

# Ottawa Pedestrian Plan (Final Report June 2009)

## 1.0 Introduction

The Ottawa Pedestrian Plan is intended as a guide to establish Ottawa as one of the most pedestrian active cities in North America by encouraging and facilitating more people to walk more often. Comprehensive pedestrian master planning is in its infancy. A few jurisdictions have had pedestrian master plans for over 10 years, but most that currently have them have developed them over the last 5 years. (1) The Ottawa Pedestrian Plan is the first of its kind for the City.

A community that is designed to support walking is more livable, attractive, and sustainable. It is a community that promotes healthy living benefits, contributions to a cleaner environment, supports social cohesion, and represents a positive force for an even greater sense of local pride.

Only recently, pedestrians are being considered as a serious component of the modern transportation system. The Ottawa Pedestrian Plan guides the City in the planning, design, and implementation of pedestrian facilities and programs with an emphasis on facilitating walking, and combined walking/transit, as viable alternatives to automobile use, ultimately resulting in a more pleasant and efficient transportation system.

Combined with the recently completed Ottawa Cycling Plan, the implementation of this work will strengthen Ottawa's already enviable reputation as a people-oriented, beautiful city.

*"I strongly support this initiative-it is critical to our success as a city."  
Ottawa Resident*

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## 1.1 About Ottawa

Ottawa is home to more than 800,000 people who live, work and otherwise contribute to its collective civic character. Ottawa is also Canada's capital city as an attractive and friendly place to welcome all Canadians and visitors from around the globe.

The City of Ottawa is committed to enhancing the quality of life for its residents by providing an accessible and balanced transportation system to reduce dependence on the automobile and where walking forms a critical part of personal travel. Nonetheless, similar to cities in other parts of the world, Ottawa today exists as a largely car-oriented city... The trend here and elsewhere is that the number of cars per household is increasing and car commuters are traveling further and faster than ever before. The Pedestrian Plan, in combination with many other municipal initiatives, is a further commitment toward reversing this trend.

Ottawa is a city of diverse neighbourhoods and villages with a distinctive downtown and vast natural and rural area covering a collective area of 2,758 km<sup>2</sup>. People living in the older, traditional, Downtown and City Centre neighbourhoods have the highest number of viable transportation options. Cars and public transit share space with pedestrians and cyclists on its narrow streets, most of which have sidewalks on both sides. However, as local and commuter car traffic has increased, these streets have become less amenable to walking.

In contrast to this, the development of the city over the last few decades is reflected in Ottawa's suburbs which followed the international trend toward predominantly car-dependent, low density residential neighbourhoods. Few



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1 Ridgway, M. *Pedestrian Plans-State of the Practice* Prepared for the ITE District 6 Conference in Portland Oregon, July 2007.

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streets have sidewalks and where sidewalks are provided, streets are more likely to be multi-lane roadways with high traffic volumes. Unique to some suburban neighbourhoods are green linear parks providing pedestrians with a leisure-oriented system of off-road pathways. While very appealing, these pathways do not share the same status as sidewalks when it comes to development and maintenance standards.

The Pedestrian Plan is intended to capitalize on local opportunities to create a step-by-step, 20-year-and-beyond plan to make Ottawa one of the most pedestrian-active cities in North America.



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### 1.2 What is the Ottawa Pedestrian Plan?

The Ottawa Pedestrian Plan examines walking in the City today, to identify and recommend specific changes in infrastructure, policies, and programs that will **encourage more people to walk more often.**

To meet this intent, the Ottawa Pedestrian Plan illustrates how streets can be transformed through high quality design to better contribute to the quality of the public realm and the creation of more sustainable communities. The plan proposes a “pedestrian-first” philosophy, emphasizing the movement of people rather than vehicles.. The pedestrian-first approach recognizes, embraces and strengthens the unique, community “place-making” characteristics of pedestrian-oriented streetscapes, while incorporating cycling, transit and vehicular movement opportunities. At the same time the intent is to place a higher priority on the role that the city’s green-spaces play in connectivity to/from destinations to create a choice of comfortable and safety-conscious pedestrian routes.

To accommodate the pedestrian-first philosophy, the Ottawa Pedestrian Plan proposes a more inclusive and collaborative approach to designing the public realm. A collaborative approach allows creative thinking and teamwork, not only within municipal government but with key stakeholders such as community organizations, businesses, and Ottawa citizens. Working collaboratively, municipal government can be more responsive to public input and take advantage of sometimes disparate views in creating a healthier, sustainable environment that simultaneously resolves numerous public needs. In this way, there is more opportunity to be responsive to public needs and more opportunity to design streets that provide for flexibility in use while providing streetscape environments that are comfortable and enjoyable for Ottawa’s citizens and visitors.

The Ottawa Pedestrian Plan is about improving **walkability**. In the context of the Ottawa Pedestrian Plan walkability can be defined as follows:

**Walkability** reflects overall walking conditions in an area (2). It is broad reaching and can be evaluated on a variety of scales from the community-wide or city level down to the site level and includes the consideration of an equally varied number of high level concepts down to the details and quality of pedestrian facilities for sidewalks and pathways, access to buildings, roadway conditions that parallel pedestrian routes, land uses patterns and land use planning, proximity of destinations, community support, programs, security and comfort for walking etc.

**Walkability** reflects  
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2 Victoria Transport Policy Institute <http://www.vtpi.org/tm/tm92.htm>

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Dan Burden of Walkable Communities Inc. (3): is one of the pioneers of the concept of the **walkable community** and he eloquently describes it below:

*“A walkable community is designed for people, at the human scale, emphasizing people over cars, promoting safe, secure, balanced, mixed, vibrant, successful, healthful, enjoyable and comfortable walking, bicycling and human association. It is a community that returns rights to people, looks out especially for children, seniors and people with disabilities and takes aggressive action to reduce the negative impacts of sixty-plus years of auto-centric design and uncivil driving practices. It is also a community that emphasizes economic recovery of central neighborhoods, promotes the concepts of recovering and transforming suburban sprawl into meaningful villages, and especially takes ownership and action to protect and preserving open space.*

*A walkable community, like a livable community, smart growth community, or sustainable community, makes a neighborhood, hamlet, village, town, city or metropolis into a place where many people walk, ride bicycles and use transit, and where anyone who drives a car moderates their behavior in a way where they take nothing from the rights of those who wish to stay healthy and active by taking part in activities outside the car.*

*A walkable community is one that is old, historic, well worn, restored sensibly and worthy of protection. A walkable community is one that is compact, new, fresh, invigorating and teaming with people enjoying their streets, parks, plazas, buildings and other physical space.”*

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### 1.3 Vision, Goal and Objectives:

In many jurisdictions across North America there has been a recent policy shift to promote alternate modes of transportation. In many cases this is resulting in a shift in priority for various modes with pedestrians now being considered the top priority. Ottawa has started to move in this direction and must continue to pursue it vigorously.

The City of Ottawa is at an important threshold in its development and growth and is committed through policies in both the Official Plan and the Transportation Master Plan to providing a range of transportation options for all users, and to reduce demands on the road network and dependence on the automobile. To this end, the City recognizes walking as an integral part of a publicly supported and accessible transportation system — walking forms a critical part of every person trip. The Pedestrian Plan is intended to support these principles and meet the targets and objectives outlined in the Official Plan and the Transportation Master Plan.

Furthermore, the City Strategic Plan (2007-2010) (4): identifies 48 priorities and strategic objectives to be met over the coming years, and the Ottawa Pedestrian Plan responds directly to and/or indirectly supports at least nine of these objectives.

Specifically, the Plan responds directly to:

- **Transportation Priority**, Objective 1 - “Improve the City’s transportation network to afford ease of mobility, keep pace with growth, reduce congestion and work towards modal split targets.”

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3 <http://www.walkablecommunities.org/>

4 2007-2010 City Strategic Plan – City of Ottawa.

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- **Infrastructure Renewal Priority**, Objective 2 -“By 2017, close the infrastructure renewal gap in sidewalks, traffic control signals, traffic signs and streetlights.”
- **Solid Waste and Environmental Priority**, Objective 3 -“Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 20% by 2012.”
- **Sustainable, Healthy and Active Priority**, Objective 6 -“Require walking, transit and cycling oriented communities and employment centres.”
- **Sustainable, Healthy and Active Priority**, Objective 11 - “By 2017, close the gap in sidewalks, traffic lights, street lights and bicycle lane infrastructure that has been warranted and unfunded.”

In addition, the Plan supports the following objectives:

- **Transit Priority**, Objective 1 -“Achieve a 30% modal split (for transit) by 2021.”
- **Sustainable, Healthy and Active Priority**, Objective 9 -“Ensure public health programs that work to promote health and prevent disease are maintained in concert with the growing population of the city.”
- **Planning and Growth Management Priority**, Objective 2 - “Respect the existing urban fabric neighbourhood form and the limits of existing hard services, so that new growth is integrated seamlessly with established neighbourhoods.”
- **Planning and Growth Management Priority**, Objective 4 - “Ensure that City infrastructure required for new growth is built or improved as needed to serve the growth.”

### The Vision

The Vision of the Ottawa Pedestrian Plan is to:

***Facilitate year-round walking in the City of Ottawa as a comfortable, viable, well integrated and well used component of the transportation system in the City.***

### The Goals

The goals of the Ottawa Pedestrian Plan are intended to reinforce and build on the central objective for walking as stated in the Transportation Master Plan:

*“The walking modal share will increase from 9.6% in 2001 to 10% in 2021. This reflects the positive impact of the Official Plan’s emphasis on compact, mixed use development, which will be countered by significant growth in longer trips that cannot be reasonably made on foot.” (5)*

Therefore the goals of the Ottawa Pedestrian Plan are to

1. Increase the pedestrian modal share across the City.
2. Assist in guiding future city development in such a way that encourages the creation of a high quality pedestrian environment.
3. Develop and strengthen the “culture of walking” in Ottawa.

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5 Ottawa 2020 Transportation Master Plan, 2003.

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### The Objectives

To achieve these goals, the following objectives will need to be realized:

4. Develop an integrated network of pedestrian facilities that includes sidewalks, pathways and pedestrian-friendly spaces throughout the city, providing connections to important destinations and transit facilities.
5. Develop policies, tools, processes and practices necessary to plan, implement and maintain the pedestrian system.
6. Develop new, and strengthen existing programs to encourage more people to walk more often and make walking a mode of choice.
7. Define implementation priorities for the pedestrian network and supporting programs.