



Plan for the Needs of Children and Youth

A Call to Action: Ontario Professional Planners Institute

February 10, 2009

Summary

There are good reasons to give priority to the needs of children and youth in land-use and transportation planning. This Call to Action proposes that Ontario municipalities endorse a set of 21 child and youth friendly land-use and transportation guidelines that are set out below.

Background

Established in 1986, the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) is the recognized voice of the Province's planning profession and provides vision and leadership on key planning issues. The Institute's more than three thousand members are employed by government, private industry, agencies, and academic institutions. They work in a wide variety of fields, including urban and rural community development, urban design, environment, transportation, health and social services, housing, and economic development.

OPPI members are committed to creating and fostering healthy communities throughout Ontario. They recognize how land-use and transportation planning decisions shape us in ways we are only just beginning to appreciate, including potential contributions to obesity, heart disease, mental health, social isolation, nutrition, and poor air quality.

In keeping with this commitment, in 2007 OPPI prepared a position paper *Healthy Communities, Sustainable Communities*. This position paper emphasizes the importance of urban design, active transportation, and green infrastructure. In its brief consideration of the particular impacts of planning on young people, the position paper notes that "for the first time in many decades, our children's life expectancy may not exceed our own."

OPPI based a Call to Action on the *Healthy Communities* position paper. It called for research and the development of guidelines, measures, methods, and policies that support the attainment of healthy, sustainable communities.

The present Call to Action addresses what may be the most important of numerous concerns about unhealthy and unsustainable communities: the impacts on children and youth. This Call to Action highlights *Child and Youth Friendly Land-Use and Transportation Guidelines*, a document prepared by the Centre for Sustainable Transportation at the University of Winnipeg. (There is more below about the Centre and the development of the *Guidelines* document.)

Overview of the Guidelines

The 21 child and youth friendly land-use and transportation guidelines were developed in the spirit of a statement by Enrique Peñalosa, former mayor of Bogotá, Colombia. “If we can build a successful city for children we will have a successful city for all people.” The guidelines have been endorsed by OPPI and thus represent OPPI’s position on these matters, at least for urban and suburban communities. The guidelines are organized in six groups, set out here with brief comments and in full later in this Call to Action.

1. *Give priority to the needs of children and youth* [Guidelines 1-3]. These three guidelines are the most important in that they call for a focus on the needs of young people and indicate processes whereby this can be achieved.
2. *Plan for children and youth as pedestrians* [Guidelines 4-7]. Walking is the most available mode of active transportation, and thus the most important. It can provide the maximum of exercise for the minimum financial outlay. Land uses should above all facilitate young people’s walking.
3. *Plan for children and youth on bicycles (and other wheels)* [Guidelines 8-12]. Bicycling is the most common mode of mechanized, non-motorized transportation, and is available to most young people. It can be an important means of enhancing independence in youth; but, even more than adults, young people require a safe bicycling environment.
4. *Plan for children and youth as transit users* [Guidelines 13-15]. As with cycling, the availability of transit to young people can enhance their independence and social maturation. Young people will use transit if it is easy to use and particularly if they and their parents consider it to be safe.
5. *Focus on journeys to and from school.* [Guidelines 16-18]. During the school year, trips to and from school usually comprise the majority of young people’s weekday travel. These trips should receive the highest priority when seeking to encourage active transportation (i.e., non-motorized transportation such as walking and bicycling).
6. *Reduce transport’s adverse impacts on children and youth* [Guidelines 19-21]. Almost all of these impacts result from operation of the internal combustion engines that propel nearly all motorized vehicles. They are experienced mostly when travelling but also when near traffic.

Why be concerned about young people and transportation?

There are several reasons to be concerned about young people and today’s transport and about the related matter of how land is used. Here are some of them:

- Young people appear to be spending more time in cars.
- Some of this car travel has replaced walking and bicycling, removing needed opportunities for physical exercise.

- Some car travel has replaced more environmentally benign transit use, adding to what may already be an excess of car use, reducing both the present and the future viability of transit systems, and further reducing young people's opportunities for exercise.
- Being in cars can be harmful, because in-car air quality can be lower, and enervating, because the view of the passing world through a windshield can be limiting.
- Young people travel to where young people gather, meaning that if they travel by car pollution from traffic in the vicinity of these places—e.g., schools—will be higher.
- Whether or not young people travel by car, they are especially susceptible to pollution from traffic and thus from the increased pollution that results from traffic growth.

As well as exercising less, and weighing more, other effects may be associated with the lost exercise associated with the increased automobile use. They include reduced academic performance and compromised emotional development.

The transport needs of young people differ from those of adults, partly because their destinations are different and partly because they travel differently. On schooldays, for example, the majority of walking and cycling trips are still made by young people notwithstanding the recent large increase in travel by car. Thus, facilities for non-motorized modes are much more important for young people's travel than they are for adults.

Overall, about a fifth of all local trips may be made by young people, a significant share that impels attention to their transport needs.

The following specific data were drawn from surveys in south-central Ontario in 1986 and 2006. They are probably indicative of wider trends.

- Children and youth make more than half of all schoolday walking and bicycling trips. Their rate of walking or cycling is about ten times that of adults. Thus, when facilities for pedestrians and cyclists are being considered, the needs of young people may be the most important.
- Young people's schoolday travel by car increased greatly between 1986 and 2006. For 11- to 15-year-olds the per-capita increase was 96 per cent. For 16- to 19-year-olds, the per-capita increase was much lower—12 percent—chiefly reflecting a sharp fall in driving by this age group across the two decades. Per-capita car use by adults, as passenger or driver, increased by only 4 per cent, further highlighting the extraordinary increase among young people under 16 years of age.
- Considering 11- to 15-year-olds only, just over half of the additional trips by car in 2006 were trips to and from school. These car trips replaced trips that in 1986 had been made by transit, walking or bicycling. Just under half of the additional trips were trips other than between home and school. Essentially all of these trips were new trips, i.e., trips that had not been made in 1986.

The 21 guidelines concern land use as well as transport because land use is a key factor in determining the transport patterns of young people as it is for adults. Above all, they are directed towards reducing the amount of travel by automobile by children and youth, and also towards reducing the amounts of all road traffic near children and youth.

Our Position on Land-use and Transport Planning for Children and Youth

Our basic position is that Ontario municipalities should endorse the *Child and Youth Friendly Land-Use and Transportation Guidelines*. OPPI members and others should work towards securing such endorsement. The full set of 21 guidelines is below. (Further explanation of individual guidelines is in the 90-page document *Child- and Youth-friendly Land-Use and Transport Planning Guidelines for Ontario; Version 2*, at <http://www.kidsonthemove.ca>.)

Putting children and youth first

- Guideline 1. In transport and land-use planning, the needs of children and youth should receive as much priority as the needs of people of other ages and the requirements of business.
- Guideline 2. Within each municipality, designate a staff member or council member, or both, as responsible for bringing the perspectives of young people to consideration of transport and land-use planning issues.
- Guideline 3. As may be appropriate, establish or adapt one or more forums for children and youth to ensure that their perspectives are considered by land-use and transport planners.

Providing for children and youth as pedestrians

- Guideline 4. Identify where children and youth want to go or need to go and, to the extent possible, provide ways of getting there by foot.
- Guideline 5. Assess pedestrian routes used or to be used by children and youth to ensure that they are as safe and suitable for them as possible.
- Guideline 6. Separate sidewalks used by children and youth from heavily travelled roads.
- Guideline 7. Ensure that sidewalks are always cleared of ice and snow.

Providing for children and youth on bicycles (and other wheels)

- Guideline 8. For older children and youth, ensure that destinations that cannot be a walk away are no more than a bicycle ride away.
- Guideline 9. For younger children, ensure that sidewalks are suitable for their tricycles and bicycles.
- Guideline 10. For destinations to be reached by bicycle, provide separate bicycle paths or trails or, if not possible, install bicycle lanes on regular roads.
- Guideline 11. Ensure that bicycle riders are well provided for at intersections and have sufficient priority for forward movement.
- Guideline 12. At destinations, provide secure, convenient bicycle parking.

Providing for children and youth as transit users

- Guideline 13. Ensure that every part of a transit system is safe and welcoming to young people, and affordable.
- Guideline 14. Avoid transfers by routing vehicles where children and youth want to and need to go; make transfers easy where necessary.

Guideline 15. Examine every aspect of a transit system from the perspective of a parent with a child in a stroller, and make adjustments to meet such a traveller's needs.

Providing for journeys to and from school

Guideline 16. Act to ensure that school policies and practices favour walking and cycling to and from school and other modes of active transportation, or, where appropriate and possible, regular public transportation.

Guideline 17. For younger children, help arrange walking school buses and other means of supervision.

Guideline 18. Act to reduce the time children spend in school buses to a maximum of 40 minutes per day.

Reducing transport's adverse impacts on children and youth

Guideline 19. Where destinations cannot be reached by foot, bicycle or transit, arrange land uses so that in-car time is reduced.

Guideline 20. Particularly in urban areas, post and enforce much lower speed limits.

Guideline 21. Do what is possible to reduce amounts of motorized road traffic generally and reduce its impacts.

The Centre for Sustainable Transportation and development of the Guidelines

With support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Centre for Sustainable Transportation (CST) produced the 72-page *Child and Youth Friendly Land-Use and Transportation Guidelines* document in 2005, when CST was located in the Toronto region. That document is available at <http://www.kidsonthemove.ca>. Since then, CST has become part of the University of Winnipeg. With support from the Public Health Agency of Canada, CST is now preparing guidelines documents for the other nine provinces. In the course of that work, the guidelines have been revised and reduced in number from the original 27 to the 21 that appear above. Version 2 of the *Guidelines* document is also available at <http://www.kidsonthemove.ca>. With further support from the Trillium Foundation, CST has been disseminating the guidelines within Ontario, with the help of OPPI. This Call to Action arises from that collaboration.

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