

## Complete Streets in Southern Ontario: Project Overview

In summer 2012, the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT), a project of Clean Air Partnership, conducted survey-based research in Grey and Bruce Counties, Niagara Region and the City of Mississauga. TCAT's objective was to investigate the status of Complete Streets in these jurisdictions and to gain a better understanding of the barriers to implementing Complete Streets policy and projects. TCAT collected online surveys from a diverse set of respondents from each jurisdiction including planners, engineers and public health staff, active transportation and accessibility advocates and elected officials. Survey responses from Niagara Region were analysed and incorporated into a case study available below. Survey respondents' names are kept confidential.

Niagara Region	
Population	431,346
Land Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	1,854.25
Population density (people/km <sup>2</sup> )	232.6
Jurisdiction type	Regional Munic.

**“Greater collaboration among planners, engineers and public health professionals is essential.”** - Travis Macbeth and Denise Landry in Ontario Planning Journal, September/October 2012

### Geography and Government

The Regional Municipality of Niagara (Niagara Region) is located in Southern Ontario, Canada, between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Niagara Region is an upper-tier municipality with 12 area (lower-tier) municipalities. The Region is governed by the Niagara Regional Council including a chairperson and 30 councillors. All plans and policies in Niagara Region must conform to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2006) and Ontario's Provincial Policy Statement (2005).

Niagara Region is largely rural with several small and medium sized urban areas. The City of St. Catharines (population 131,400) is the most populous area municipality in Niagara Region.

### Transportation Policy Context

Transportation planning in Niagara Region is guided by a number of plans and policies: the Niagara Regional Policy Plan (Section 9), Regional Policy Plan (Oct. 2011), Regional Niagara Transportation Strategy, Regional Niagara Bikeways Master Plan (2003), Model Municipal Bicycling Policies, Niagara Region Model Urban Design Guidelines and the Transportation Impact Study Guidelines. As well, many lower-tier municipal official plans include active transportation policies (e.g. City of Welland Official Plan Section 4 and Section 6). Although many of these policies and plans prioritize multi-modal planning and active transportation, none include the term 'Complete Streets'.

Change is on the way.

Niagara has reached many transportation planning milestones in recent years. For example, the Regional Niagara Bicycle Committee was established in August 2011 to provide input to Niagara Regional Council on cycling issues, projects, policies and programs (Niagara Region, 2012). Then, in November 2011, [Healthy Living Niagara](#) (HLN) hosted the Active Transportation in Niagara Summit which explored strategies for making walking and cycling safer and more accessible in the region. The HLN Summit was the catalyst for the Niagara Region's Integrated Community Planning unit to produce a discussion paper *titled Complete Streets for Niagara*, released in August 2012. The paper explores how Complete Streets could be implemented in the Region's twelve area municipalities and what potential benefits there are associated with their development (Craig Rohe, Personal Communication, April 12, 2012 as cited in TCAT's Complete Streets Gap Analysis report.). The Niagara Region's discussion paper states that, "developing and adopting Complete Streets model policies will present the opportunity for more of these proactive measures to be conducted in a formal manner which will ultimately help mitigate the conflicts between motorized and non-motorized modes of transportation on regional and local roads" (Niagara Region, 2012). A

three-phase process for implementing Complete Streets in Niagara is proposed: 1) Research and Review, 2) Consultation and Policy Development, and 3) Implementation Strategy. This approach involves developing model policies and guidelines, recommendations for implementation, and delivering a context-specific pilot project. The discussion paper is the first regional-level Complete Streets study in Canada.

In September 2012, the Regional Niagara Council voted to extend the Regional transit service pilot program. Transportation planning staff will use the pilot to evaluate ridership and assess the feasibility of inter-jurisdictional service delivery.

## **Barriers to Complete Streets**

Niagara Region has made progress towards a more complete transportation network. Several area municipalities have begun tracking the progress and implementation of active transportation infrastructure (e.g., measuring the kilometres of cycle lanes installed). However, like many other jurisdictions in Southern Ontario, Niagara Region still faces several key barriers to Complete Streets policies and projects.

Five of nine survey respondents identified jurisdictional issues as the key barrier to Complete Streets in Niagara Region. Both regional and local governments play a role in right-of-way design, construction and operation in Niagara. The Region has jurisdiction over road surfaces and signalization while area municipalities are responsible for pedestrian rights-of-way, on-street parking and transit facilities. These elements need to be coordinated in order to successfully implement Complete Streets, yet regional and local transportation priorities do not always align. Survey respondents report, for example, that even though the Region is committed to on-street bike lanes, many area municipalities are reluctant to compromise on-street parking in order to do so. Even where local and regional priorities align, the complex mix of responsibility means that cost sharing structures are controversial (Niagara Region, 2012). The Region's Discussion Paper recognizes cost sharing as a key concern, stating that future implementation strategies for Complete Streets "must have regard for the monetary constraints of the Niagara Region and the [area] municipalities". While jurisdictional constraints are not unique to Niagara Region, the large number of lower-tier area municipalities (12) and settlement areas (29) pose added complexity. Each jurisdiction has its own unique built form, transportation demand characteristics and policies and bringing these into conformity with Regional transportation policy and plans is a significant challenge.

Niagara's Integrated Community Planning unit has been a strong voice for Complete Streets in Niagara. However, survey respondents report that support for Complete Streets amongst the public and elected officials remains tepid. Without strong support from the range of stakeholders, it has proven difficult to achieve concrete action. Opposition to active transportation projects tends to unite around a belief that multi-modal roadways cost more to design and implement than a conventional roadway. Certainly, new Complete Streets projects and retrofits require capital expenditure. However, the operational costs of Complete Streets have been found to be significantly less than for a conventional street (National Complete Streets Coalition, 2012). At the same time, few of Niagara's streets require "radical" or expensive modifications to become more complete - a point that many politicians or members of the public do not recognize (survey respondent, 2012).

## **Opportunities and What's Next?**

Phase 2 ("Consultation and Policy Development") of Niagara Complete Streets project is underway (Niagara Region, 2012). This phase includes consultation with key stakeholders (e.g. Regional Niagara Bicycle Committee), staff and partners from the Active Transportation in Niagara Summit (November, 2011). In fall 2012, phase 3 of the Niagara Complete Streets Project will begin. The Region's consultant will administer a public workshop and a walking audit of pilot sites and will deliver visualizations of the pilot sites including enhancements recommended by audit participants (Niagara Region, 2012). These visualizations will help negotiate the opposition to Complete Streets projects. Proponents of Complete Streets in Niagara (governmental and non-governmental) must also institute performance measures so that the positive outcomes of Complete Streets projects can be better demonstrated to local stakeholders.

Like Grey and Bruce Counties, land use is a major determinant of travel behaviour in Niagara Region. The distance between urban areas in the Region is great and inter-municipal commutes are common. Complete Streets projects must be coupled with sustainable land use and public health policies. To be successful then, the Complete Streets movement in Niagara will require continued partnership with transportation and land use planners, engineers and public health professionals (survey respondent, 2012; Macbeth and Landry, 2012).

#### **References:**

Macbeth, T. and Landry, D. (2012). Niagara Active Transportation Summit Shaping communities through collaboration, *Ontario Planning Journal*, (27/ 5) September/October 2012, pp. 7-8.

National Complete Streets Coalition. (2012). "Complete Streets Fact Sheets: The Cost of Complete Streets". Accessed August 9, 2012, <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/complete-streets-fundamentals/factsheets>

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