What are our urban walkability and bikeability levels?

This article provides a basic assessment of the overall urban environments, focussed on walkability and bikeability levels. Walkability generally refers to various features of a community or neighbourhood that create a place that is easily able to be travelled without the use of an automobile.

Well-marked crosswalks, mid-block crosswalks (these are pedestrian crossings located along a roadway between two streets), and smaller corner radii can all lead to safer and more walkable streets. Mid-block crosswalks help to improve walkability by providing greater access to areas for pedestrians, while limiting the number of pedestrians crossing without a crosswalk.

Ideal automobile speed limits in neighbourhoods that wish to promote walkability are around 32 to 40 kmph, with busier and more heavily trafficked street speed limits set at 56 kmph (American Planning Association, 2006, Planning and Urban Design Standards).

The simple design of wider sidewalks can provide for larger volumes of pedestrian traffic, while creating a nice open place to walk.

The US Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Walkability Audit Tool gives the following criteria and ranges:

(a) Pedestrian Facilities: Range from no permanent facilities where pedestrians walk in roadway or on dirt path, through continuous sidewalk on both sides of road, or completely away from roads to sidewalk on one side of road; minor discontinuities that present no real obstacle to passage.

(b) Pedestrian Conflicts: Range from high potential for conflict with motor vehicle traffic due to driveway and loading dock crossings, speed and volume of traffic, large intersections, low pedestrian visibility, to low conflict potential.

(c) Crosswalks: Range from crosswalks not present despite major intersections, to No intersections, or crosswalks clearly identified

(d) Maintenance: Range from major or frequent problems, including cracking, buckling, overgrown vegetation, standing water, etc. on or near walking path, to No problems

(e) Path Size: Range from no permanent facilities, including measure of useful path width, accounting for barriers to passage along pathway, through less than 900 millimetres wide significant barriers, to more than 1.5 metre wide, barrier free path.

(f) Buffer: Range from no buffer from roadway, including space separating path from adjacent roadway, through more than 1.2 metres from roadway, to not adjacent to roadway.

(g) Universal Accessibility: Range from Completely impassable for wheelchairs, or no permanent facilities, including ease of access for the mobility impaired (Looking for ramps and handrails accompanying steps, curb cuts, etc.), through difficult or dangerous for wheelchairs (e.g. no curb cuts), through wheelchair accessible route available but inconvenient, to designed to facilitate wheelchair access.

(h) Aesthetics: Range from uninviting, including proximity of construction zones, fences, buildings, noise pollution, quality of landscaping, and pedestrian-oriented features, such as benches and water fountains, to pleasant

(i) Shade: Range from no shade, accounting for different times of day, to full shade.

The US Federal Highway Administration, Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Team, Office of Safety, Washington, DC, Bikeability Audit Tool gives the following criteria and ranges:

(a) Did you have a place to bicycle safely? On the road, sharing the road with motor vehicles? No space for bicyclists to ride (e.g. no bike lane or shoulder; narrow lanes); Heavy and/or fast-moving traffic.

(b) Did you have a place to bicycle safely? On an off-road path or trail, where motor vehicles were not allowed? Path ended abruptly; Path intersected with roads that were difficult to cross

(c) How was the surface that you rode on?

(d) How were the intersections you rode through? Signal didn't give me enough time to cross the road; Unsure where or how to ride through

(e) Did drivers behave well? Drove too fast; Passed me too close; Did not signal; Ran red lights or stop signs.

(f) Was it easy for you to use your bike? No maps, signs, or road markings to help me find my way; No safe or secure place to leave my bicycle at my destination.

Walking and cycling provide affordable, basic transport. Improving walking and cycling conditions provides enjoyment and health benefits to users, and it can support related industries, including retail, recreation and tourism.

The role that nonmotorized travel plays in supporting public transport travel is often overlooked.

Wishing you a New Year 2017 of peace, good health, opportunities and readiness.

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