mandatory recycling
- No packaging
- Producer responsibility
- Landfill gas capture

Upon regrouping the responses into higher level categories, some larger themes begin to emerge within the five key action areas.

WHERE WE LIVE

Within this section, two broad themes emerge if we group similar actions together. There are three actions related to local, community-level infrastructure, and three actions related to the availability of green space. Combined, these themes become the most frequently prioritized action areas.

HOW WE LIVE

We observed locally sourced food as the largest priority in this section, but if we group some other similar actions together, two key priorities emerge. One overall theme is health, equity and community support. The other cluster is related to a sustainable local economy.

HOW WE MOVE

Overall, the actions within this category all relate to better transit or active/ alternative transportation, including a large representation of electric vehicles.

WHAT WE DO WITH WASTE

Waste was the smallest area represented, but participants consistently emphasized waste minimization and reuse within this section. This section grows slightly if we integrate responses related to the sharing economy, which were included in the "how we live" section.

HOW OUR BUILDINGS OPERATE

Solar energy was the most common response, but overall, these actions can be reorganized into two main categories. About half of the responses fall under renewable energy, and the other half into energy efficiency in buildings.

3. Key Findings

"People are empowered and believe in other people in their community"

In responding to the exercises, participants focused on some key types of approaches, including:

- Community-scaled solutions (more walkable, close-knit and self-sufficient communities)
- Better transit, pedestrian and cycling infrastructure
- More green space (parks, green roofs, green walls, community gardens)
- Increased renewable energy (solar, geothermal, wind)
- Energy-efficient buildings (mandatory retrofits and energy-efficient new construction requirements), and
- Waste minimization and reuse

Across all themes, community members felt that behaviour and lifestyle change was the key solution to reaching our greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal.

When asked about how to most effectively communicate the urgency of climate change action, most participants responded within one of three themes:

- Using local examples of extreme weather events (e.g. Toronto flood and ice storm), health issues, and children's future to 'shame' and scare people into action (48%)
- Inspiring people into action by promoting successful, positive stories of climate-action and sustainability projects (33%)
- Connecting climate change to potential financial gains and jobs (19%)

Interestingly, about half of the participants felt that using negative or "shaming" tactics would have the most impactful effect on the public. The other half reported that a focus on the positive benefits and opportunities related to climate solutions would be more effective.
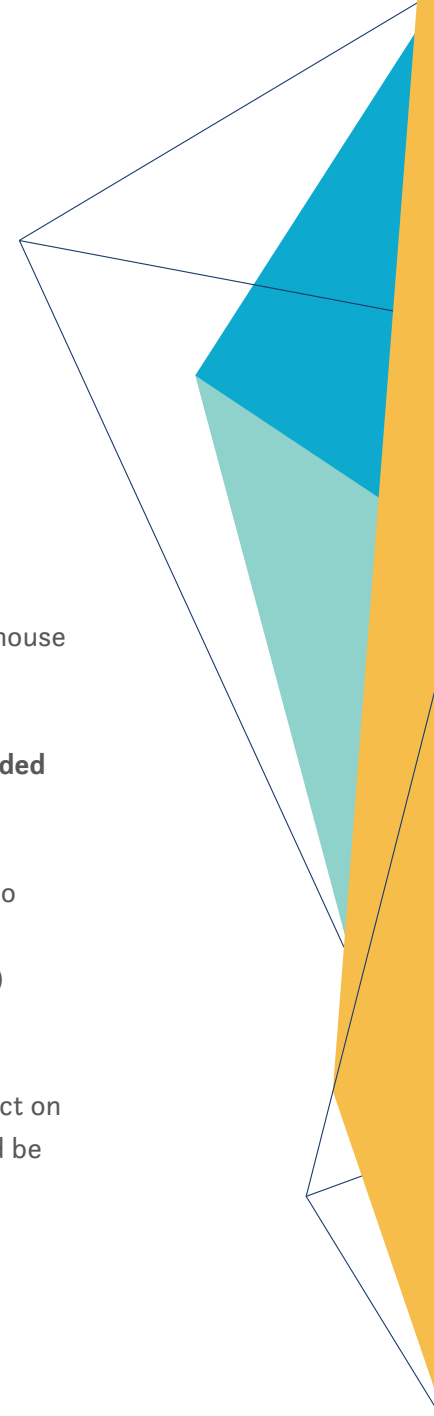
4. Next Steps

The results from the City-hosted Community Conversations and a series of additional events hosted by community organizations, non-profit groups, and City Councillors will be combined into an integrated engagement report to inform the first phase of TransformTO's long-term GHG modelling work. The modelling will be used to inform the development of a long-range plan to achieve Toronto's target of an 80% reduction in GHG emissions by 2050. This plan will be presented to City Council at the conclusion of TransformTO's first phase. Further opportunities for community engagement will be incorporated into future phases of work, starting in 2017.
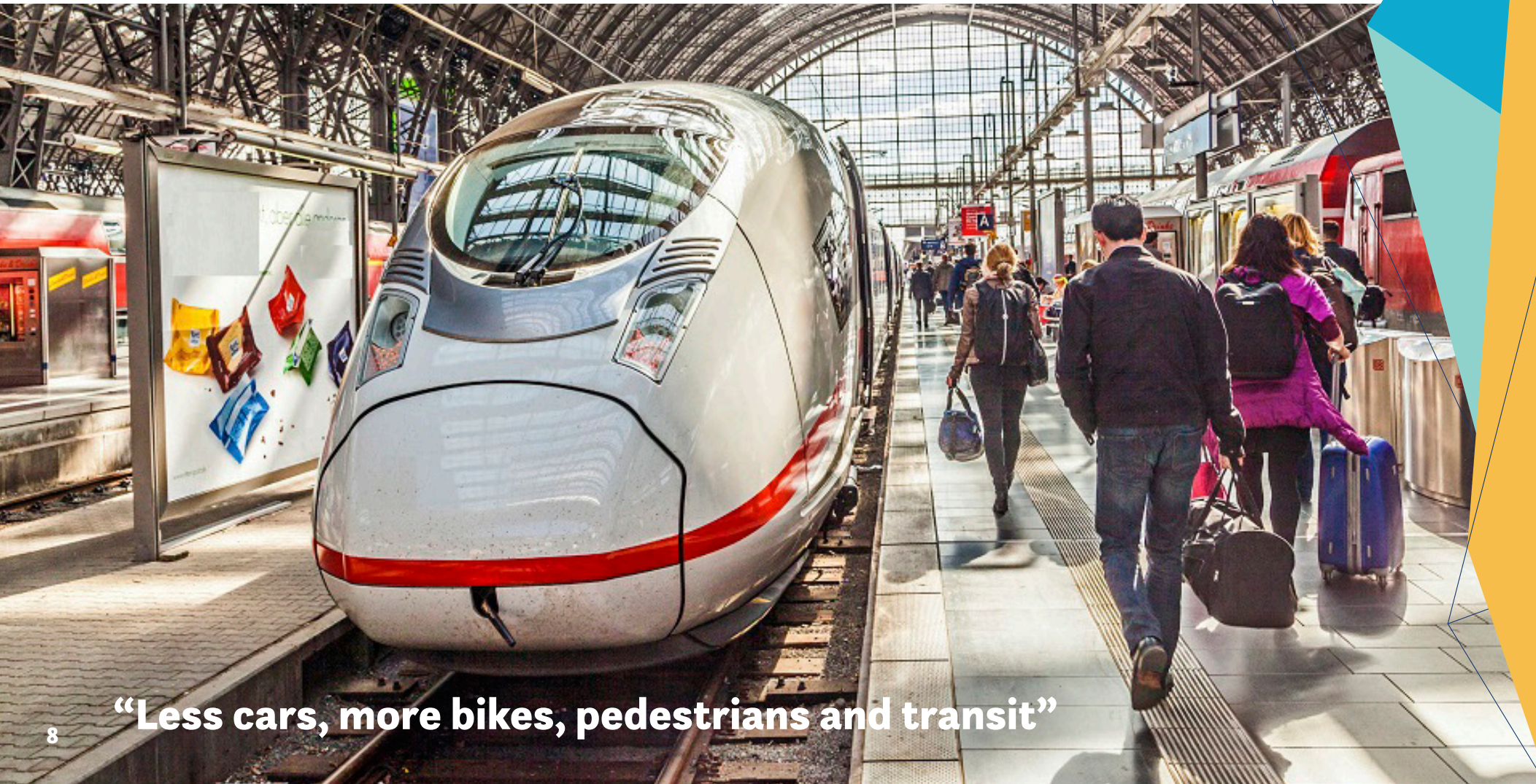
"Less cars, more bikes, pedestrians and transit"

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