



A Healthy, Green and Just Recovery

Active Travel
FACTSHEET



Invest in active travel



Active travel is good for us, our communities and our planet.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS MADE MANY OF US APPRECIATE THE NEED FOR MORE SPACE IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN FOR PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS. WITH GOVERNMENTS CONSIDERING INVESTMENTS TO KICK-START OUR ECONOMY, IT IS A GOOD TIME TO CONSIDER THE HEALTH, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS THAT COULD RESULT FROM INVESTMENTS IN ACTIVE TRAVEL.

Active travel is any form of travel that involves physical activity such as walking, cycling or blading. Because active travel allows us to accomplish two goals with one action, it is easier to fit into our schedules. We can get the exercise we need while commuting to work or running errands. Active travel is good for our health, for our communities and for the planet.

ACTIVE TRAVEL IMPROVES HEALTH BY INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The health benefits of physical activity are well known. It can reduce the risk of over 25 chronic health conditions, including heart disease, breast cancer, colon cancer, and Type 2 diabetes. One long-term study found that people who cycle three hours per week reduce their risk of an early death by 28%, while another found that those who walk

29 minutes per day, seven days per week, reduce their risk of an early death by 22%. Physical activity also improves mental health because it can improve self-esteem, sleep and mental faculties, reduce depression, anxiety and stress, delay dementia, and reduce dependence on drugs and alcohol.

ACTIVE TRAVEL NEEDS TO BE SAFE

Fewer cyclists are killed or seriously injured when more people cycle in a community. This is likely because cyclists are more visible and drivers are more aware of them when there are more of them. Separated bike lanes reduce injuries to cyclists as well, while also encouraging more people to cycle because it feels safer to them. Pedestrians are safer when vehicle speeds are lower, they are separated from traffic, and they are more visible to drivers.

ACTIVE TRAVEL CAN IMPROVE HEALTH BY REDUCING AIR POLLUTION

Traffic-related air pollution is a serious concern in Canada. In the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area alone, it causes about 700 early deaths and 2,800 hospital admissions each year. Several studies suggest that air pollution in our communities can be reduced substantially when short vehicle trips are replaced with walking or cycling. One U.S. study estimated that \$3.6 billion in air quality health benefits and \$3.75 billion in physical activity health benefits could be produced each year by encouraging 31.3 million people living in the Midwestern United States to eliminate all vehicle trips of eight kilometres or less, with half of those trips replaced by cycling.



An ambitious active travel strategy can reduce air pollution, greenhouse gases and health inequities.

CLIMATE CHANGE IS ALREADY HARMING THE HEALTH OF CANADIANS

The physical and mental health of Canadians is already being harmed by climate change. In different parts of the country, climate change has increased the frequency and intensity of floods, wildfires, hurricanes, ice storms, and heat waves over the last several decades. These events have exposed millions to extremely high levels of toxic air pollution, forced hundreds of thousands of Canadians to evacuate their homes, and left hundreds of thousands without power for extended periods. Climate change is also melting permafrost in the far North, increasing sea levels on three coast lines, and extending the range of vector-borne diseases such as Lyme disease.

While climate change affects everyone, it has a greater impact on some. Young children, older Canadians, and people with pre-existing health conditions are more sensitive to heat waves and wildfire smoke. Indigenous Peoples in Northern communities can experience greater food insecurity as melting permafrost and changes in plant and animal populations disrupt their access to traditional food sources. In addition, people who live

on lower incomes may not have the resources to protect themselves, or recover from, extreme weather events such as heat waves and floods.

ACTIVE TRAVEL CAN REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

The international community has concluded that all countries must reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45% by 2030 and to zero by 2050 if we are to avoid catastrophic levels of global warming. The transportation sector is responsible for about one quarter of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. Several studies have found that we could substantially reduce those emissions by investing in active travel. For example, a California study estimated that an ambitious cycling-focused strategy could reduce greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles by 8% by 2040.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT NEEDS TO SUPPORT ACTIVE TRAVEL

The design of communities shapes the way people travel. Studies have found that people walk and cycle more – and drive less – when their neighbourhoods have the following characteristics:

- *Fairly high population or job densities* – Neighbourhoods with higher job or

population densities support local businesses and efficient transit service which encourages walking and cycling.

- *A rich diversity of land uses* – People will walk and cycle more when their neighbourhoods have a variety of stores, restaurants, and community services located within close proximity to their homes.
- *Supportive street designs* – People will walk more when streets are designed in a grid pattern that makes it easy and efficient to reach local destinations; when there are sidewalks, crosswalks, good street lighting, and street furniture to make it safe, easy and pleasant to do. People will cycle more if there are separated bike lanes or safe bike paths.
- *Transit stops within a short distance* – People will walk or cycle to transit stops if those stops are less than 10 minutes from their homes or workplaces.

ACTIVE TRAVEL CAN REDUCE HEALTH INEQUITIES

A number of groups within Canada – such as lower-income populations, newcomers, minorities, Indigenous Peoples, and people with health challenges – experience higher rates of illness, chronic diseases, and premature deaths because



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of social disadvantages. Neighbourhood design has a greater impact on these groups because they are less likely to drive cars and more likely to rely on local services and public transit. By ensuring that lower-income neighbourhoods have access to stores and restaurants, well-maintained sidewalks, traffic lights, separated bike lanes and efficient transit service, we can create more equitable communities that are safer and healthier for everyone.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

A study by energy analysts has estimated that 18,000 jobs could be created in communities across the country if \$2 billion of federal funding were directed at active travel infrastructure such as separated bike lanes and sidewalks. This investment would create construction jobs and provide economic opportunities for smaller communities, while also reducing air pollution and GHG emissions. It could also make our communities healthier and more equitable, particularly if lower-income neighbourhoods were prioritized for these investments.

Raise your voice to call for greater investments in active travel to create healthy, green and just communities.

For more information, see our Backgrounder on Active Travel