

Active transportation beyond the Greenbelt

By Danielle Culp, Neil Loewen & Raktim Mitra

In response to the growing demand for safer, healthier and more sustainable environments, urban planners are advocating for active modes of transportation. While much work has been done to highlight active transportation projects in the urban context, smaller municipalities are often overlooked. This article examines the key challenges and opportunities for rural and smaller communities “beyond the Greenbelt” in relation to active transportation planning.



Danielle Culp



Neil Loewen



Raktim Mitra

The *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* identifies areas where intended growth should occur, and 15 of the 21 jurisdictions identified are small rural municipalities located in the outer ring of the Greenbelt. These municipalities have lower proportions of youth, and higher proportions of people aged 50 and older, as well as lower median incomes, when compared to large cities within the region.¹ Many of these municipalities have developed pedestrian and cycling plans and incorporated active transportation into existing policies; however, day-to-day travel by residents is still largely car dependent.

The research team explored the challenges to active transportation planning by surveying and interviewing municipal staff in the GGH. The results are documented in the recent publication, “Active Transportation Planning Beyond the Greenbelt,”² which highlights 13 rural, suburban and urban projects that demonstrate ways in which challenges to active transportation planning can be met in differing contexts. Some of the findings are highlighted below.

Resources—Funding to hire staff can critically improve a municipality’s capacity to implement active transportation planning and related programming.³ Further, by increasing and expanding training and education among different departments, it can strengthen the planning process and improve the capacity of municipalities to undertake active transportation projects using existing resources.³

Public Support—Securing public support is a key challenge faced by many smaller municipalities. This is partly due to the fact that the majority of the road network is designed with cars in mind, which has fostered attitudes that favour driving over other, more sustainable transportation options.

Liability—The risk of injury to road users poses real concerns for municipalities and can sometimes be a deterrent from building active transportation infrastructure.

Design—Designing spaces that improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists often requires compromise between transportation modes in terms of design. For example, the removal of parking to accommodate bike lanes is often proposed, but opposed by local residents. However in order to balance the needs of various road users and communities, trade-offs may need to be made such as narrowing lanes instead of removing them.

Environment—Both the natural and built environments create unique challenges for active transportation in smaller and rural communities where destinations tend to be farther apart than more urban settings and winter conditions can exacerbate active transportation.

Authority—Upper and lower-tier governments often share jurisdiction over roadways and other services, which can be challenging. For example, many counties in Ontario are not responsible for providing recreational facilities, making it difficult to justify construction of multi-use trails or cycle paths.

Active Transportation Planning Beyond the Greenbelt,³ was a collaboration between the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation, Ryerson University and the University of Toronto.

Danielle Culp is a student member of OPPI and a masters student at Ryerson’s School of Urban and Regional Planning. Neil Loewen is a planner at Urban Strategies Inc. Dr. Raktim Mitra is a candidate member of OPPI and an assistant professor of Urban and Regional Planning at Ryerson University.

Endnotes

- 1 Hemson Consulting Ltd. (2012). Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Forecasts to 2041: Technical Report. Retrieved from: <http://www.hemson.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/HEMSON-Greater-Golden-Horseshoe-Growth-Forecasts-to-2041-Technical-Report-Nov2012.pdf>
- 2 Smith Lea, N., Mitra, R., Hess, P., Loewen, N., & Culp, D. (2017). Active Transportation Planning Beyond the Greenbelt: The Outer Ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region. Toronto: Clean Air Partnership.

THE BUTLER GROUP CONSULTANTS INC. Land Planning Services

David A. Butler, MCIP, RPP
President

397 Brunswick Avenue, Unit 6
Toronto, Ontario M5R 2Z2
416.926.8796
E-mail dab@butlerconsultants.com

