

KIPLING AVENUE

Accessibility-Focused Site Visits

August 2023

**STREETS ARE VITAL
PLACES IN TORONTO.**

**HOW OUR STREETS ARE
DESIGNED SHOULD
IMPROVE SAFETY AND
ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL.**



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Kipling Avenue Accessibility-Focused Site Visit represents a collaborative effort from City staff and members of the accessibility community. Transportation Services is thankful for the insights and time of all participants.

The tour was led by the Transportation Services Cycling and Pedestrian Projects Unit, Becky Katz; Kanchan Maharaj, Igor Samardzic, Sonya De Vellis, and other Transportation Services staff.

Introduction, Vision, and Goals

In August 2023, the City of Toronto's Transportation Services Division conducted a site visit focused on recent upgrades to Kipling Avenue between Steeles Avenue West and Mount Olive Drive/Panorama Court. This visit, referred to throughout the report as the Kipling Site Visit, was part of an ongoing effort to gather accessibility-focused feedback on new complete street infrastructure.

The goal of the Kipling Site Visit was to understand the effectiveness of current designs, particularly for those with mobility and sight loss challenges, and to use this insight for future urban planning and design standards.

This report provides a summary of feedback received from participants during and following the Kipling Site Visit, which is organized by various locations along the multi-use trail.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The area of the site visit included Kipling Avenue, between Rowntree Road and Mount Olive Drive, an arterial road featuring four lanes of vehicle traffic. Along the east side, there is a multi-use trail, and sidewalks are present on both sides of the road. This area is classified by the city as a mix of Neighborhoods and Apartment Neighbourhoods. Additionally, there are bus routes operating along Kipling and Albion. In 2021-2022, a major road resurfacing took place on Kipling Avenue between Steeles Avenue West and Mount Olive Drive/Panorama Court, which included replacing asphalt on the road, and repairing, improving and replacing curbs, boulevards and sidewalks. Several safety and accessibility upgrades to the existing multi-use trail were completed as part of the road resurfacing.

This project is also located within a Neighbourhood Improvement Area, where Transportation Services staff conducted engagement sessions with residents, community agencies and local businesses in 2019 to identify key access destinations and barriers to cycling.

SITE VISIT PLANNING

In Spring 2023, Transportation Services began recruiting study participants and developed a detailed project plan, available in Appendix A.

This plan outlined the logistics and objectives of the Kipling Site Visit. During the visit, staff members were assigned various roles, which ranged from assisting individual participants in navigating the sites, to conducting thorough note-taking and photography. After the visit, participants congregated to discuss their feedback, key observations, and identify areas for further investigation. Following the visit, City staff compiled and summarized the feedback, which was shared with the participants for their input and approval.

SITE VISIT

Eleven participants took part in the Kipling Site Visit, which began at the northeast corner of the intersection of Kipling Avenue and Rowntree Road/Annabelle Drive, with an assessment of the floating bus platform, tactile surface indicators, and wayfinding.

The visit continued south of Rowntree Road to examine the divergence of the multi-use trail and sidewalk, including observing a driveway entrance. After crossing west at Kipling Avenue at a mid-block point, the group continued south to Mount Olive Drive/ Panorama Court, where they evaluated the intersection design and tactile signals for bikes and pedestrians.

A debrief session was held immediately following the Kipling Site Visit at Rexdale Community Hub among the participants and several Transportation Services staff to discuss final thoughts and inputs.

OVERARCHING FEEDBACK

Site Visit Feedback

Participants shared a wide range of detailed feedback, including how to best lead a site visit to review accessibility.

Participants highlighted the need for receiving pre-information about the site visits. The pre-information should include details about accessing the site by transit, convenient pick-up/drop-off points, washroom and rest stop locations. The level of one-on-one staff support for each participant should be established prior to the site visit.

The post-site visit debrief session was also well received, as it provided a chance for participants to have a focused discussion without outdoor distractions.

Design Feedback

The feedback from the Kipling Site Visit underscored the crucial need for accessible and safe suburban infrastructure.

Participants expressed mixed views on tactile pavers, emphasizing the need for clear detectability for blind users.

Concerns were raised about steep slopes at crossings for wheelchair users. The necessity for additional signage, particularly for people cycling, was highlighted to ensure safety at multi-use trails.



2.1

Floating Bus Stop: Kipling Avenue and Rowntree Road

- **Detectability of Tactile Pavers:** There were mixed opinions on the effectiveness of tactile pavers next to the multi-use trail and the sidewalk. Some blind individuals, particularly cane users, noticed a distinct disparity between texture and shading, while others found no discernible difference between sidewalk and path.
- **Preference for Beveled Edges:** The purpose of tactile pavers was unclear to some. A change in elevation or a beveled curb was suggested as a more effective indicator.
- **Simplifying Paver Use:** Some participants felt the number of pavers was excessive and suggested their placement should be limited to adjacent to the sidewalk.
- **Need for Cyclist Signage:** Safety concerns were raised about crossing the multi-use trail due to uncertainty about people on bicycles yielding to pedestrians. The addition of signage indicating where people cycling should stop was recommended.
- **TTC Poles as Indicators:** The utility of a pole as a reference point for aligning oneself when crossing to the platform was discussed. Adjustments to the pole's location were suggested for better accessibility.
- **Orientation Challenges:** The spacious area posed orientation challenges, particularly for those disembarking from buses and heading toward the sidewalk, with no clear demarcation of the multi-use trail.
- **Importance of Audible Cues:** The setback of the sidewalk from the street could potentially complicate navigation across the multi-use trail, highlighting the potential need for audible cues to assist blind individuals.
- **TTC Shelter:** The structural design of the bus shelter, specifically focusing on the height of the map and the obstruction caused by the bench positioned in front of it were raised.
- **TTC Shelter:** Enhance bus shelters by adding wheelchair ground markings, wider spaces, "through" exits for easy wheelchair movement, and designated areas where wheelchairs wait for bus boarding.

KIPLING AVENUE, NORTH OF ROWNTREE ROAD



2.2.1

Intersections: Kipling Avenue and Rowntree Road/Annabelle Drive

- **Steep Slope Accessibility:** Participants observed that while the curb's steepness made it detectable, it posed a challenge for wheelchair users.
- **Obstruction on the Multi-Use Trail (MUT):** There were several mentions of a hydro pole obstructing the MUT and sidewalk. Some participants suggested that the trail alignment should take priority over the hydro pole location.
- **Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) Concerns:** Misalignment between the APS and Tactile Walking Surface Indicators was noted.
- **Reviews of the APS were mixed:** participants highlighted issues with low volume, irregularly button placement and type and difficulty in operation.
- **Mixing Zone:** Adjacent to the intersection, the large mixing zone elicited mixed reactions, particularly from people with low vision who found it difficult to orient themselves and navigate through this shared space.

KIPLING AVENUE AND ROWNTREE ROAD/ANNABELLE DRIVE INTERSECTION



2.2.2

Intersections: Kipling Avenue and Mount Olive Drive/Panorama Court

- **Curb Ramp:** The level area at the south-west corner of the intersection received mixed reactions. Some participants appreciated the absence of a perpendicular curb ramp, noting safety concerns about rolling off near the intersection. Others expressed worries about the high slopes of the ramps in the area.
- **Mixing Zone:** In the mixing zone, where people cycling cross the intersection and navigate the concrete area, there was confusion and concern about the shared use of the sidewalk by multiple users.
- **Signage:** The elephant feet markings and stop bar for people cycling were deemed unclear by participants, leading to a preference for additional signage.
- **Raised Crossing:** A raised crossing at this intersection was favoured by one participant, particularly for the benefit of blind individuals, to clearly indicate the presence of a crossing in the absence of a perpendicular curb ramp.

KIPLING AVENUE AND ROWNTREE ROAD/ANNABELLE DRIVE INTERSECTION



2.3

Driveway: Rowntree Plaza

- **Clarity of Pavement Markings:** There was a consensus that the driveway markings were not clear. Suggestions included adding directional arrows for vehicles and aligning the top of pedestrian symbols more accurately with the yellow centerline.
- **Need for Additional Tactiles at Driveway:** Participants requested the addition of tactile indicators across driveways, highlighting the difficulty in detecting approaching driveways due to lack of clear indicators.
- **Requirement for More Signage:** Additional signage was advocated for, aimed at prompting both people cycling and drivers to yield to pedestrians.
- **Issues with Contrast:** Concerns were raised about the inadequate color contrast between the pavers and the sidewalk, which may affect visibility.
- **Preference for Raised Crossings:** One participant suggested that raised crossings are beneficial to both slow down drivers.

KIPLING AVENUE, SOUTH OF ROWNTREE ROAD



2.4

Mid-block Crossing: North Albion Collegiate Institute

- **Challenging Curb Ramp:** The curb ramp presented challenges for wheelchair users, with several noting its slope made sidewalk access feel unsafe.
- **Accessing push button:** Difficulties in accessing the pushbutton raised safety concerns.
- **Shorelining along the sidewalk curb:** A blind participant found the curb sufficiently tall to use as a guide, with a technique known as shorelining, to navigate effectively.

MID-BLOCK CROSSING ON KIPLING AVENUE, 150 METRES NORTH OF MOUNT OLIVE DRIVE



3.0

Conclusion

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK:

- The design of the floating bus platform received mixed reviews from participants, with many noting that the placement of the multi-use trail between the sidewalk and bus shelter presented numerous orientation challenges. While opinions differed regarding the detectability of tactile pavers, with some preferring an elevation difference to indicate the change in facility between the sidewalk and multi-use trail, it was suggested that signage and indicator poles would aid in orientation and guidance for all road users.
- In “mixing zone” intersections that are designed to accommodate pedestrians, mobility aid users, people cycling and transit users, the following comments were expressed:
 - A lack of a perpendicular curb ramp between the tactile walking surface indicators received mixed reviews depending on participants’ disabilities, as some wheelchair users noted challenges and safety concerns with mounting the curb, while it was favoured by blind participants as a navigational aid.
 - High-contrast pavement markings and symbols are essential to identify where certain road users should be positioned while waiting to cross the intersection, or yield to others.
- The user-friendliness of Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) was a common theme at several crossings and intersections, with participants noting that the buttons were either difficult to reach for wheelchair users or the volume of the tone was too low to hear in a high-traffic volume area.

SUMMARY OF STAFF FINDINGS:

- Importance of Clear Signage and Wayfinding: The site visit emphasized the necessity for clear and consistent signage, especially around multi-use trails and floating bus platforms, to guide both people cycling and pedestrians and reduce potential conflicts.
- Strategic TTC Pole Placement for Orientation: There was a consensus on the utility of strategically placed TTC poles that serve as reference points for navigating transitions between different street elements, which is particularly helpful for individuals that are blind or low vision.
- Audible Cues for Better Navigation: The necessity for audible cues to assist people who are blind or low vision in navigating bus platforms and crossing intersections was identified as a crucial area for improvement.

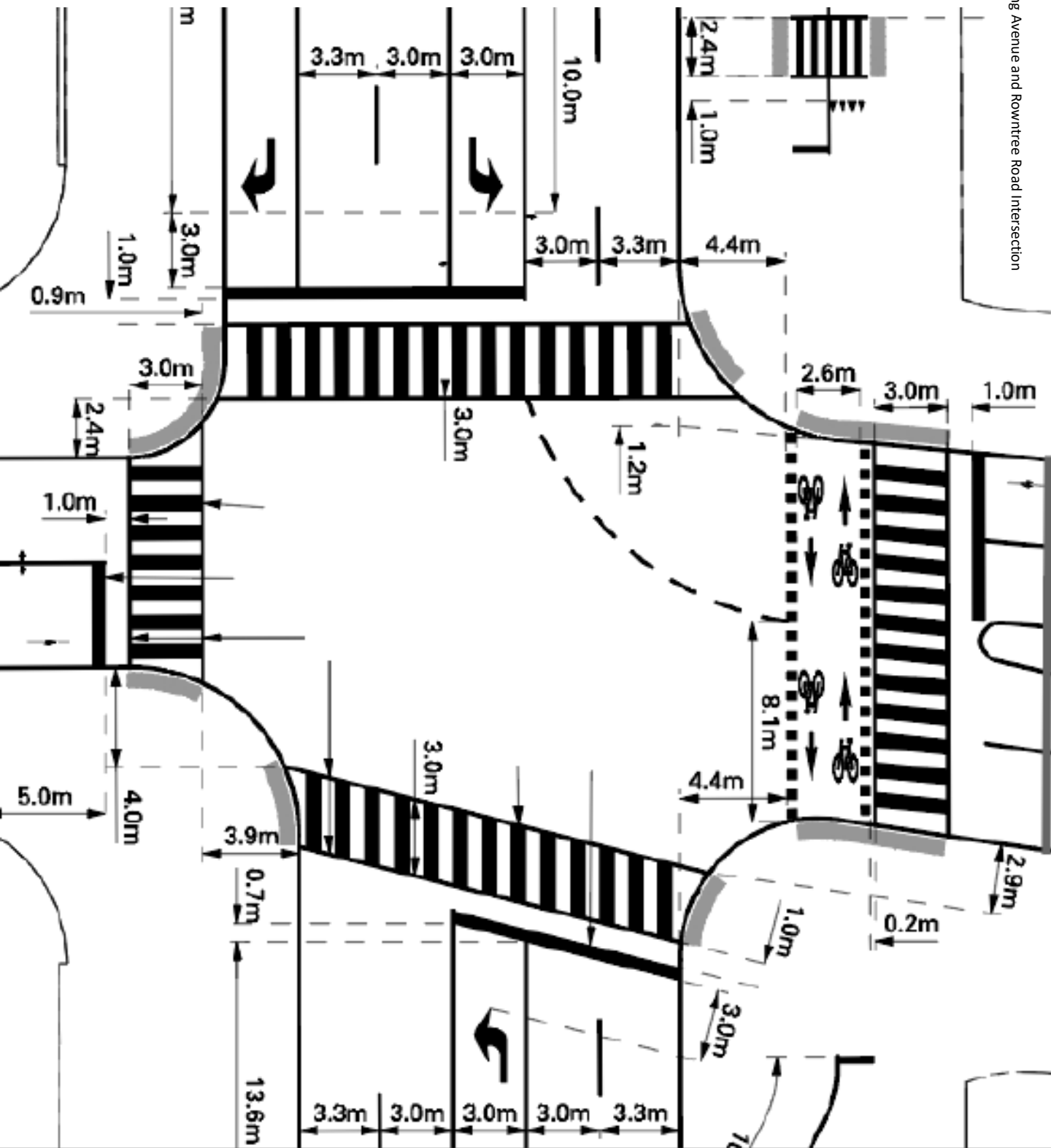
3.0

Conclusion

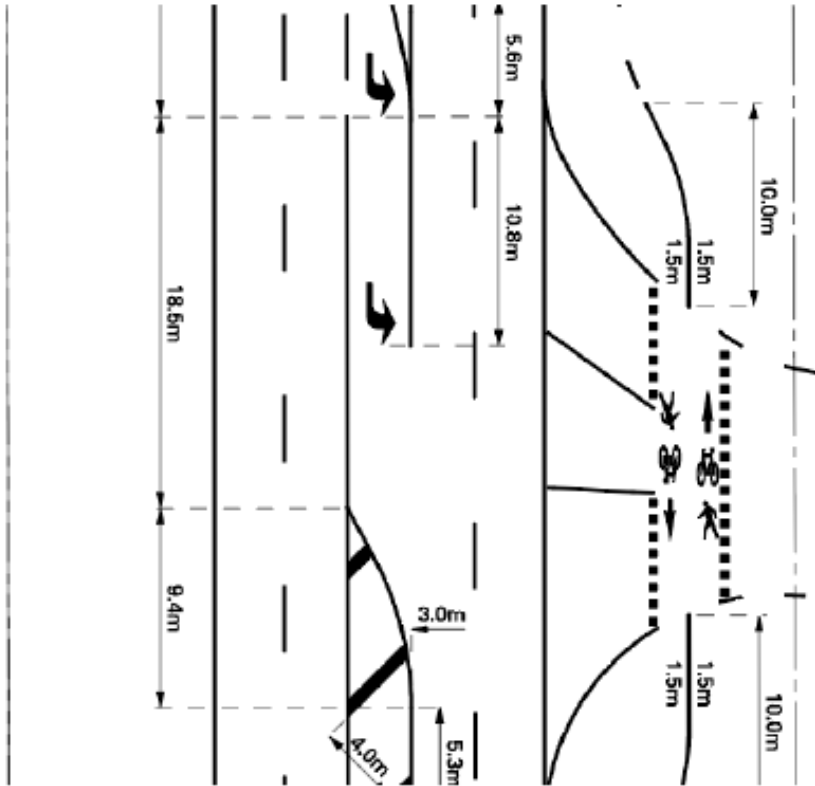
NEXT STEPS:

Transportation Services staff will:

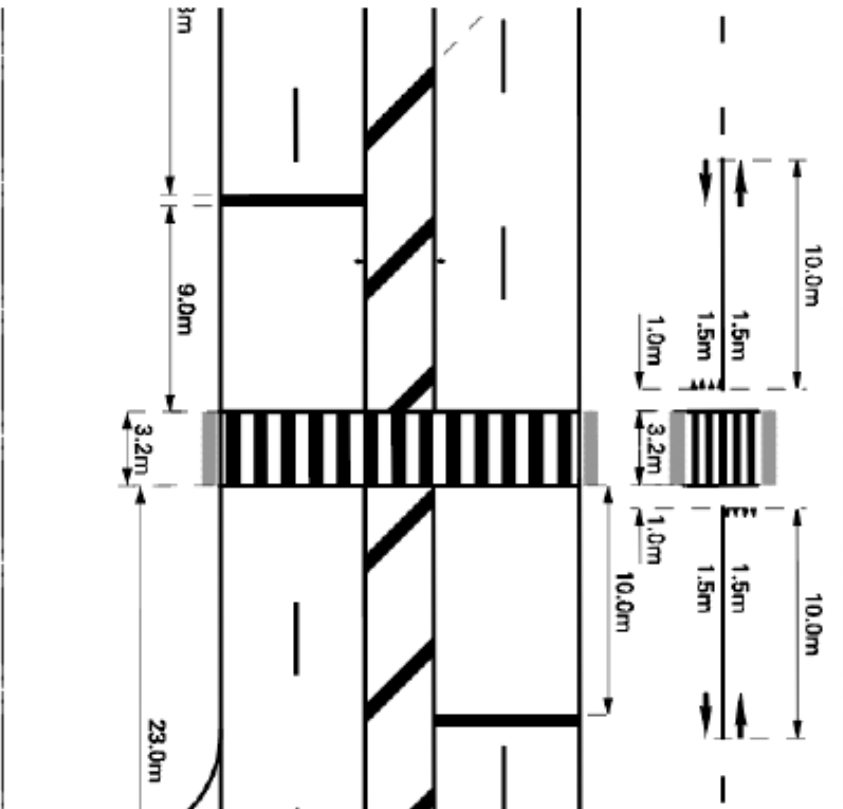
- Share results of the Kipling Site Visit internally to inform design and best practices of the planned extension of the Kipling Avenue multi-use trail south of Finch Avenue West.
- Develop standards for floating bus platforms, in collaboration with TTC staff and the accessibility community.
- Continue consulting and conducting on-site reviews with people with disabilities to gather feedback on accessible design.



Raised Driveway Crossing



Mid-Block Crossing



August 2023



For advice, insights and comments please contact
cycling@toronto.ca.