Walk Toronto comments on Leaside Traffic Calming Plan

Geoff Kettel forwarded the presentation about the Leaside Traffic Calming Plan to Walk Toronto for comments. Michael Black and Dylan Reid offered to review the plan and provide comments.

Overall, the plan looks very promising. The goal of neighbourhood traffic calming is one that will be of interest to many communities across Toronto, and it is our hope that once a comprehensive plan has been instituted in Leaside, it will be a model that will inspire other neighbourhoods to request similar measures. Studies have shown that area-wide traffic calming is more effective than isolated measures (see <https://www.tcat.ca/reading-the-signs-vision-zero-in-toronto/> ) While proposals for fine-grain improvements to specific streets are common throughout Toronto, it is rare to see such a well-developed plan at the neighbourhood level.

A particular strength of the plan is that several different calming strategies are being considered that will work in conjunction with each other.

We are particularly supportive of the systematic use of raised crosswalks, for several reasons. They slow speeds and make it more likely that vehicles will stop safely at pedestrian crossings. Also, they create better accessibility for pedestrians – especially those with mobility difficulties or who use a wheelchair – by achieving a flat, even crossing experience. Finally, they will drain meltwater away from the pedestrian crossing, preventing the formation of awkward and dangerous puddles of water at pedestrian crossings during snow melts, thus improving the accessibility of the neighbourhood.

We do have a few suggestions.

1) At the “Gateway” features, consider narrowing the road at the entrance if possible with sidewalk bulb-outs, in order to slow down vehicles turning into the neighbourhood. Such bulb-outs would also be a good place to feature neighbourhood welcome signs. Studies show that a gateway without physical changes will only result in a slight speed reduction, whereas one with physical changes will result in significant speed and crash reductions. (see <https://www.tcat.ca/reading-the-signs-vision-zero-in-toronto/> ).

2) Consider applying to the StART Road Mural Pilot Project for a residential street in Leaside that suffers from excessive traffic and/or speeding. Street murals are known to slow down traffic by adding a level of complexity and the unexpected to a street. This change nudges drivers to slow down and pay more attention to their surroundings. They are also a popular community project. Information can be found here: <https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/streets-parking-transportation/enhancing-our-streets-and-public-realm/streetartoronto/apply-to-start-programs/start-road-murals-pilot-project/>

3) It is essential for traffic safety that streets that are missing sidewalks gain a sidewalk. It is preferable to have sidewalks on both sides of the street so that people on foot, including children, don’t have to cross the street (itself potentially dangerous) to get to a safe walking zone. Sidewalks provide safe space for vulnerable pedestrians (e.g. children, seniors) and for those with accessibility needs (e.g. vision impairment, use of a wheelchair, use of cane or other assistance). They also create a more comfortable space for walking for all pedestrians, and thus encourage walking rather than using vehicles to travel to local destinations. In turn, this reduces street congestion, improves neighbourhood air quality and lowers noise pollution levels.

There are a few streets in Leaside that are missing sidewalks, or that have a sidewalk only on one side, and a traffic safety/calming plan should include a long-term goal of adding them. It’s worth noting that, if a street is wide enough, the city can use some of the existing road allowance to build a sidewalk, reducing any infringement on green space at the side of the street. As well, doing so reduces the width of the travel lanes, which has been shown to reduce vehicle speeds.

For example, portions of Cameron Crescent, Donegal Drive and Fleming Crescent provide access to Howard Talbot Park, but they not have a sidewalk for safe access to that park on foot. Although the streets that they connect to do have sidewalks, these end abruptly when they arrive at the section leading to the park. There is certainly room for a sidewalk to be installed on city property on at least one side of the street.

4) On all streets where parking is allowed, consider sidewalk bulb-outs at intersections. These make the crossing distance for pedestrians shorter, and would work well in conjunction with raised crosswalks. They also discourage drivers from taking turns at speed, and prevent drivers from parking close to the intersection where they could block sightlines.

5) Leaside is a planned community. Sections of McRae Drive and Millwood Rd. are zoned for retail. They used to have a pleasant English ‘high street’ quality: human-scaled, providing walkable access to local stores from most parts of the neighbourhood.

Unfortunately, Leaside’s high streets are now struggling due to competition from shopping centres in eastern Leaside (Leaside SmartCentre and Leaside Village), plus big box stores on Eglinton – not to speak of Costco and East York Town Centre in Thorncliffe Park.

We are aware that the Leaside Property Owners Association has done its best to revive local high streets and preserve options for walkable shopping for Leaside residents. Their efforts have succeeded on Bayview Ave., and many Leasiders will walk to the local Bayview stores. Unfortunately, McRae and Millwood have not been as successful and they do not seem to get the same amount of foot traffic. Investment in better street furniture, public art, plantings, trees, etc. for the high streets could create a better pedestrian environment. Motorists will tend to drive more slowly if the streets are vibrant with shops and pedestrians. As well, nearby retail and destinations may encourage more residents to walk for errands rather than using their vehicle.

6) We recommend better connections across the borders of Leaside to nearby destinations. While the traffic calming study focuses on the interior of Leaside, traffic calming measures at the periphery of Leaside will also contribute – calmer traffic around the neighbourhood will mean calmer traffic within it.

As well, better connections across Leaside’s borders will encourage more people who live in or near Leaside to walk or cycle to nearby destinations rather than drive, creating more vibrant streets and reducing the volume of motor traffic.

With that in mind, studying the major intersections on the borders of the neighbourhood and finding ways to make them more safe and friendly for pedestrians would contribute to the overall goals of the project.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our insights into this very promising plan, and we hope this feedback is of assistance.

Sincerely,

Dylan Reid

Michael Black

On behalf of Walk Toronto