

Active Transportation Infrastructure in Canada

A Pre-Budget Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance

Presented by the Federal Active Transportation Coalition

August 1, 2014

About The Federal Active Transportation Coalition

The Federal Active Transportation Coalition is comprised of organizations representing commuters, walkers, bicycle, transit and automobile users, health agencies, urban planners and transportation engineers. Together, these organizations are calling for greater federal investment in active transportation infrastructure.

Executive Summary

The Federal Active Transportation Coalition has addressed three of the priorities of the Standing Committee on Finance for Pre-Budget consultation: 1) Balancing the federal budget to ensure fiscal sustainability and economic growth; 2) Supporting families and helping vulnerable Canadians by focusing on health, education and training and; 3) Ensuring prosperous and secure communities, including through support for infrastructure. Active transportation infrastructure is any type of infrastructure that promotes transportation that involves walking, biking and other forms of human powered transportation. This also involves using public transportation such as taking a bus, train or a subway, given that most transit journeys begin and end with a walk or a cycle. This type of infrastructure is fiscally sustainable and promotes economic growth by complimenting existing infrastructure at a cheaper cost as well as helping local businesses grow. Active infrastructure transportation can improve economic productivity and helps mitigate the problem of traffic congestion on Canadian roads and highways. Such infrastructure can also help reduce Canada's burden of chronic diseases and other health problems resulting from physical inactivity. Obesity, heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes are just some of the major health problems in Canada. These cost health care systems billions of dollars, but can be reduced by investing more in active transportation infrastructure, which helps increase physical activity. Without active transportation infrastructure, Canadians are less likely to take up daily active transportation because of road safety concerns. Public opinion polls show that Canadians strongly support the construction of more active transportation infrastructure. Many municipalities across Canada have already started investing in active transportation infrastructure projects and the demand for this type of vital groundwork will only continue to grow across the country. Therefore, the Federal Active Transportation Coalition urges the federal government to ***establish a \$250 million fund over three years, under the Building Canada Plan to support active transportation infrastructure.***

What is Active Transportation Infrastructure?

Active transportation is any type of human powered transportation, as well as public transit. Walking, in-line skating, biking, non-motorized wheelchairs, skiing and taking a public transit bus are all examples of active transportation. Infrastructure that supports these modes of transportation include traffic calming measures (roundabouts, curb extensions), bike and pedestrian lanes/sidewalks, footpaths, recreational trails and public transit. Research shows that public transit infrastructure is associated with more walking and bicycling, greater physical activity and lower obesity rates. As well, active transportation infrastructure has many economic and health benefits.

Fiscally Sustainable Infrastructure, Promoting Economic Growth and Reducing Congestion

Active infrastructure is economically sustainable and can complement existing infrastructure intended for cars. The construction and maintenance costs for active infrastructure are substantially more cost efficient than traditional infrastructure intended for automobiles. According to Transport Canada's Guide *Active Transportation in Canada*, widening a road to accommodate a new bike lane costs \$20,000-\$150,000 per km compared to an average \$1.3 million per km to widen a two lane urban arterial road to four lanes. Sidewalks can accommodate 20 times the volume of people per hour than urban roads and are much cheaper to construct.ⁱ

The presence of active infrastructure can also spur on local economic growth. Area businesses benefit from pedestrians and cyclists who are more likely to spend money at local destinations than people who drive cars. This was illustrated in a 2009 study of Bloor Street merchants in Toronto, which found that people who walked or cycled to their businesses spent more money in the area than those who drove. Not only do large urban centres benefit economically from active transportation, but small towns and rural communities can also reap the rewards of active transportation infrastructure through increased tourism and property value. For instance, Wasaga Beach, Ontario has developed biking trails along with an active transportation plan to promote healthier lives and attract more tourists using these bike lanes.

In addition to economic spinoffs, active transportation infrastructure also helps workers remain healthy and productive. The London School of Economics estimates that the health benefits of cycling save the UK economy \$197 million (US) per year in reduced worker absenteeism.

Lastly, this type of infrastructure helps mitigate traffic congestion, which hinders economic growth and productivity. The current impact of traffic congestion from daily commutes stifles trade and commerce. According to the Toronto Board of Trade, the direct and indirect costs of traffic congestion in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton totaled \$6 billion in 2006. Reducing even a small proportion of automobiles on the road in exchange for active transportation can have a large impact. In 2007-2008, the U.S. Federal Highway Administration study determined there was a three percent drop in traffic on "urban interstates", which translated to a nearly 30% reduction in peak hour congestion. This illustrates how a slight drop in commuters using private automobiles can have a significant effect on traffic and subsequently the businesses that rely on transportation. If only a small percentage of Canadians chose to take a bike or walk to work

instead of a car, the impact could significantly reduce commute times on roads and highways.

Active transportation infrastructure is economically sustainable, helps local businesses grow, reduces the burden of traffic, and can also help Canadians live in healthier and safer communities.

Ensuring Healthier and Safer Communities

Investing in active transportation infrastructure can help address some of the country's current health problems. Canada faces high rates of chronic disease, which have been growing at a rate of approximately 14% each year. In addition, Canada continues to deal with an obesity epidemic among children and adults. According to Statistics Canada, 60% of adults and 32% of children/youth are either overweight or obese.ⁱⁱ As well, 85 percent of adults and 93 percent of children do not get enough daily physical activity, which is a direct risk factor for obesity, cardiovascular diseases and other chronic health conditions.ⁱⁱⁱ Physical inactivity costs the Canadian health care system \$6.8 billion annually from preventable chronic diseases.^{iv}

The 2013 Speech from the Throne committed to addressing Canadians physical activity by working with the provinces and territories, and the private and not-for-profit sectors to encourage citizens to be more physically active. Research shows children who walk and bike as a form of transportation live healthier lives. A Quebec longitudinal study indicated that sustained active transportation (biking, walking to and from school) among children aged 6-8 is associated with a healthier Body Mass Index.^v Other studies indicate that the most effective means of increasing physical activity is to incorporate it into day-to-day activities such as daily commutes to school or work. In an American study involving 43 major US cities, researchers found that there was a positive correlation between higher rates of bicycle infrastructure and higher rates of bicycle commuting. Another study in Seattle indicated that adults who lived within a half of a mile from a bike lane were 20% more likely to bike at least once a week. Similarly, the presence of sidewalks and pedestrian paths are also a major factor in increasing physical activity. A study by San Diego State University that examined 11 countries (including Canada) demonstrated that the presence of sidewalks was highly predictive of higher rates of physical activity. A Toronto study on walkability, urban density and health outcomes demonstrated that people who lived in suburban areas that lacked this type of infrastructure were at a higher risk for diabetes and obesity. Therefore, it is not surprising that states and cities that have more active transportation also have lower incidences of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and overweight or obesity. Active transportation infrastructure is the key to reducing physical inactivity and associated poor health outcomes.

Physical inactivity is not the only health problem that active transportation infrastructure can help address. Polluted air is strongly associated with serious health conditions including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, a variety of lung conditions, and cancer. In 2008, short and long term exposure to air pollution was estimated to result in 21,000 premature deaths in Canada, as well as 620,000 doctor visits, 92,000 emergency department visits, and 11,000 hospital visits.^{vi} That same year, exposure to air pollution in Canada costs the economy roughly \$8 billion. Active transportation infrastructure can reduce the amount of

pollution in the air by encouraging people to use modes of transportation that do not emit pollution.

Road safety is another health concern that remains a large deterrent for Canadian commuters considering active transportation. Safety concerns keep one in five Canadians from cycling or walking. Furthermore, a lack of active infrastructure such as bike lanes, sidewalks, paved shoulders and traffic calming measures has a negative impact on biking and walking. A survey of adults who lived in Metro Vancouver revealed that potential and occasional cyclists would cycle more often if cycling routes included separate bike paths, traffic calming measures and paved shoulders. Without the presence of this infrastructure, adults were less likely to take up daily active transportation. Also, there is a “safety in numbers” effect whereby the more pedestrians and cyclists that use active infrastructure, the more reductions in the overall rate of injury. Further studies indicate that separated bike lanes, traffic calming measures and improved lighting can help promote biking and walking. With expanded infrastructure and improved conditions, Canadians can feel safer when they choose active transportation for their commute. Active transportation infrastructure has been shown to help all Canadians live in healthier and safer communities with better air quality. Many municipalities are recognizing these benefits and have already started investing in active transportation infrastructure, which has received a strong endorsement from the public.

Canadians Support More Active Transportation Infrastructure

There is an increasing demand for active transportation infrastructure across the country. An Ipsos/Reid poll indicated 81% Canadians strongly or somewhat support the creation of more bike lanes.^{vii} Cities as large as Toronto or as small as Haliburton, ON or as north as Whitehorse have already started active transportation infrastructure initiatives. These communities are responding to the growing demand for cost-effective, efficient and healthier ways to travel. For example, Montreal has hundreds of kilometres of bike lanes and has constructed them with minimal effect on parking for cars. Smaller towns such as Haliburton have extended the shoulders of roads to accommodate biking and walking. Communities across the country are looking to invest in active transportation initiatives, but this requires dedicated support from all levels of government to continue to fund active transportation infrastructure.

Conclusion: Canada Needs More Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment

Active transportation infrastructure can encourage economic growth, reduce the costs on Canada’s health care system through disease prevention, make Canadians safer with reductions in traffic and pollution, and increase physical activity rates. Canadians are supportive of active transportation infrastructure, while many municipalities are beginning to invest in healthier, sustainable and efficient modes of transportation, much more needs to be done. For these reasons, the Federal Active Transportation Coalition recommends that the federal government:

Establish a \$250 million fund over three years, under the Building Canada Plan to support active transportation infrastructure.

Endnotes

ⁱ Active Transportation in Canada: A Resource and Planning Guide *Transport Canada* 2011

<http://www.tc.gc.ca/media/documents/programs/atge.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Body mass index of Canadian children and youth, 2009 to 2011 *Statistics Canada* <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2012001/article/11712-eng.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Obesity *Statistics Canada* 2013 <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/search-recherche/bb/info/obesity-obesite-eng.htm>

^{iv} Jansen, Ian Health care costs of physical inactivity in Canadian adults *Applied Physiology, Nutrition and Metabolism* 2012 803-806

^v Pabayo R, et al. Sustained active transportation is associated with a favorable body mass index trajectory across the early school years: findings from the Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development birth cohort *Preventative Medicine* 2010 59-64

^{vi} Canadian Medical Association. No Breathing Room: National Illness Costs of Air Pollution. August 2008.

^{vii} IPSOS-Reid "More Bike Lanes on City Roads (81%) and Mutual Biker/Driver Respect Needed" 2011 <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=5427>