

Making the Case for Active Transportation

- Bulletin # 8: Role of Municipal Decision Makers -



Municipal decision makers refer to both elected municipal council members and municipal staff. They are the people within your community who make decisions on behalf of the residents. Municipal decision makers have a role to play in promoting active transportation. They have substantial influence on the development patterns, transportation systems, and design of our communities. The Canadian Medical Association supports the role of municipal decision makers in developing and promoting active transportation in their communities.

“Making active transportation a greater part of everyday life in Canada will take political will, professional knowledge, public involvement and adequate funding. Municipalities need to learn from the experience of others, craft a strategy for local success, and implement it across municipal activities like land-use planning, road design and maintenance, health promotion, budgeting and staff training.”³

Municipalities that design for active transportation afford more equitable access to employment, education, recreation and consumer opportunities for vulnerable populations including seniors, children, Canadians with lower incomes and people with disabilities. “In Canada, approximately 20% of Canadian households do not own a car; of these, 10% are low-income and 1% are precluded from driving due to a disability.”²

Municipal decision makers influence planning and development practices that support the type of mixed-used communities needed to promote and support active transportation (see sidebar for examples). They need to design around people and not vehicles. If they plan for cars they will get more cars. If they plan for people they will get more people.

The Canadian Medical Association and provincial/ territorial medical associations urge all levels of government to promote active transportation by¹:

- a) Incorporating active transportation principles into community planning and infrastructure renewal; and
- b) Developing and implementing public education and awareness programs that explain the link between health, active transportation and the environment.

Municipal policies that can shift travel from private vehicles to more active transportation modes would provide multiple benefits such as increased physical activity and decreased air pollution from time spent idling in cars.⁴

Active transportation refers to any form of human-powered transportation. Examples include:

- Walking,
- Cycling,
- Using a wheelchair,
- Pushing a stroller,
- Running, and
- In-line skating or skateboarding.

Local government officials around the world have been working with community members and organizations to increase community active transportation opportunities.

Barcelona, Spain

“In Barcelona, city planning provides high-quality opportunities for people to live and work actively. City planners have accomplished this although the physical site is small and topographical constraints in outward development restrict space for greenery and active living.”⁵

Copenhagen, Denmark

“Copenhagen is well known as a cycling city. Every day, cyclists travel more than 1 million kilometers in the city, using a sophisticated and safe set of cycle tracks and lanes throughout the city.”⁵

The World Health Organization⁵ states that municipal decision makers have a role to:

- Prioritize funding for improvements that support non-motorized modes of transportation such as sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic calming measures and bike lanes.
- Require road improvements to include provisions for all modes of travel, including active transportation rather than just vehicle travel.
- Create comprehensive plans for cycling and walking in existing and future developments and integrate these plans into the larger transport planning.
- Provide a clean and attractive environment that invites residents to engage in active transportation in their neighbourhood.
- Engage citizen participation in community design and provide opportunities to residents to discuss active transportation opportunities and barriers.
- Review municipal by-laws to determine whether they encourage or discourage active transportation at the neighbourhood level.
- Enact policy changes at the local level, since they have the potential to encourage increased physical activity over the long term by making active transportation an easier choice for residents.

Take Action!

Learn how your municipal government can take action to integrate active transportation into planning. Review *Communities in Motion: Bring Active Transportation to Life*,³ produced by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Centre for Sustainable Community Development. Use the checklist to assess your community and share your results with your municipal decision makers.

Work with your municipality to develop an Active Transportation Plan (see box) that develops a long term transportation vision for your community and encompasses all modes of transportation.

Share *Making the Case for Active Transportation Bulletin # 6 - Safety* with local decision makers to enhance their understanding of these issues.

Visit municipally-owned property and buildings. Note the existence of active transportation infrastructure such as bike racks, trail signage, benches, bus shelters, sidewalks, or multi-use pathways. Share your results with your municipal decision makers and work together to increase the availability of active transportation infrastructure.

Use the Green Transportation Hierarchy (See Bulletin #5) as a basis for prioritizing transportation modes in the Active Transportation Plan.

An **Active Transportation Plan (ATP)** provides a long term vision for active transportation by reviewing the benefits for improving active transportation opportunities and proposing networks and strategies for their implementation. An ATP is not about restricting the use of motor vehicles but about enhancing choice and opportunities for multi-modal travel and recreation that promotes physical activity and healthy lifestyles for all ages. The long term goal of an ATP is to transform an automobile reliant community to a place where motorists, public transit users, pedestrians, cyclists and others share a common vision for an approach to future transportation desires and needs. It identifies links and extensions of existing bikeways, sidewalks and trails, as well as creates new walking and cycling connections throughout a community. It can include plans for prioritizing network projects, determining appropriate levels of funding for operations and maintenance, reviewing current standards, by-laws and programs for cycling and walking, and introducing a program for public promotion and education.

References:

1. Canadian Medical Association (2008). News Release. Retrieved from www.cma.ca/index.cfm/ci_id/86954/la_id/1.htm
2. Victoria Transport Policy Institute www.vtpi.org
3. Federation of Canadian Municipalities for Sustainable Community Development (2008). *Communities in Motion: Bring active transportation to life*. Retrieved from http://www.sustainablecommunities.fcm.ca/files/Capacity_Building_Transportation/CommunitiesinMotion-PUB-e.pdf
4. Frank, L., Kavage, S. & Litman, T. (2006). Promoting public health through smart growth: building healthier communities through transportation and land use policies and practices. *Smart Growth BC*. 1-43.
5. Edwards, P. & Tsouros, A. (2006). Promoting physical activity and active living in urban environments: The role for local governments. World Health Organization, Europe.
6. Cameron, C., Craig, C.L. & Paolin, S. (2005). *A municipal perspective on opportunities for physical activity: Trends from 2000 – 2004*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute.

How to use this bulletin: This bulletin is for professionals and community members who want to build a case for active transportation in their community. Share the information in this bulletin with community decision makers such as municipal council members and municipal staff responsible for land-use planning, transportation, public utilities, social services, parks, recreation and building codes to increase their knowledge on their role in developing and promoting active transportation opportunities in their community.

Other Making the Case for Active Transportation Bulletins at www.cflri.ca:

- Health Benefits
- Environmental Benefits
- Built Infrastructure
- Social Capital
- Economic Benefits
- Barriers
- Safety

