Active Transportation

BACKGROUND:
Active Transportation (PHAC, 2000) refers to all human-powered travel, including walking, running, cycling, in-line skating, snowshoeing, and even canoeing. Walking and cycling are among, if not the most popular.

Given its many benefits, interest in the development or redevelopment of streetscapes and neighbourhoods that encourage active transportation has been steadily growing in recent years. Those benefits, many of which are significant in light of current issues and trends, include improved public health, decreased air pollution and green house gas emissions, lower energy consumption, local economic development, and, where active transportation networks are well planned, positive impacts on overall community and individual well-being. There are risks associated with active transportation; without sunscreen there is greater risk of skin damage, being active outside exposes one to pollution — especially near heavily used roadways or on smog days, and there is risk of injury or accident. However, according to Conor, C.O. et al. (2010) and others, the benefits associated with Active Transportation in terms of health, environmental quality, and infrastructure costs, are substantial (Transport Canada, 2012).

The benefits of active transportation given our obesity epidemic have the attention of both planners and health professionals. Increasing instances of obesity are linked to sedentary lifestyles and decreasing levels of physical activity (StatsCan, 2011; PHAC, 2011; Government of Canada, 2011). Obesity and physical inactivity are considered risk factors for heart disease, stroke, and other chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and various cancers. Each additional kilometre walked per day reduces the likelihood of becoming obese by nearly 5%, while each hour per day spent in a car increases the likelihood of becoming obese by 6% (Ontario College of Family Physicians, 2005).

Numerous environmental, social, physical and cultural factors influence the adoption of active transportation. Sprawling communities with street patterns that are not designed with active transportation in mind discourage it (Sherwood, D. & Bradshaw, C., 2008). Development characterized by low-density communities where services, venues, places of work, shops, and other amenities are well separated from one another, and far from places of residence, results in a dependency on cars (Ontario College of Family Physicians, 2005). In many municipalities, zoning, development, and transportation regulations and guidelines favor less walkable land use patterns (Frank, Sallis, Conway, Chapman, Saelens, & Bachman, 2006). People are more likely to use active transportation when it serves their purpose, when trips will be pleasurable and without risk, and when active transportation - as a mode of transportation - is considered socially acceptable (Transport Canada, 2010). Given the factors that influence our decision to use active transportation, municipalities, community

The Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition is an incorporated registered charity, established in 1992, whose mission is "to create innovative solutions to meet community challenges and build strong, equitable and sustainable communities through education, engagement and collaboration".

Contributors
Eric Tucs, Shazya Karmali
organizations, schools, and our workplaces have a significant role to play (Transport Canada, 2010). Active transportation is also important to the well being of people living in rural communities, although it is more often than not considered within an urban context. Promoting active transportation in rural settings is challenging given distances between important destinations, a "car culture", and reliance on cars (CIA).

Given a better understanding of the factors that influence the adoption of Active Transportation among planners, and a greater appreciation of the risks associated with a diversity of people using diverse transportation modes, interest in integrated and balanced transportation networks has grown. Integrated and balanced transportation options, properly designed, increase the utility of each transportation option, thereby increasing the affordability and accessibility of transportation (Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, & Beam, 2005).

**CURRENT STATUS:**
Interest in active transportation, and active transportation planning, among citizens, health professionals, and planners started building in the late 1980s. Interest continues to grow. At present, the federal government, along with many of Ontario's municipal governments, health authorities, planners, public institutions, and community organizations are facilitating the adoption of active transportation in Ontario. While not an exhaustive list, organizations involved in active transportation include:

- The Clean Air Partnership (www.cleanairpartnership.org/active_transportation)
- Toronto Centre for Active Transportation (tcat.ca/)
- Active and Safe Routes to School (www.saferoutestoschool.ca/)
- The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (www.ontarioplanners.on.ca/content/Publications/innovativepolicypapers.aspx#healthycommunities)
- Share the Road (www.sharetheroad.ca/), and
- I can Walk (www.icanwalk.ca/en/home)

Given its positive impact on health, environmental quality, and community well being, active transportation is fundamental to healthier communities.

**RISKS:**
The most significant risks associated with the slow or poor uptake of active transportation reflect the probable consequences of sedentary lifestyles, little physical exercise, high pollution levels, lost time and stress due to traffic congestion, and little interaction with one's surroundings. There are risks associated with active transportation, which include exposure to pollution and injury. However, a comparison of the risks associated with the use of active transportation versus its benefits suggests that the benefits far outweigh the risks. Moreover, many of the risks associated with active transportation are related to infrastructure design, unsafe practices and habits, and the poor integration of various modes of transportation (Frank, Conway, Saelens, & Bachman, 2006; Go for Green, 2000; Conor et al., June 2010).

**ACTIONS SUPPORTED BY THE OHCC:**
- Research on active transportation, and the dissemination of results and findings on best practices and the impacts of active transportation on the social determinants of health.

Please comment online if you would like to share news of a healthy policy or healthy communities project related to Active Transportation.
- Community based initiatives respectful of the healthy communities approaches that are focused on adoption of active transportation, and the development of integrated and balanced transportation networks that facilitate inclusion.
- Public educational programs, alongside educational programs in institutions and the workplace, which encourage active transportation, and the safe and respectful use of active transportation networks (Sallis, Cervero, Ascher, Henderson, Kraft, & Kerr, 2006).
- Incentive programs that reward and/or facilitate active transportation among employees, clients, and customers.
- Development of healthy policies in support of active transportation.
- The design and planning of neighbourhoods, towns, and cities in ways that encourage active transportation.
- The installation of public facilities, such as storage for bicycles, that is suited to active transportation users.
- Development of safe, enjoyable, and appealing active transportation routes and networks.
- Integrated and balanced transportation networks that are designed for efficient transportation as well as recreation use, that are also designed to facilitate inclusion.
- The development of workplace policies, incentives, and facilities that enable the use of active transportation among employees.
- Educational programs on the benefits of active transportation, and on the expectations and responsibilities associated with sharing routes, paths, and the road with others.
- The identification and/or development of safe routes to school that engage parents, children, youth, motorists and the community, inclusive of skill and safety courses.

**OHCC’S ROLE:**
- Advocate for active transportation and the development of integrated transportation networks that facilitate social and economic inclusion, and that improve health, environmental, and economic outcomes.
- Disseminate new information and knowledge on the benefits and risks of active transportation in relation to environmental, social, health, and economic trends.
- Research and assess the impacts of active transportation initiatives on individuals' quality of life, and on the social determinants of health.
- Support, if not lead active transportation initiatives that incorporate healthy communities principles and values.

**RESOURCES:**
- Transport Canada (2010) Active Transportation in Canada; a resource and planning guide (available from www.tc.gc.ca/urban)
- Canadian Obesity Network (www.obesitynetwork.ca)
- Childhood Obesity Foundation (www.childhoodobesityfoundation.ca)
- Toronto Centre for Active Transportation (www.torontocat.ca)
- Transport Canada (www.tc.gc.ca/eng/programs/environment-utsp-casestudyactivetransportation-1069.htm)
- Physical Activity Strategy (http://www.physicalactivitystrategy.ca/)

**REFERENCES:**
to health: Associations between neighborhood walkability and active transportation, body mass index, and air quality. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 72, 75-87.


