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Streets**

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active transportation 



May 27, 2014

HL31.2 Advancing Active Transportation in Toronto: Findings from Four Demonstration Projects

Dear Chair Joe Mihevc and Members of the Board of Health Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT), a project of Clean Air Partnership. TCAT conducts research and education that supports a vision for cities that are safe, convenient, and enjoyable communities to walk and bike.

TCAT's role in the Active Transportation Demonstration Projects

TCAT was the lead on the community engagement of two of the four sites (Black Creek and the Annex) identified under the Active Transportation Demonstration Projects. This was a year-long project funded by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer through its "Healthy Canada by Design" Coalition Linking Action and Science for Prevention (CLASP) program. CLASP is a national initiative with a diversity of partners working on breaking down barriers to help facilitate active transportation uptake in cities across the country. Through CLASP, TCAT worked closely with Toronto Public Health throughout 2013 to create a three-stage community engagement method in Black Creek and the Annex. TCAT's CLASP Facilitator Ryan Whitney conducted key informant interviews and organized capacity building workshops and community consultation events.

Site Selection Process

At the beginning of the project, TCAT considered several candidate sites using an eligibility and site selection tool developed by TPH. One of the important criteria was the potential for these projects to result in a real on-the-ground change at the end of the project. The two neighbourhoods selected for the project, the Annex and Black, Creek, both received very high scores on the selection tool but are very different from one another.

About Black Creek

The first site we chose was the Black Creek neighbourhood, a culturally diverse suburban neighbourhood characterized by a mix of low-density and high-rise housing, low walkability, and high rates of obesity and diabetes. Toronto's 2014 Neighbourhood Equity Score determined that Black Creek faces the most serious inequities requiring immediate action of 140 ranked neighbourhoods in Toronto.

Launched in 2013, Everdale's Black Creek Community Farm is an innovative community-led project initiated to tackle the lack of access to healthy food in this area. It is now Toronto's largest urban farm and an incredible city resource providing fresh organic food in an area of the city that has very few options for fresh and healthy food. The farm expects to draw a large number of people from both the local neighbourhood and across the City. At present, the farm is cut off from the neighbourhood, and a TTC stop, by Jane Street, a busy four-lane major arterial road, which provides no safe and convenient place for pedestrians to cross. The closest traffic signal to the planned farm entrance is 250 metres away, about a six-minute walk (three minutes there and back).

TCAT worked closely with Everdale, throughout 2013, to engage local residents in discussions on different options for improving the safety of pedestrians and cyclists in Black Creek. The intervention identified as the highest priority was the installation of a new traffic control signal at the farm.

Exploring Options for Jane Street in Black Creek



What it looks like now (Photo Credit: Google Maps)



What it could look like (Credit: Jeremy Johnston, TCAT)

About the Annex

The Annex is a diverse mixed-income downtown neighbourhood close to the University of Toronto. The major shopping strip in the Annex, Bloor Street, has been a focal point for change for many years. Bloor Street has a relatively high number of cyclists, a fairly high incidence of car-bike collisions, and is served by a subway underneath the street. The installation of a bike lane on Bloor Street was identified as the highest priority intervention by residents for this area through TCAT's community engagement process.

Exploring Options for Bloor Street in the Annex



What it looks like now (Photo Credit: Nancy Smith Lea)



What it could look like (Credit: Jeremy Johnston, TCAT)

Recommendations

As a result of TCAT's role over the past year on these demonstration projects, we have been eagerly anticipating, as have our community partners, the Medical Officer of Health's recommendations to identify a path forward to provide local improvements for active transportation in the four study areas. Unfortunately the recommendations are not what we had hoped. The demonstration projects provide an excellent opportunity to move from high-level vision (as in the terrific *Active City: Designing for Health* report, agenda item HL31.1) into on-the-ground change.

I encourage the Board to consider additional recommendations to 1) advance the site-specific preferred interventions identified by the communities who took the time to participate in this project over the course of 2013 and to communicate their concerns, and 2) establish a permanent program to strengthen civic engagement around active transportation issues, to formalize the staff roles in this program, and to provide funding to implement locally-driven active transportation initiatives emerging from this program, using best practice from other jurisdictions such as New York City's Plaza Program.

The Toronto Board of Health is playing a critical role in articulating the links between health, active transportation, and the built environment. This health evidence and policy analysis is extremely important and lays the foundation for what we hope is the next step. The Board can continue to play a strong leadership role by ensuring that changes to the built environment actually get implemented so that Torontonians can be healthy and active in their daily lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Smith Lea". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nancy Smith Lea, Director
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