



Complete Streets Policy Analysis

The Toronto Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT) uses a revised version of the US National Complete Streets Coalition’s Policy Measurement Tool to assess the prevalence and strength of Complete Streets language in Canada’s Official Plans and related document. In this policy analysis, we look at the City of Ottawa Official Plan (OP), recent amendments made to the OP, and the updated Transportation Master Plan (TMP). TCAT undertook this analysis at the request of Ottawa based organizations including Ecology Ottawa.

The City of Ottawa has undertaken a city-wide review of land use, transportation and infrastructure policies that make up its OP, TMP, Cycling Plan, and Pedestrian Plan. It has recommended the adoption of a Complete Streets policy as part of the Ottawa TMP. This analysis assesses the strength of the Complete Streets components of Ottawa’s OP and TMP based on the 10 elements outlined by TCAT on the Complete Streets for Canada [website](#). Overall Ottawa’s TMP represents a good first step towards a comprehensive Complete Streets policy, but falls short on key components that would make it model policy. In this sense, it is two steps forward and one back.

The biggest strength of the City of Ottawa TMP is its incorporation of community context. It recognizes that there is no “cookie cutter” approach to Complete Streets and it frequently acknowledges that local context, whether urban, suburban, or rural, will have an impact on how a given street is designed and experienced. The TMP is also robust in its emphasis on connectivity. It clearly aims for the development of an integrated, comprehensive network of pedestrian, cycling, and transit infrastructure, taking the time to underscore the importance of connectivity in each mode’s chapter, including a direct reference to the importance of connecting Complete Streets to each other (see quote below).

“A complete street in isolation is much less effective than a connected network of complete streets that provide freedom and movement to all users by the travel mode of their choice.”

- City of Ottawa Transportation Master Plan

The City of Ottawa TMP demonstrates a commitment to all users and abilities, and uses strong language towards implementing a Complete Streets policy. The TMP contains many fundamental components integral to a successful Complete Streets approach, however, on a few elements lacks a final consideration that would make it an exemplary policy. For example, the TMP demonstrates a robust commitment to different user groups by dedicating separate chapters to pedestrians, cyclists and then transit users of all ages and abilities. It could have been even stronger by including direct references to the full range of mobility and ages of pedestrians and cyclists in each chapter. Further, and with reference to implementation, the policy stipulates that it will focus on both new construction and reconstruction, including construction opportunities such as rapid transit development. It misses a great chance to specify the Complete Streets approach be included in repair and maintenance road projects.



Complete Streets Policy Analysis

The Complete Streets policy outlined establishes in the introduction to the design section that streets are important public spaces. This is a valuable emphasis, but relying on an introduction to redefine an important concept does not maximize its chance for implementation, and regularly referring to and discussing streets as destinations would have strengthened the approach. A more robust framing would have seen the new perspective permeate the design subsections.

“This section is a first step towards the creation of a robust framework that will make Complete Streets an integral part of the City’s day-to-day transportation decisions and operations.

- City of Ottawa Transportation Master Plan

The policy lacks some important details regarding working with different stakeholders. A strong Complete Streets policy requires that all levels of government work towards the same goals when adopting and implementing a Complete Streets approach. The City of Ottawa TMP commits to working with a range of community stakeholders but does not specifically discuss how the City will engage private developers or other governments at the provincial, regional, or municipal levels.

The City of Ottawa has identified updating its guideline documents as a key part of the Complete Streets implementation process, but it could benefit from a more detailed implementation strategy. It provides context for the existing guidelines, and provides a good overview of how they will be updated to further emphasize the role of Complete Streets. This is also where the TMP addresses exceptions to Complete Streets implementation. It states that updated road design guidelines will identify situations where an exception to the use of Complete Street design elements might be warranted, and more importantly, will provide a process to follow to make decisions in those cases. Clearly defining exceptions about when a Complete Streets policy will not be followed helps ensure strong implementation. It is a positive first step that exceptions are mentioned in the TMP, but the ultimate strength of this policy element will depend on the details of the processes developed through the guideline update process.

A robust Complete Streets approach establishes performance standards with measurable outcomes. The City of Ottawa TMP recognizes that the success of the plan depends on monitoring relevant conditions, actions and impacts. It outlines a plan to develop a framework of performance indicators that reflect the goals and objective of the TMP and its component strategies. The ultimate success of implementation of this Complete Streets policy will depend on the development of concrete and measurable performance measures.

Overall, the City of Ottawa’s amended OP and updated TMP strongly encourage connectivity and context sensitivity, and regularly reference design guidelines. It includes a Complete Streets policy that includes many essential elements, but lacks some key components. It also tends to rely on updating support guidelines to address some of the key components of a strong Complete Streets policy.