



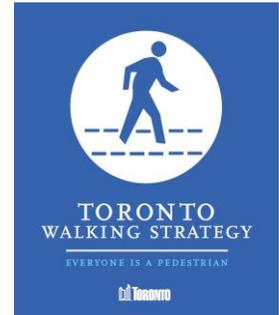
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## FCM Sustainable Community Awards 2011 Winner – Transportation

City of Toronto, Ontario  
Population: 2,600,000



The strategy will help Torontonians undergo a culture shift  
Credit: City of Toronto

### *City of Toronto Walking Strategy*

#### Summary

The City of Toronto has adopted a strategy to transform its streets, public spaces and neighborhoods into places where people choose to walk, and to integrate these spaces with public transit, cycling and other sustainable modes of travel.

Giving new meaning to the phrase 'walk the walk', the city has created a new section within its transportation division to implement the strategy and provided it with staff and an operating budget to achieve its mandate. The city is working with partners such as universities, local business improvement associations and non-profit organizations to implement the strategy.

Turning Toronto into a great walking city is expected to make the city safer and more liveable, and to cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, improve transportation efficiency, and reduce infrastructure and road maintenance costs.

#### Background

Toronto is Canada's largest city and it's growing at a rapid pace. The city's Official Plan was developed to accommodate 3 million residents with 1.83 million jobs by 2031 (20 per cent more people and 40 per cent more employment than in 2006). In 2007, the city passed a Climate Change, Clean Air and Sustainable Energy Action Plan, which aims to lower GHG emissions to 80 per cent below 1990 levels by 2050.

The city's Walking Strategy is designed to help it meet these ambitious goals by helping Torontonians undergo a culture shift — to change their transportation preferences from motor vehicles to walking, cycling and public transit. The strategy also supports the city's Sustainable Transportation Initiatives plan and its Call to Action on Physical Activity.

The Toronto Walking Strategy will also help the city achieve its Official Plan's objectives for walking and the public realm, and creating an attractive, safe, and sustainable city where people of all ages and abilities can enjoy a good quality of life.

#### Project Development

Toronto has had strong walking advocate groups for many years. Partly on the advice of these groups, the city adopted a Pedestrian Charter in 2002. The charter details the city's commitment to ensuring that walking is "a safe, comfortable and convenient mode of urban travel."

"When council launched the new walking strategy in 2009, it was because they felt they needed to move forward and put flesh on the bones of the charter," explains Elyse Parker, director of the Public Realm section in the city's Transportation Services.

During 2007 and 2008 the city conducted a series of consultations with organizations and members of the public, and with internal divisions and agencies including City Planning, Public Health, Parks, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), Toronto Environment Office, Economic Development, and Culture. It also surveyed 1,000 Toronto residents to gather information about their attitudes and concerns.

“It was a very good policy development process,” Parker says, “The public consultation was quite comprehensive and the result isn’t just flavour of the month, it’s very thoughtful.”

Based on the public consultations and survey, the city prepared the Walking Strategy, which details 52 steps to creating a pedestrian-friendly city. In 2009 it established the Public Realm unit of Transportation Services to take responsibility for the planning, design, implementation and management of streetscapes to achieve a beautiful, functional and safe pedestrian realm.

## **Project Implementation**

Toronto’s Walking Strategy brings together city programs and initiatives that are managed by various departments and unifies them into a cohesive whole. The strategy provides cross-divisional oversight of every area of activity — from infrastructure to public engagement — that can help make the city more pedestrian friendly. The goal is to transform Toronto’s streets, public spaces and neighborhoods into places where people choose to walk, and to integrate these spaces with public transit, cycling and other sustainable modes of travel.

To help make Toronto a great place to walk, the city is developing and testing new practices and technologies. It has pilot-tested ‘scramble’ intersections, ‘Zebra Crossing’ pavement markings, and longer pedestrian walk times at intersections with traffic lights. It is also researching a system of rising bollards that could be used to create short-term pedestrian-only areas.

Partners such as local business improvement associations, non-profit organizations and the city’s colleges and universities are helping to implement the strategy. The University of Toronto and Ryerson University, for example, maintain pedestrian zones and manage city-funded programs.

Toronto has advertised and promoted the Walking Strategy with posters for pedestrian events, and new signs and signals for scramble intersections and pedestrian zones. It has also hosted design and complete streets forums, sponsored a graphic design competition, and received extensive local media coverage. For complete information about the Walking Strategy, people can refer to a dedicated section on the city’s website, or acquire a 48-page booklet that explains it in detail. The booklet is attractive, easy to read and available online or in print.

“We’ve received many compliments on our user-friendly communications,” says Janet Low, project officer. “I think the strategy document is particularly successful. It’s exciting to see how it galvanizes people — from ordinary citizens to urban designers and engineers.”

Communities from across Canada and around the world have requested copies of the Walking Strategy booklet and the city has delivered presentations about the strategy to the Kingston Coalition for Active Transportation, to City of Vancouver staff, and at conferences and meetings in Quebec, New York City and The Hague.

Communities can replicate Toronto’s success by combining walking-related policies, activities and initiatives from different divisions into a single strategy, and making an inter-divisional team responsible for implementing and integrating it into service delivery across the community.

Improving conditions for walking will promote a healthier population, reduce pollution and congestion, improve access to workplaces, shops and services, and help revitalize neighbourhoods and local business districts. The strategy will strengthen citizens’ sense of community by putting more ‘eyes on the street’ and by creating more shared public spaces and opportunities for social interaction and recreation.

## Results

Since the strategy was launched in 2009, Toronto has:

- pilot-tested pedestrian-only streets, intersections featuring ‘No Right Turns on Red’, and intersections with leading pedestrian interval signals
- added pedestrian priority intersections (‘scrambles’)
- created a searchable ‘walks’ database
- provided support for Pedestrian Sundays in Kensington Market
- introduced a car-free weekend on St. Clair Avenue West
- launched a pedometer-lending program
- coordinated street furniture to remove impediments on sidewalks

## Lessons Learned

- **USE PILOT STUDIES TO BUILD CREDIBILITY AND CREATE BUY-IN.** “We’ve learned the value of taking baby steps. You earn buy-in gradually. If you ‘soften up’ technical staff and the public — especially with pilot tests, which build credibility — it’s easier to go back with more ambitious plans,” says Elyse Parker, director of the Public Realm section, Toronto Transportation Services.
- **MAKE SURE YOU HAVE SUFFICIENT RESOURCES.** “We think one of the keys to our success is that we’re located in Transportation Services — an operating division with an operating budget. The strategy is not just out there as a policy document in a policy unit,” says Parker.
- **FOCUS ON THE BIG PICTURE.** “The Walking Strategy focuses on basic services and activities. It’s a long-term strategy that will endure even if council changes direction,” Parker adds.
- **CONSIDER ADOPTING A COMPLETE STREETS POLICY.** “The Walking Strategy would have had greater backing with a complete streets policy behind it. We’re pursuing such a policy now, but we recommend that other municipalities try to put that in place first,” Parker concludes.  
*[‘Complete streets’ provide safe access for all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, public transit users and motorists and are comfortable for people with disabilities, children, families, and the elderly.]*

## Related and Future Initiatives

The Toronto Walking Strategy outlines 10 years of activities and initiatives. The city is currently developing or examining proposals for:

- a community walkability audit tool for community groups and individuals
- online resources about how to improve walkability
- a citizens’ guide for organizing pedestrian events
- a presentation on how Transportation Services works to improve walkability
- incentives to encourage people to define new walks for the online walks database

## Partners and Collaboration

The Walking Strategy is the product of discussions with the public and many organizations, including:

The Toronto Pedestrian Committee  
Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation  
Clean Air Partnership  
Jane's Walks  
United Way  
Spacing Magazine  
Toronto Environmental Alliance  
Yonge Street BIA

Toronto Society of Architects  
Ryerson University  
The University of Toronto  
Various public health, environmental, and business improvement associations

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