



## **WALK Friendly Ontario Feedback Report City of THUNDER BAY**

### **SUMMARY**

The Review Team was impressed with the goals set out by the Walkability Committee of EarthCare Thunder Bay and the representation around this table. In our experience, communities that have a group that is specifically addressing the needs and interests of walkers tend to be more successful in seeing changes materialize on the ground. Thunder Bay also has a number of strong community partners to assist with its walkability work – it takes a community to be walk friendly. As the City moves ahead with its Transportation Master Plan it will be important to keep in mind that **walking is the fundamental mode in any integrated mobility solution.**

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- Mobility Coordinator in place
- Committed community partners
- Active Living Corridor
- Multi-use trails for recreational walking
- Opens Streets events and other street festivals
- Great snow clearing policy!

### **TOP PRIORITIES**

- Pedestrian Mobility Plan
- Land Use Policies that require infrastructure to support walking
- Reduce speed limits on neighbourhood streets and in the downtown areas
- A well resourced Transportation Demand Management program

### **COMMUNITY INFORMATION**

#### **Key Contributors**

It was noted that no community groups were listed as advocating for active transportation (AT). However, Eco Superior was the lead on the application during the pilot phase of the WALK Friendly program and is a valuable community partners not to be forgotten.

- The role that Thunder Bay District Health Unit plays in creating a walk friendly city is fantastic. Research clearly shows the connection between the built environment and health. More and more cities are pro-actively consulting with public health not just around protection from health hazards, but also for health promotion.

In 2013, the Canadian Institute of Planners released the [Healthy Communities Legislative Comparison Study Report](#), which identified building linkages and networks between municipal professionals that are key players in advancing healthy community design as a key opportunity in moving forward.

**Recommendation:** Engage more pro-actively with TBDHU on the review of major road reconstruction and other built environment projects to bring a health lens to this work.

- We congratulate the City of Thunder Bay for having a Mobility Coordinator to support the city and community partners in improving the conditions for active transportation. However, it appears that only about 10% of the Mobility Coordinator’s time is spent on walking and related issues. We know that it’s not all on Adam’s shoulders and that there are others within the City that have some responsibility for walking.

**Recommendation:** That the Mobility Coordinator’s efforts be more equitably distributed so that the needs and interests of walkers can be addressed.

### Status of Walking

- Your journey-to-work numbers have been trending down. Although you don’t have data after 2011, we’d like to see an upward trend. The EarthCare Sustainability Plan (ECSP) **recommends** that the City “research and implement a method to measure mode-share in order to inform policy development”.

Collision and injury rates begin trending down in 2013, which is positive. However, it was noted that there have been 4 fatalities in a 5 year period, which the Review Team felt was pretty high for this medium sized community and should be a good indicator that more work needs to be done to increase pedestrian visibility and provide a safer walking environment.

**Recommendation:** That the City of Thunder Bay consider implementing a Vision Zero initiative.

Vision Zero is a fairly new concept in North America and takes a systems approach to enhancing road safety. Rather than exclusively faulting drivers and other users of the transportation system, Vision Zero places the core responsibility for accidents on the overall system design, addressing infrastructure design, vehicle technology, and enforcement. According to Vision Zero philosophy, a person might fail but the road system should not.

## PLANNING

Over-all it appears that there are a number of plans in place that could support improvements to the walking environment in Thunder Bay. However, some are dated and targets for implementation are not being met. The new Strategic Plan for the City calls for the development of a Transportation Master Plan that includes a Pedestrian Mobility Strategy. This will be an excellent opportunity to engage the public and community partners in planning for integrated mobility including walking, cycling and public transit. There seems to be a lot of infill development (50%) in the city, which is great. Ensuring that diversity of land uses is a focus of this development opportunity will be important to improving walkability.

- It was noted in the application that the TDM plan is about 5 years old, less than 10% of the plan has been implemented and you're not meeting annual targets. A well resourced TDM Plan will enable you to develop and implement a recognizable brand, develop trip planning tools, website, maps, and campaigns aimed at improving public awareness of, and building support for, sustainable travel options, and encouraging their use. This is important as you implement your Transit Master Plan in order to get the most from this investment and increase ridership. Every transit trip begins and ends with a walk.

The EarthCare Sustainability Plan (ECSP) identifies this as an action area for the City.

We support the **recommendation** in the Sustainability Plan to:

“Resource the Transportation Demand Management Plan in order to develop and implement a recognizable brand, develop trip planning tools, website, maps, and campaigns aimed at improving public awareness of, and building support for, sustainable travel options, and encouraging their use.”

- The Thunder Bay Active Transportation Plan doesn't include a sidewalk inventory or anything about sidewalks at all in fact. The focus for pedestrians appears to still be on recreational walking, as per the many references to multi-use trails. However, continuous and connected sidewalks were one of the 3 aspects of your community identified in the application in most need of improvement in order to better accommodate walkers of all ages and abilities. The ECSP also identifies this as an action area for the City.

**Recommendation:** That the City undertake a comprehensive sidewalk inventory including the quality of the sidewalks and develop a strategy that would help to prioritize the construction of new sidewalk and the maintenance of existing sidewalk to accommodate vulnerable populations or address any other context sensitive factors.

The City of Peterborough has an inventory and prioritization process that was developed by their TDM Manager, Susan Sauve, and it has been used effectively to the improve connectivity of the sidewalk network. Contact Susan to learn more at [ssauve@peterborough.ca](mailto:ssauve@peterborough.ca).

The Thunder Bay Active Transportation Plan also doesn't include a target mode share or a safety goal. The ECSP **recommends** that the City "research and implement a method to measure mode-share in order to inform policy development".

- Although there have been some projects undertaken, the City has not yet adopted a Complete Streets policy. The ECSP states that "all new street reconstruction and capital road projects incorporate design elements for walking, biking, and transit use for all ages and abilities, including place-making".

**Recommendation:** Adopt a Complete Streets policy making implementation "routine accommodation", and incorporate Complete Streets into your Transportation Master Plan and Urban Design Guidelines. See the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation's document [Complete Streets by Design](#) for more information and also [Making Canada's Roads Safer for All](#) from Transport Canada.

- Site plan control is implemented on a case by case basis for commercial development and sidewalks may not always be required.  
We support the ECSP **recommendation** to "review and reform site-plan control and development Policies/By-laws so that all new developments are conducive to walking, cycling, and transit-use and there is greater adherence to the Urban Design and Streetscape Guidelines and Image Route Guidelines".
- There is no requirement for sidewalks on both sides of collectors or neighbourhood streets, which is disappointing. When you don't require sidewalks, you don't get sidewalks. You end up with gaps in your sidewalk network and, on your collectors, may have inadequate facilities to support public transit use.

**Recommendation:** Update policies in your Official Plan to require sidewalks on both sides of collector and neighbourhood streets.

- Thunder Bay Transit is to be commended for working closely with the community and following through on input collected to create new, more rider- friendly bus routes. However, only 10-25% of bus stops have shelters or waste receptacles. Only 26-50% of bus stops have concrete pads or seating. The Transit Master Plan includes a number of recommendations for service improvements, which is great. Better quality facilities at bus stops also make public transit a more appealing option. We understand that many of the new shelters that have been installed throughout the city through the Bus Stop Enhancement Program are equipped with LED lighting. However, this lighting has not yet been hooked up to the grid.

**Recommendation:** Add more and better quality facilities are needed to accommodate people waiting for a bus, such as shelters, concrete pads, seating and waste receptacles.

**Recommendation:** Make it a priority to get the LED lighting operational so that transit riders can benefit from this investment that the city has made.

- Less than 10% of your walking infrastructure is lit using human scale lighting. Human scale lighting is essential to illuminate sidewalks and paths in a manner to make it safe and inviting to walk. For example, during the winter months it's dark during commuting times. Lighting is one aspect of CPTED, which is being used currently to assess specific areas of the City.

**Recommendation:** Inventory your lighting, especially at transit stops, as part of your asset management plan/program in order to make improvements.

- There is no City-wide pedestrian-scale wayfinding and route signage. We support the ECSP **recommendation** to “support and facilitate the development of a City-wide wayfinding system, including maps and signage for active transportation routes to key destinations”.
- We know that Ecole Gron Morgan and Corpus Christi were part of the national dissemination of School Travel Planning between 2010 and 2012 and that they have travel plans in place. However, although concerted efforts have been made, STP and ASRTS initiatives have failed to produce results. The walkability committee would benefit from representatives from both school boards to provide input on how to encourage more active school travel.

In 2013, the Ottawa-Carleton District and Ottawa Catholic school boards joined with the Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) to sign a School Active Transportation Charter. This precedent setting move represents the first step towards creation of a new School Active Transportation Support Network that will see the boards and OSTA strengthen their collaboration with the City and Green Communities Canada in support of active travel initiatives including STP. Contact Wallace Beaton at [wbeaton@greencommunitiescanada.ca](mailto:wbeaton@greencommunitiescanada.ca) to learn more.

**Recommendation:** Set up a conference call/meeting with Jacky Kennedy to strategize about how to move forward with your active school travel initiatives.

## **ENGINEERING & COMMUNITY DESIGN**

Thunder Bay has provided a great example for other communities to follow with its Active Living Corridor. The City should be commended for listening to citizen's feedback and widening the multi-use trail on Arundel and installing bollards to provide a physical separation between walkers and vehicles making it safer and more comfortable for pedestrians. The policy and budget allocated to plowing all sidewalks during the winter months – including trails where they take the place of a sidewalk – is impressive. In addition, the city's place-making efforts are notable.

- Another aspect of your community identified as most in need of improvement in order to better accommodate walkers of all ages and abilities was reducing speed limits and increasing enforcement. The posted speed limit on neighbourhood streets and in the downtown area is too high at 50 km/hr. Canada Walks fully supports the recommendations made in the [Ontario Chief Coroner's Pedestrian Death Review](#) to lower the speeds on residential streets to 30 km and to 40 km on other roads. A person has a 90% chance of surviving a collision with a car at speeds of 30 km/h or lower, but that drops to a 50% chance of survival at a speed of 45 km/h.

Speeding and enforcement issues could also be addressed through design changes to roadways, although this is a more long term fix. For example, reducing speed limits to 40 km/hr 100m from schools is likely not effective and probably not enforced. A safety and design initiative seems to be in order given the yearly fatalities reported.

**Recommendation:** Reduce posted speed limits on residential streets to 30 km/hr and 40 km/hr in your downtown area, in conjunction with an education and enforcement campaign.

It was noted that you don't have a warrant process for traffic calming in the city. The City of Hamilton (WFC Silver) recently updated its [Traffic Calming Policy](#), which includes a Traffic Calming Program that operates based on neighbourhood need with no technical pre-requisites prior to installation of traffic calming/management measures. Instead, the technical requirements are used to prioritize proposed traffic calming/management measures.

**Recommendation:** Develop and implement a traffic calming policy that includes a process to address issues brought forward by citizens.

- The cycle length in the downtown area seems long and would likely favour automobile travel over pedestrian travel. Consider checking your signal timings with the Pedestrian Signal Delay calculations that are available in the US Highway Capacity Manual. This gives a rating for intersections and relates it to pedestrian comfort and delay (and likelihood of jaywalking), e.g. more than a 30 second delay results in low adherence to traffic signals by pedestrians.
- Consider developing and implementing walk friendly block length standards to reduce the distance walkers must travel to make safe crossings and access destinations. These standards could facilitate greater connectivity and inform decision making for placement of mid-block crossing facilities. This can help address the challenge that Thunder Bay (and many other communities) faces with respect to ensuring that pedestrian crossings are a reasonable walking distance apart – particularly in suburban areas.
- In June 2015, the Highway Traffic Act (HTA) was amended through Bill 31 – Transportation Statute Law Amendment Act (Making Ontario's Roads Safer), and included changes to enhance the rights-of-way for pedestrians in crossovers and regulations respecting pedestrian crossovers (PXO). These amendments came into force on September 1, 2015.

In conjunction with this, the MTO has recently completed its update to OTM Book 15 Pedestrian Crossing Treatments. Within this update, the Province has introduced three new variations of the Pedestrian Crossover. These crossing treatments will allow pedestrians to cross with the right-of-way under a greater number of conditions than before, and will provide municipalities with more cost effective solutions to ensure pedestrian safety – particularly for mid-block crossings. The updated version of OTM Book 15 is set to be released in early 2016.

**Recommendation:** Engage in a process to identify priority locations for mid-block crossings that considers collision data, need expressed by citizens, block length and land use context.

- Many intersections have pedestrian signals and most meet the OADA standards. Beyond this, however, it does not appear that much is being done with respect to pedestrian oriented design to facilitate safer and more comfortable crossings. Intersections are the places in corridors where all travel modes mix the most and user safety is paramount. It is clear that changes to current practices with respect to engineering and design are necessary.

**Recommendation:** Develop and consistently implement guidelines for pedestrian oriented intersections that consider the needs of the most vulnerable users of these spaces – people walking.

See the City of Ottawa’s (WFC Silver) guidelines on [Intersections, Driveways and Pedestrian Crossings](#) as an example.

Some questions posed by the Review Team for consideration:

1. I was curious about prioritizing repair and replacement of sidewalks being on arterial streets. Is this an area of high walking activity compared to other areas? What is the justification for this?
2. Is the number of curb ramps being replaced enough? Twenty, or approximately five intersections, seems low.
3. The number of pedestrian signalized crossings mid-block seems low. Is the demand for these crossings adequately assessed or is the connectivity such that they are not needed? Not having a warrant system in place for crossings is fine. However, is there a process that is set up that addresses needs identified by citizens to deal with how these are implemented?

## **EDUCATION & ENCOURAGEMENT**

The Review Team was pleased to hear that members of council participated in an information session and tour of Thunder Bay’s worst areas to walk. There is nothing like experience to change minds and hearts! It is clear that TBDHU plays a key roll in public education and encouragement campaigns to promote walking. You have a number of events and a variety of community partners that promote walking. The Review Team was impressed with your process to make it easy for residents to organize a street event, and that you have continued to host Open Streets annually.

- Other than the Commuter Challenge, which seems to have strong participation, it did not appear that Transportation Demand Management is a priority. Outreach to schools would be a very useful place to start given their dispersion throughout the communities.
- The Review Team was disappointed to see little interest in ASRTS. GCC has worked with EcoSuperior and the health unit over the years to involve schools and we are aware of some that participate in IWALK October and other events. As stated earlier in the application, this is an area that needs to be addressed going forward.
- Notwithstanding the promotional campaigns led by TBDHU, and some great community-wide events, over-all it was felt that this section could use improvement.

### **ENFORCEMENT**

The City of Thunder Bay appears to have a strong relationship with Police Services around road safety and the Review Team was pleased to see that bylaws were being actively enforced that make streets safer for pedestrians. This is a strong section of the application.

### **EVALUATION**

The Review Team felt that section was very thin and needs work. You need data to make the case for investment in facilities, programs, policies and activities that support walking in your community. Remember, what doesn't get measured doesn't count.

- See the Status of Walking section for recommendations regarding counting, monitoring and measuring rates of walking. Consider developing a relationship with a university or college program and faculty to assist with annual activities to collect data.
- There are many tools out there to evaluate walkability in order to identify problem areas and potential solutions. Some of the ideas outlined in question 219 of the application could easily be completed.

**Recommendation:** That the Mobility Coordinator research which methods would best suit the needs of the Thunder Bay context and develop a program for on-going evaluation.

- It doesn't appear that pre and post evaluations of road project are undertaken routinely to measure changes to pedestrian collision rates, vehicle speeds, and volumes of pedestrian and vehicle traffic.

**Recommendation:** Conduct pre and post evaluations of road project to determine if your counter measures have been effective in improving safety and comfort for all road users.

- It appears that there are limited evaluation efforts being undertaken to measure the effectiveness of plans, programs, interventions and campaigns. For example, the City of



Thunder Bay has a number of plans and policies in place to support walking and it will be important to put monitoring and evaluation practices in place to see how these are, and will, affect walking activity levels and mode shift. A comprehensive evaluation strategy could help to pull these pieces together and tell the story of change over time.

#### **FINAL COMMENTS**

To wrap up, the City has had some successes with a Mobility Coordinator in place, committed community partners to work with, installation of the Active Living Corridor, a new Transit Master Plan, multi-use trails for recreational walking, outdoor public art installations, Opens Streets and other street festivals, and a great snow clearing policy that supports winter walking. The City has taken some recent steps toward becoming more walkable by engaging community at different levels. However, tangible results, for the most part, have yet to be realized. At this time the application failed to demonstrate progressive attempts, e.g. design, follow through on plans and evaluation, to improve the current state of walking. However, we recognize that progress is being made and encourage you to continue your efforts to make the City of Thunder Bay a great place to walk.