

Walkability in Toronto's Apartment Neighbourhoods

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON WALKABILITY WORKSHOP FOR STEELES-L'AMOREAUX WALKABILITY WORKSHOP

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INTRODUCTION

This document reports on a “Walkability Workshop” facilitated by Action for Neighbourhood Change, Steeles-L’Amoreaux and held at the Highland Heights Junior Public School in Toronto in October 2008. The workshop is part of a larger study called *Walkability in Toronto’s Apartment Neighbourhoods* which will incorporate information gathered from approximately 10 Toronto neighbourhoods. The goal of the study is to explore the ways residents living in high-rise areas get around their neighbourhoods and, especially, to highlight the importance of walking for residents in carrying out their daily lives. It is intended to identify what works for pedestrians, barriers to walking, and possible improvements to the local walking environment.

In **Part One**, this report first gives some background on the overall project. In **Part Two** we describe what we actually do as part of a walkability workshop, and in **Part Three** we summarize some of the information gathered at the Steeles-L’Amoreaux workshop. The report is intended to give preliminary feedback to participants and others interested in the walking environment of the area. It is largely a straight forward reporting of the information we gathered and does not offer analysis or offer any substantial interpretations of what we heard. Further analysis is coming as we gather more information and work with the data. As analysis proceeds, supplement reports will be produce that explore and interpret the rich information gathered in this and the other workshops in the study.

PART ONE: STUDY BACKGROUND

The study is being conducted by Professor Paul Hess of the Department of Geography at the University of Toronto in association with Jane Farrow, Executive Director of the Centre for City Ecology, Toronto. Our contact information can be found at the top of this document. We welcome any questions about this report or the overall study.

The authors recognize the Social Research Council of Canada for helping to fund the research. We also are very grateful to the local community organizations that have helped us organize our workshops. In Steeles-L’Amoreaux, Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) helped us to arrange space for the workshop, organized volunteers and provided enormous overall support. We are especially grateful to Pramila Javaheri of ANC and the local residents who participated in



the workshop and showed such commitment to and deep knowledge about their neighbourhood.

The overall goal of the research project is to help better understand the ways people get around Toronto's high-rise apartment neighbourhoods, especially by walking. Building on the arguments Jane Jacobs espoused more than 40 years ago, the importance of creating good places for people to walk is now increasingly being recognized by transportation experts and public officials. Planners and architects have pushed the idea of "New Urbanism," arguing that new neighbourhoods should be built more like the Annex or Cabbagetown neighbourhoods of downtown Toronto, with connected streets and houses that directly front sidewalks. Public health researchers and officials even suggest that the ways we are designing our cities has contributed to the recent rise in physical inactivity and obesity because people no longer walk as part of their regular, daily activities.

These discussions, however, are usually focused on downtown areas or new developments in the outer suburbs. This study is intended to put more focus on the many people living in Toronto inner suburbs. As people interested in making better walking environments, we believe that Toronto's high-rise neighbourhoods are enormously important.

These places were planned and developed in the 1960's and 1970's. At that time, it was then assumed that most of the people living in the new apartments would not have children, would move to houses as soon as they could, and would be able to drive to the places they needed to go. The single-family subdivisions in these areas were, at least, designed so that children could walk to school, but the apartments on the big arterial streets were not places designed for walking.



Today, however, a different population is living in them, often people with limited incomes, people with children and complicated travel needs, and people who do not own a car or who only have access to a car part of the time. In other words, neighbourhoods that were designed for cars now house people that must rely on walking and transit to carry out their lives. This study is intended to better understand how these residents get around their neighbourhoods, especially by walking. Our goal is to share this information with the people who live in them so they can better advocate for improvements.

This is a good time for residents to make clear what they want and need because of policies and program being developed by the City of Toronto. The City is working with local community organizations and developing policies and programs for 13 Priority Areas that include many of the high-rise apartment areas. It is developing a “Walking Strategy” to “make Toronto a great walking city” that should include these areas. It is currently developing a “Tower Renewal” program that also promises to bring improvements to apartment areas. Finally, the City has an ambitious transit plan, “Transit City,” that could bring light-rail and other transportation improvements to some of these neighbourhoods. All these initiatives offer some potential for changing apartment neighbourhoods into better places to live.

The authors do not represent the city and we do not know what will become of these various initiatives, but we strongly believe that better information about how residents use their neighbourhoods is crucially important to making positive change. For these efforts to be successful and make Toronto a better place for its residents, we believe that the residents themselves must have a strong voice and play a central role in decision-making. We are doing this work to provide both residents and the City with information to help foster this objective.

PART TWO: WHAT HAPPENS IN THE WORKSHOPS AND HOW ITS USED

The workshops take place with the assistance of local neighbourhood or community organizations. The organizations recruit local residents to participate, provide a location to meet, and provide other support such as volunteer assistance for setting up and cleaning up. We strive to include a wide range of types of residents in terms of age and background and we make sure that childcare and some translation support is available if needed. All information gathered in the workshop is treated as confidential and identifying information of any participant is not collected.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES TO GATHER INFORMATION

After an introduction to the project, three activities take place in the workshop to explore how residents travel:

(1) Survey

Each participant fills out a survey consisting of roughly 40 questions. The survey contains background information on the respondent such as age, household income, whether or not there are children in the household, how long the resident has lived in the area, how many cars and drivers are in their household if any, etc. This information is useful in understanding the transportation needs of residents and in exploring different travel patterns by different types of people. The survey also asks more directly about the activities people travel to on a regular basis and how they get to them. For example, people are asked where they do their food shopping, how

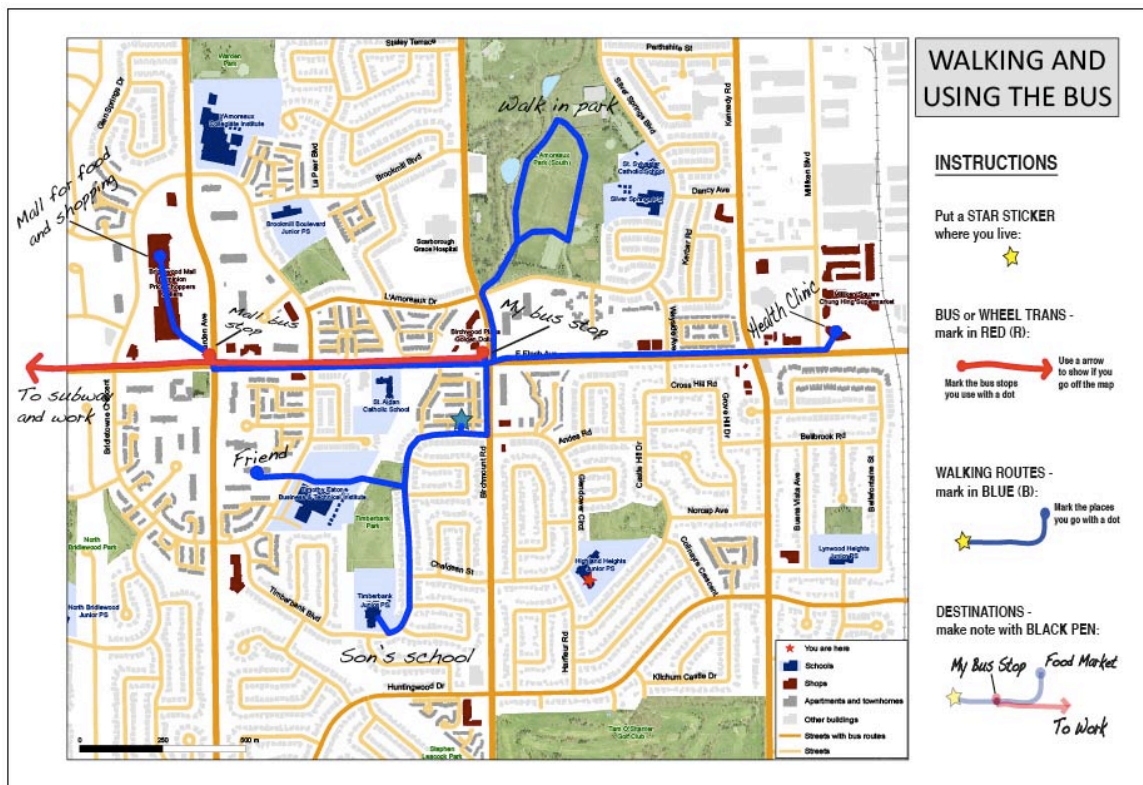
many times a week they shop for food, and if they usually go shop by walking, transit, driving, taxi, etc. Finally, they survey asks a series of questions about how people find the walking environment in area, whether they feel safe walking, whether traffic is a problem, etc.

A summary of much of this information is presented below. It will be further analyzed and presented with tables and graphs in subsequent reports.

(2) Individual maps

Participants are asked to create maps that show how and where they travel. Each participant is given a set of maps on which to draw with coloured pens. Using the pens to represent different modes (walking, bus, auto, bicycling), they are instructed to trace all the trips they regularly take during a typical week when the weather is warm. Participants are asked to show their actual routes and to label their destinations. When they travel outside of the area on the map, they are asked to note their eventual destination. This information is being entered into a Geographical Information System (GIS) that can be used to analyze the distances people travel by various modes for different activities, the types of streets they tend to use and the directness of their walking routes. This map information can also be connected to surveys for further statistical analysis.

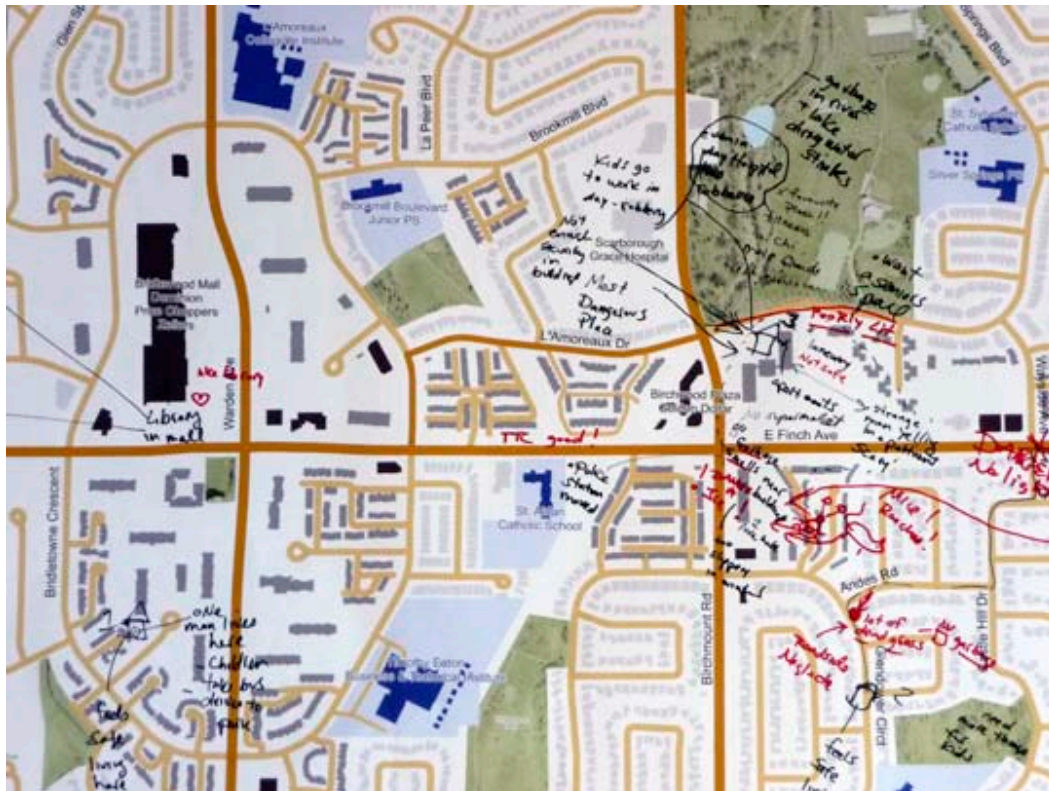
This analysis is very intensive. It will be included in the final report but is not ready for this preliminary document.



Hypothetical Example of Individual Map for Walking and Bus Trips

(3) Small group exercise

Participants are asked to discuss their neighbourhood and its walking environment and public spaces as part of a small group of 5 – 8 people. Each group is seated around a large display map of the area. A member of the research team acts a discussion facilitator as well as uses a pen to record participants comments directly on the map. For example, if a participant pointed out a specific place that that it was particularly dangerous to cross a street, wanted a crosswalk, liked a particular park, or avoided walking at night, this was recorded on the map. Another member of the research staff also acted as a note taker to record the discussion.



Example of portion of annotated map from group exercise.

A summary of much of this information is presented below in text form. The map notations made in the workshop are still being compiled into one map and are not presented here. The next supplement to this report will contain this analysis.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE USED?

The information gathered from the workshops in this project will be used to produce several reports and papers. The authors hope that the information will be useful for neighbourhood residents to advocate for improvements to their neighbourhood.

(1) Preliminary report

This current document is a preliminary report. It is intended to give feed back from the Steeles-L'Amoreaux workshop. Similar reports will be produced for each neighbourhood that participates. The reports describe the project, describe who participated in the workshop and give a first cut at what the researchers heard from participants. The report will be made available to the Steeles-L'Amoreaux Action for Neighbourhood Change and a copy for download can also be found at the author's websites. See the contact information at the beginning of this document for the addresses. We will give updates to this report as we continue to analyze the data. We also welcome additions or corrections by residents.

(2) Final report

A final report will be made that includes the information gathered from all of the neighbourhood's studies. This report will include a full analysis of all the data and make general conclusions about what we learned. We will discuss the walking and transportation issues in the neighbourhoods as a whole as well as compare them to each other. Like the preliminary report, we will make this report available to the local organizations that worked with us and post it on our websites. We will also provide copies to the relevant people and committees at the City of Toronto including the Mayor, City Councillors, Public Realm Office, Tower Renewal Office, and Pedestrian Committee.

(3) Academic papers and presentations

We also hope to add to the growing literature on walking and we will publish academic papers in planning journals and present at conferences based on the study. The goal is to help other planners and academics better understand pedestrian issues in these types of environments.

PART THREE: THE STEELES-L'AMOREAUX WALKABILITY WORKSHOP

The workshop was held on a sunny Saturday in October with a diverse group of enthusiastic participants. The following summarizes much of the information we gathered. Approximately 30 participants completed the maps and survey and their were five groups that completed the small group exercise. This included a large group of Mandarin speakers that a translator guided through the exercises.

First, we present information gathered from the survey to describe who participated and their general travel patterns. This information is given in percentages to help better convey the range of responses but it should be remembered that numbers are low. For example, 10 percent of respondents represent less than four people.

The following sections then presents the more qualitative information on what people said about their walking environment.

WHO PARTICIPATED?

Participants in the workshop were a diverse group of people, but should not be seen as representative of the neighbourhood as a whole. This section describes socio-demographic characteristics of the participants according to the survey.

Sex and age

About two-thirds (65%) were female and one-third (35%) male. The age range was broad but about half the participants (48%) were over 65. About another quarter of participants (26%) were in their late teens or early 20's. Very few people in their late twenties or thirties participated.

Housing and household types

The most common housing type in which participants live is apartments (44%) closely followed by townhouses or semi-detached houses (41%). The remainder (16%) live in single-family, detached housing. About a third (35%) of participants reported that they own their housing.

Almost half (48%) of participants report they come from households with children and 34 percent from households where there are children 6 years old or younger present. Thirteen percent of participants report they come from single-parent households. Most of the remainder (42%) report they come from "other" types of households. This includes most of the elderly, Mandarin speakers who participated in the workshop. Some of these come from multi-generational households. The average household size reported was 5.2, about twice as high as the average size for the city as a whole.

Income and education

Most participants did not provide income data or reported that they didn't know their household income. Of those that did report, most came from households with incomes of \$24,000 a year or less. Education levels were fairly high with 45% of participants reporting they attended at least some college or university.

Time in Canada and language at home

Participants were largely foreign born, with only 7 percent reporting they have lived in Canada their entire life. Many are recent immigrants with 17 percent reporting they have lived in Canada less than a year and another 28 percent reporting they have lived in Canada for between 1-5 years. Together, about half of participants have lived in Canada for longer, either between 5-10 years (14%) or more than 10 years (34%).

About 70% of respondents reported they spoke a language other than English at home, mostly mandarin or “Chinese.” About 30 percent listed they only spoke English at home. Some participants also listed Tamil as a home language.

Length of time in neighbourhood and reasons for residence

Participants were about evenly split between those that have lived in the neighbourhood a relatively short time, 3 years or less, and those that lived in the neighbourhood longer. About a quarter (23%) listed living in the area for less than a year. At the other end of the scale, 16% listed living in the area for 10 years or more.

When asked the important reasons they choose to live in the neighbourhood “living close to family or friends” listed by 65 percent of participants received, by far, the strongest response. Because the area is “affordable” also received a strong response and was listed by 35 percent of participants. There was little response for reasons such as “neighbourhood amenities (parks, stores),” “social/cultural feel of the area,” or “desirable housing size and/or features.”

Employment

The employment status of participants was not clear, with only 18 percent marking they had a part or full time job and another 21 percent marking that they were students. A full 43 percent marked “other” but did not specify what this meant. On the other hand a full 70 percent of respondents report that there is at least one wage-earning worker in their household.

Driver’s licence and auto ownership

The large majority of participants (78%) reported that they do not have a drivers licence with about half (53%) also having no plan to obtain a license. Most participants, however, do live in households where there is another licensed driver and at least one vehicle. Only 13 percent report that there are no licensed drivers in their household and only 20 percent report that no one in their household has a motor vehicle. However, another 40 percent of participants report that their household has only one vehicle. With large households, this suggests that many of the participants have limited access to a vehicle.

TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR

The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants suggest a population that is often dependent on walking and transit for meeting the needs of their households. This was confirmed in the survey where 13 percent agreed strongly and 57 percent agreed to the statement that they walk because they don’t have access to a car. This section places walking into a larger context by describing the general travel patterns of the participants in terms of how often they do common activities like shopping,

where some of these activities occur – whether locally or outside the area – and the mode of travel – walking, bus, driving, biking or other modes.

Going to work and school

Of the participants who work outside the home or go to school, almost two-thirds (67%) do so within the neighbourhood, further emphasizing that local travel is very important for most participants. Most participants get to work or school by bus (55%), followed equally by a few people that travelled by walking (18%), as a passenger in a car (18%) and bicycling (18%).

Other members of participants' households (who were not at the workshop) were more likely to be employed and more likely to have access to a motor vehicle. Participants reported that two-thirds (65%) of these drive to work with most of the remainder using the bus (25%).

Shopping

Most participants (60%) shop for food once or twice a week. Walking is the most common way people do their shopping as reported by 38 percent of participants followed by driving as reported by 25 percent. The vast majority (81%) reported that they shop near home. Bridletown Mall and Milliken Square with its Chinese grocery were mentioned as the places where most people shop. Seventy-one percent of participants listed the type of transportation they have available as the most important reason in deciding where they shop. This was followed by length of time to get there (listed by 35%), price (listed by 26%), and the availability of culturally specific food or goods (listed by 23%).

Weekly frequencies for general shopping (other than food) varied. The largest categories were rarely or never (listed by 26% of participants), 1-2 times a week (listed by 30%), and more than 4 times a week (listed by 30%). The transportation mode used for general shopping was split between driving (27% as drivers, 13% as passengers), and walking (33%).

Travel for children

More than half (55%) of participants reported taking children to school, although only 10% reported doing so everyday. A full 95 percent of people who said they brought children to school reported usually walking to do so. For taking children to other regular activities, 70 percent reported walking to do so.

HOW PARTICIPANTS SEE THEIR TRAVEL ENVIRONMENT

This section pulls information from both the survey and the small group exercise. Participant's evaluations of their pedestrian environment are followed by a discussion of public space, and, finally, an evaluation of the bus system.

General evaluation of pedestrian environment

The survey had a series of questions that asked people to rate the neighbourhood travel environment. For most of these, participants were presented with a statement and were asked to mark a response on a five point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The broadest statement given was “My neighbourhood is a good place for walking.” The vast majority of people either agreed (32%) or agreed strongly (44%) with this statement. No one strongly disagreed with it. On the other hand, almost three-quarters (74%) of respondents with children disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement “I feel comfortable letting my children walk to places on their own” although how strongly issues of age, personal security, or safety from traffic goes into this evaluation is not clear (one participant reported sending her children out with walkie-talkies). Still, only a few people (16%) agreed with this statement and no one agreed strongly. These general assessments must also be tempered with more specific evaluations.

Sidewalk conditions

In contrast to people’s positive global assessment of the walking environment, when asked to check off a list of “major barriers” participants face in their “daily travel in [the] neighbourhood,” very few (7%) marked that they do not face major barriers and 44 percent marked “poor sidewalk and walking conditions.”

The only category that received a stronger response was “no bike lanes” which was marked by 54 percent of participants. One participant was an avid cyclist, but the survey showed few other participants use bikes as a regular mode of travel. Instead, a number of people in the small group discussions mentioned bicycles on sidewalks as a “big problem” for pedestrians. Bicyclists on sidewalks were identified as mostly adults. One participant said “I grab my children because they don’t slow down.” Thus, the desire for bicycle lanes can probably be best interpreted as a desire to improve walking conditions.

This was mirrored in another question where 30 percent of participants reported that they do not feel safe in some areas of the neighbourhood because of the “pathway [is] not maintained or [is] unkempt (e.g. sidewalk broken, littered, etc).” Seniors and youth identified the lack of a sidewalk on one side of Birchmount along the park and by the Scarborough Grace Hospital as a problem.

In the group discussions many people made other comments on sidewalk conditions, mostly about the sidewalks on Finch that almost everyone use. Snow and ice in the wintertime was identified as a particular problem. One participant noted the sidewalks have “too much ice ... I have to walk on the street.” Even with ploughing, participants noted the snow banks at corners and bus stops. One participant noted that “they don’t clean the snow. They only care about the traffic, they don’t care about us...when they plough the roads they pile it up at the corner... we have to climb over three feet of ice and snow.” Another also equated the lack of snow removal along Finch with city neglect of the area saying, ““they just don’t plow

it, they just don't care...But even if they do, they don't salt it." One person said seniors simply don't go outside in winter because it is too dangerous to walk.

Several participants also identified the general condition of Finch sidewalks and flooding as a problem. Comments such as the "sidewalk is very unlevel," "they need to fix holes," "drainage is bad" and "both sides are flooded after storms" were typical.

Crossing streets and safety from traffic

In response to the statement "There are enough places to safely cross the large streets" many participants agreed (41%) and a few strongly agreed (15%). Many were neutral on this question (26%), and a few disagreed or strongly disagreed (19%). The amount of agreement was somewhat surprising. Along Finch between Birchmont and Warden, a very heavily used pedestrian route, there are only four protected crossings, three at lights and one at a crosswalk. This is certainly far fewer than is generally considered desirable in the pedestrian literature. People may not need more crossings because activities are concentrated in only a few locations, so there is little need to cross back and forth across the street. However in the survey, 40 percent of participants agreed or agreed strongly that they cross large streets even where there is no light or crosswalk in order to make their walk shorter. This suggests that, at least for some people, they are willing to take the risk of crossing wide, fast roadways.



On the other hand, some participants clearly won't. In the small group exercise several participants mentioned they wouldn't cross Finch without a light because of the fast, dangerous traffic. This was reflected in the survey with responses to a statement about traffic. A substantial portion of respondents, 27 percent, disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement "I feel safe from traffic when walking in my neighbourhood."

Some intersections were identified as particularly dangerous to cross in the group exercise. Glendower and Silver Springs was mentioned with lots of traffic and vehicles often going through the light. A participant noted, "children can't get across." The intersection of Wayside and Finch was also mentioned as dangerous

because children cross there but there is no light. Finally, Kennedy Road and Finch was mentioned as dangerous to cross by more than one group.

Lights with crossing times that are too short was also seen as a general problem, especially by the elderly. Every major intersection on Finch was identified as not giving people enough time to cross safely.

Another problem identified were signals that take a very long time to change before they allow pedestrians to cross. In particular, the light at Glendower and Birchmount and the light on Finch by the St. Aidan Catholic school was identified in this regard.

Distances

A basic problem identified by many participants was simply the distances between the activities they use. In the survey, 21 percent marked the statement “[the] places I want to go are very far apart” as a major barrier they face in their “daily travel in the neighbourhood.” Most participants live near to Birchmount and Finch and the long walk to the Bridlewood Mall at Warden Road was mentioned in several of the group discussions. Specific comments were that the library was too far away, that a supermarket was needed closer to Birchmount (where there used to be a food store that closed) and that the walk to Bridlewood is too far for seniors. Some seniors reported that the approximately one kilometre walk takes them 30 minutes or more each way but they need to walk even in winter to do their shopping.

Shortcuts and fences

Related to distances, a number of people (18%) listed “places are not well connected in the neighbourhood” as a major barrier to travel in the neighbourhood. Even more telling, 36 percent of people agreed and 43 percent strongly agreed that they “often use shortcuts (unpaved paths, cutting across parking lots, etc)” to get around the neighbourhood. Because informal routes and shortcuts often involve pedestrians coping with poor walking conditions such as mud or increase exposure to traffic when compared to more formal routes, this can be interpreted as an indication that formal routes do not direct connect the places people want to go.

Fences came up as a issue in several groups. A participant reported that two out of the three gates between Silver Springs and Finch are kept locked, forcing pedestrians to walk further.

Fences around the St. Sylvester Catholic School were identified as falling down, perhaps because of shortcutting. A participant suggested formal paths should be installed at these locations.

Fences around the condos near Bridlewood Mall were also seen as making people’s walks longer. One participant asked “they don’t provide security, so why do they make us walk so far around?” Another participant mentioned climbing fences to shorten their walk to the mall.

A locked gate in a fence between Timberbank Park and the Timothy Eaton Business and Technical Institute was identified as a problem. Another complaint was a bridge along this route that is not cleared of snow in winter. This is clearly a popular shortcut because the alternative route along streets is much longer.



By far, the most complaints were raised about the pedestrian link between the corner of Finch and Warden and the Bridlewood Mall entrance. This is a heavily used link because both bus users and pedestrians coming along Finch from the east use it. However, there is a steep ramp between the street level and the parking lot level that many people found difficult, especially the elderly. Also, there is not walkway through the parking lot at this location to the mall. While the mall is better than many in that it does provide formal pedestrian facilities between some entrances and some surrounding streets, there is just the open parking surface at this location. Several participants commented that they feel uncomfortable walking through the busy parking lot.

Security and lighting

Feeling safe when one is out walking is clearly an important concern for creating good pedestrian environments. In the survey question that asked participants to identify major barriers, only a few (7%) marked off that the neighbourhood “doesn’t feel safe.” However, a more specific question, “If you feel unsafe walking in certain parts of your neighbourhood, what are some of the reasons why?” only twenty percent of respondents reported that they “pretty much feel safe.” The most common response of those listed for this question was that they feel unsafe in “Places with fences and narrow spaces where I feel nervous” (marked by 43% of respondents).

In the groups discussions the Silver Springs housing area was mentioned several times as a place people do not feel safe. Also, the Bridlewood Mall area was mentioned by seniors as a place they avoid because of “robberies,” “armed people” and “purse snatchers.”

Still, social fear does not seem to be a more general issue for most people in terms of their local travel. In the survey, few respondents listed places with “too few people” or places with “scary people” as an important issue. Most (58%) did report, however, that they avoid walking at night and almost a quarter (23%) report that they keep to areas “that have good lighting.”

Places with good lighting also came up as a positive quality several times in the group discussions. One person mentioned they even use a short cut along Brigadoon Creek because there is good lighting and many people there. The mall area and the north, but not the south side of Finch were also identified as well lit.

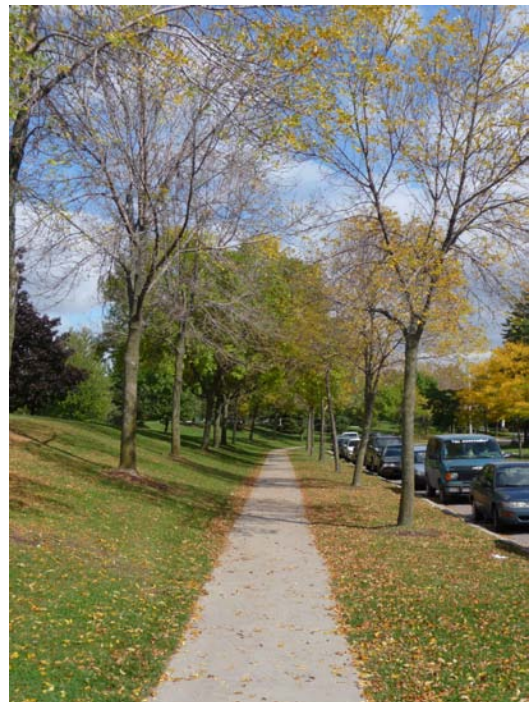
There were fewer comments about where more lighting was needed. Two places people wanted more light was within the Silver Springs development and along the lane through the townhouses between Glendower and Finch. A participant reported that a timer for the lights in this laneway was “reversed” so that the lights come on during the day instead of at night.

Public spaces

The neighbourhood’s streets and parks are important social spaces and places for recreational walking and exercising. Almost 70% of participants reported that they walk or run recreationally at least 3 times a week, and more than half of these report doing so every day. Neighbourhood parks feature prominently in this and are well used by participants. Seventy-four percent of participants reported that they go to a park at least one a week and 42 percent reported going three times a week or more. In the small group exercises, many participants made comments about L’Amoreaux Park in particular, which is clearly well loved by the community. It shows up on almost all the pedestrian route maps and people made comments such as “I love it,” and “It’s my favourite place.”

Several of the Mandarin speakers mention using the park to practice Tai Chi. The wood lot in the park was also pointed to as something special. One participant commented, “I wish there were more of those.”

The one negative comment made in several groups, was winter conditions. The winter conditions for the shortcut through Timberbank Park were mentioned above. L’Amoreaux Park was also mentioned in this regard. A participant noted a lot of children cut through the park to get to school but that’s it not safe because “it’s never cleared...it’s all ice underneath.” A senior commented that the park is an important social place for exercise, but that “its hard to get to in winter [because] all the roads in the park are icy and slippery.”



Another important public space is the mall itself. As mentioned above, some seniors reported being fearful of going to the mall. In comments from a small group with

youth, the mall is clearly a destination although some commented that it did not have stores or services that cater to youth. A movie theatre and arcade were mentioned as activities they would like to see. The Milliken Square shopping area was mentioned as being unfriendly to youth.

Other comments on public space included the various basketball courts which participants said were in disrepair.

Some older, Mandarin speakers, living in apartments expressed a strong wish for a community garden. They mentioned that people in houses have a place to garden, but they don't.

Finally, garbage and smells were identified as a problem in several public areas, especially in the commercial areas. Garbage and "vermin" at the mall were mentioned as were garbage smells in the plaza at Birchmount and Glendower. Smells from the creek and ravine north of Finch were identified as a problem after it rains. One participant noted that they avoid walking there after it rains because it "stinks." Smells and garbage within the Silver Springs development were also commented on.

Bus service

Bus service and transit is not a focus of this study, but the survey did ask participants to evaluate the overall service and many people made comments as part of the small group discussions as well. Only a few participants reported that the bus service is a "major barrier" to their local travel. This may be because, even though walking distances can be far, few people use the bus within the neighbourhood. While more than half of participants reported using bus transit to get to work or school, few reported using buses for more local travel such as shopping. Beyond expense, some of the Mandarin speakers did not take the bus because they do not feel confident enough due to their English skills. Most people that did take the bus reported that the service was okay, but that the wait for the number 43 bus, in particular, was often long with buses coming in bunches.



SUMMARY OF THEMES

The information presented above does not fully describe all the comments we heard, all the information collected in the survey, or include a systematic compilation of the notes made on the maps. This work will continue.

However, even the preliminary reporting of information from the workshop brings up some clear themes. First, many of the participants come from households with at least one vehicle, but the participants are highly dependent on walking and transit to carry out their daily lives. Most shop by foot within the neighbourhood and many also walk or take the bus locally for work and school.

On a global question, most people agreed that the neighbourhood was a good place for walking, but in more specific questions several problems stood out.

Fundamental was the simple distances between where people lived and the major shopping areas they relied on.

Also, sidewalk and walking conditions along Finch, the main route used by most participants, were seen as a problem. In winter, snow removal, ice, and snow banks that people must climb to cross streets or use the bus was clearly identified as a problem. With Toronto's long winters, this is clearly a major issue for people who have any difficulty walking but must do so to fulfil basic needs. Several participants took the lack of prompt snow removal as an indication that "they don't care about us." Even outside of winter, the sidewalks along Finch were identified as uneven, in poor repair, and as often flooding after a rain. Finally, people riding bicycles on the sidewalks was seen as a major safety issue for pedestrians and many participants thought bicycle lanes on Finch would help move bicyclists to the roadway.

Most participants reported that there were enough places to safely cross large streets, but many crossed these streets even where there were no lights or crosswalks. Many also do not feel safe from traffic. Several intersections along Finch were identified as particularly dangerous, and signals at all the major intersections on Finch were seen as not giving people, particularly the elderly, adequate time to cross safely.

Shortcutting is clearly common and some routes were seen as problematic because they are icy in winter. Many participants also identified the link between the corner of Finch and Warden and the mall as problematic for pedestrians because of the steep ramp and walk through the parking lot.

Some people clearly did not feel safe moving about the neighbourhood due to security issues, and many people do not walk at night, but overall, personal security was not flagged as a major issue.

Finally, people clearly value and regularly use L'Amoreaux Park. The Mall is the other major public or social space, although some seniors avoid the mall because they do not feel safe and some youth do not feel like there is much to do there.