



Ontario Public Health Association
l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario
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**Submission to the
Ministry of Economic
Development, Employment and
Infrastructure
on
*Moving Ontario Forward:
Outside the GTHA***

September 17, 2015

Introduction

On behalf of the OPHA's Volunteer Work Group on the Build Environment, please find outlined below our responses to the questions posed through your consultation on *Moving Ontario Forward: Outside the GTHA*. We appreciate the opportunity to offer our comments and would be pleased to provide any additional information and answer any questions you may have.

Do you think about infrastructure on a daily basis?

Public health professionals have a stake in infrastructure in our communities.

The built environment of a community influences health in a number of ways and thus the design and development of infrastructure is of interest to public health professionals. With a mandate under the Ontario Public Health Standards to work with municipalities to create supportive built environments for health, public health professionals are important stakeholders in shaping municipal land-use and infrastructure policies that influence the health and wellbeing of Ontarians. Healthy policies are the first step in creating healthy infrastructure and communities.

The opportunities that Ontarians have for good health and quality of life are directly related to municipal infrastructure. The way our roads, public spaces and facilities, and communities are designed impact levels of physical activity, incidence of injuries, air and water quality, mental health and social capital, all of which affect the health of the public (Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, 2007ⁱ)

When considering supportive built environments for health, small urban and rural communities have unique issues that are related to municipal infrastructure. For instance, people must often travel long distances to get to destinations and transportation planning is usually focused on infrastructure for automobiles. As a result, there are fewer multi-use trails, sidewalks and bike lanes, reducing the opportunity to use active forms of transportation.ⁱⁱ Therefore, the impact of infrastructure development on health is a significant consideration when allocating funds for municipal infrastructure.

What types of infrastructure projects could unlock tangible economic development opportunities in your communities?

Recommendation: To create economic development opportunities, infrastructure projects need to contribute to quality of place, encourage sustainability and accommodate active transportation.

Rationale

“A good physical environment is a good economic environment” (Tolley, 2011ⁱⁱⁱ) There is a growing body of evidence that shows the impact that the built environment has on health – of both the local population and economy. Infrastructure projects that take both of these factors into account will have maximum benefit for communities. Walking and cycling are important quality of life features – and are critical for attracting

and retaining businesses, employees, families and youth. Infrastructure projects for walking include trails, paths, and sidewalks, and for cycling include trails, bike lanes, and paved shoulders. It is critical that when undertaking large transportation infrastructure projects, accommodation for walking and cycling is included – a complete streets approach. Other improvements that are part of a complete street include amenities such as benches, lighting, decorative surfaces, crosswalks, bike racks, and plantings.

Communities that invest in infrastructure that supports and encourages walking, cycling and other forms of active transportation not only see more people walking and cycling, but also reap many economic benefits. A Toronto study showed that people who biked and walked to a retail area reported they spent more money per month than people who drove there (Clean Air Partnership, 2009^{iv}). A report by Davis estimated the return on active transportation investments averaged 13:1, with benefits including reduced road casualties, congestion, fuel costs, noise, and air pollution.

Improved walking and cycling conditions can increase both retail and private property values, and attract business. In Washington D.C. design improvements on a ¾ mile corridor helped attract 44 new businesses and 200 new jobs, as well as increased sales and foot traffic. (National Complete Streets Coalition^v) Walkable areas attract people to visit often, stay longer and spend more money (Urban Land Institute, 2010^{vi})

Providing infrastructure to accommodate active transportation is also a matter of equity. According to Statistics Canada, 20% of households in Canada do not own a car – people do not drive due to age, health, disability or income barriers, or have opted out of car ownership. The aging demographic of our population means that consideration must be given to transportation options and infrastructure outside of driving a car. In a survey of real estate markets in the U.S., increase in the walkability of a neighbourhood as measured by WalkScore increased home values by \$700 to \$3000. A 10-point increase in WalkScore increases commercial property values by 5-8%. (University of Arizona and Indiana University, 2010^{vii})

What is the long-term future of your transportation network, and how can Moving Ontario Forward support that?

Recommendation:

- Allocate dedicated funds to municipalities for both the building and on-going maintenance of active transportation facilities
- Encourage and support transportation projects that use environmentally-friendly design and materials

Rationale

The design of transportation networks has a direct impact on health. Evidence shows complete streets which accommodate walking; cycling, transit and motorized traffic are beneficial to health due to increased physical activity, increased traffic safety, better air quality, lowered body weight and improved physical, mental and social health.^{viii} Municipalities across Ontario recognize the need for their transportation networks to accommodate multiple modes for multiple benefits. *Moving Ontario Forward* can support municipalities in their efforts to create safe, accessible and connected multi-modal transportation systems by dedicating a portion of formula-based funds (e.g. gas tax) specifically for projects that focus on active transportation and creating complete streets. This approach would create incentive for municipalities to continue to invest in building multi-modal transportation networks. For application-based funds, criteria for selection should give preference to projects that benefit a range of transportation modes.

Transportation networks also need annual and long-term maintenance. Funds should be available for municipalities for annual maintenance, with priority given to maintenance of active transportation infrastructure.

The complementary environmental impacts of transportation networks should also be considered. Implementing new design and building technologies, such as low-impact design, can help to decrease the impacts that these networks have on the local environment. For example, utilizing permeable pavement technologies allows for storm water to filter through pavement back to the ground water table. This means that fewer resources are needed to create and maintain storm water sewers and retention ponds. Prioritizing projects which include multiple transportation modes, while also factoring in the environmental impacts of those networks, will allow for the greatest health benefits to be garnered by those transportation networks.

What should we consider as we work on developing an efficient and modern highway network to help connect regions and communities? *

Recommendations:

- Include cycling when planning and developing provincial highway network
- Work with Ministry of Transportation to take a coordinated approach to planning a provincial bicycle network
- Ensure that highways going through small towns do not impede local safety, accessibility and active transportation corridors

Rationale

The provincial highway network must also include cycling. The Ministry of Transportation is working on the development of a provincial cycling network, which will be an important resource for tourism, as well as a way to connect local cycling routes across jurisdictions.

The provincial highway system is a critical connector between communities to foster economic growth and development. It is also important to consider the impacts of provincial highways within communities. In rural Ontario, this means that highways frequently function as main or downtown streets. Therefore, development of provincial highways needs to consider local needs and context in order to ensure that these roads do not impede safety, mobility and accessibility for local travel, especially active transportation.

What else should we consider when making decisions around new infrastructure program design and when prioritizing future investments?

Recommendations:

- Direct municipalities to consult with local public health units for input on health impacts of infrastructure projects
- Develop incentives for municipalities to incorporate green and environmentally-friendly design and materials
- Prioritize funding for projects that achieve multiple outcomes and objectives, in particular health, and address priorities of multiple ministries
- Review existing infrastructure funding arrangements (e.g., development charges) for appropriateness relative to provincial goals

Rationale

The Ministry has identified a desire to achieve multiple complimentary objectives through investments in infrastructure. Infrastructure projects have the potential to have positive impacts on outcomes related to public health and safety, economic development and prosperity, climate change mitigation, air and water quality, and sustainability. Public health professionals have expertise in these areas and can be valuable partners to municipalities in defining the multiple benefits of infrastructure projects.

Many other provincial Ministries have a stake in how infrastructure is developed across Ontario, and we encourage the Ministry of EDEI to collaborate with them to determine how to maximize the benefits of investments. Relevant Ministries include Transportation, Health and Long-Term Care, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Education, Environment and Climate Change. More specifically, infrastructure funding should be focused on projects that enable communities to be better prepared and adapt to climate change impacts such as extreme weather events, facilitate safe and efficient active transportation, improve accessibility and utilize environmentally-friendly design and materials. Given the relationship between the health and the built environment, health should be included as a guiding principle when allocating infrastructure funding.

As an example, the Building Canada Fund in 2009 asked questions such as:

- Describe how the project is compatible with other strategies to promote the sustainable development of the municipality
- Describe how the project contributes to improved road and pedestrian safety.
- Describe how the project minimizes GHG emission and other environmental land-use impacts.
- Does the project improve transportation system efficiency, optimizing the use of all modes and decreasing the use of single occupancy vehicles?
- Does the project improve access to one or all of the following: multi-modal transportation corridors, and/or intermodal facilities; business and employment centres (including commercial, industrial, natural resources and tourism sites)

Does this project contribute to a sustainable environment?

A review of existing infrastructure funding arrangements (e.g., development charges, land transfer tax rebates, funding formulas for schools and hospitals, and so on) and the incentives they provide with respect to the location of future development can identify the appropriateness of those incentives given the goals contained in provincial growth and climate change plan.

About OPHA

Created in 1949, the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that brings together a broad spectrum of groups and individuals concerned about people's health. OPHA's members come from various backgrounds and sectors - from the various disciplines in public health, health care, academic, non-profit to the private sector. They are united by OPHA's mission of providing leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthening the impact of people, who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario. This mission is achieved through professional

development, information and analysis on issues effecting community and public health, access to multidisciplinary networks, advocacy on health public policy and the provision of expertise and consultation.

ⁱ Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. The Impact of the Built Environment on the Health of the Population: A Review of the Review Literature, November 2007.

ⁱⁱ Healthy Rural Communities Toolkit, 2014

ⁱⁱⁱ Tolley, R. Good for Business - The benefits of making streets more walking and cycling friendly. Heart Foundation South Australia. 2011

^{iv} Clean Air Partnership: Bike lanes, on-street parking and business: A study of Bloor Street in Toronto's Annex Neighbourhood, <<http://www.cleanairpartnership.org/pdf/bike-lanes-parking.pdf>>, 2009.

^v National Complete Streets Coalition – Economic Development <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/complete-streets-fundamentals/factsheets/economic-revitalization/>

^{vi} Urban land Institute, 2010. - in Walk Boston – good Walking is Good Business

^{vii} University of Arizona & Indiana University 2010 - in Walk Boston – good Walking is Good Business

^{viii} Toronto Public Health. Healthy Streets: Evidence Review. October 2014. City of Toronto. (<http://www.toronto.ca/health>)

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