

Report to Civic Works Committee

To: Chair and Members
Civic Works Committee

From: Kelly Scherr, P.Eng., MBA, FEC
Deputy City Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Subject: New Sidewalks in Established Neighbourhoods
November 23, 2021

Recommendation

That on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Environment and Infrastructure, Civic Administration BE DIRECTED to develop a Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connectivity Plan approach, including a community engagement strategy, for new sidewalks on neighbourhood road and underground reconstruction projects as proposed herein, on a trial basis in 2022 to inform the 2023 Renew London Construction Program.

Executive Summary

New sidewalks are to be installed as part of road reconstruction and underground infrastructure renewal projects in accordance with London Plan policy that sidewalks be included on both sides of most streets.

This past spring, projects planned for 2021 sparked debate over the introduction of sidewalks in established neighbourhoods.

This report provides an overview of policies supporting sidewalk installations in established neighbourhoods and provides recommendations for engaging neighbourhoods with gaps in pedestrian connectivity both at the community level and the street level.

This report is focused on addressing the challenges of implementing sidewalks in established neighbourhoods. A retrofit approach is not required in new subdivisions where current standards for draft plans of subdivision provide strong neighbourhood connection and natural walkability. Streets within new subdivisions do not meet the exemptions noted in Policy 349 and sidewalks will be constructed on both sides of all streets.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

The following report supports Municipal Councils 2019-2023 Strategic Plan through the strategic focus area of Building a Sustainable City and Creating a Safe London for Women and Girls. The report identifies strategies for building new neighbourhood infrastructure to support mobility, safety and more livable, sustainable, vibrant communities. The plan also identifies the implementation and enhancement of road safety measures to deliver convenient and connected mobility choices.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- Civic Works Committee – June 19, 2012 – London 2030 Transportation Master Plan
- Planning and Environment Committee – June 13, 2016 – The London Plan
- Civic Works Committee – August 13, 2018 – Complete Streets Design Manual

- Civic Works Committee – September 25, 2018 – Byron South Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connectivity Plan
- Civic Works Committee – February 9, 2021 – New Sidewalks in 2021 Infrastructure Reconstruction Projects
- Civic Works Committee – March 15, 2021 – New Sidewalks in 2021 Infrastructure Reconstruction Projects – Special meeting to hear public delegations

1.2 Policy Context

The City is committed to maintaining strong and healthy communities through safe and accessible infrastructure. Walking is an active mode of transportation that has been promoted in London dating back to the early 2000's and reinforced in the Smart Moves 2030 Transportation Master Plan. Planning for sidewalks on both sides of most streets has become standard practice amongst many Ontario Municipalities. Multiple policies and principles have been approved by Council over the last decade that align with improving connectivity and safety in the City and its neighbourhoods.

Smart Moves 2030 Transportation Master Plan (2009-2013):

The key goal of the London 2030 Transportation Master Plan (TMP) was to provide more attractive travel choices for those who live, work and play in London. Achieving that goal requires greater support for walking, cycling, transit and carpooling. The TMP identified 5 “Smart Moves”, each playing a role in supporting Council’s strategic objectives, and one of those TMP pillars was to provide *Greater Investment in Cycling and Walking Infrastructure*. New active transportation infrastructure will be needed in established areas to support intensification, improve access to transit and help meet the City’s environmental objectives.

Age Friendly London (2010):

The City of London supports multiple initiatives and resources to enhance seniors’ lived experience in our community. In 2010, the City of London became the first city in Canada to join the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Network of Age Friendly Cities. Age Friendly Action Plan Strategies include improving the accessibility of city roads and sidewalks, access to public transit and promoting active transportation initiatives for older adults.

The London Plan (2016)

The London Plan was adopted by City Council and then approved by the province in December 2016. The plan recognized the need to be deliberate in the way we plan our mobility infrastructure. That involves designing streets and right-of-way to provide a variety of convenient, attractive, and accessible mobility choices with strong linkages between key origins and destinations.

The Active Mobility section of the City Building Policies recognizes that walking can play a positive role in improving mobility and quality of life as part of a balanced mobility system. Policy 349 specifically speaks to supporting walkability through the inclusion of sidewalks in street design.

349_ To support walkability, sidewalks shall be located on both sides of all streets. An exception to this requirement may be considered in the following instances. In most of the instances a sidewalk will be required on one side of the street.

1. Cul-de-sacs or dead-end streets that extend less than 200 metres and do not connect to neighbourhood features or amenities.
2. Portions of streets flanking natural heritage features or areas.
3. Portions of streets flanking a Green Space that includes alternative active mobility infrastructure parallel to the street.
4. Portions of streets that have a designated multi-use pathway within the boulevard on one side.

5. Streets classified as Expressways or Rural Thoroughfares.
6. Road reconstruction projects, where the existing conditions such as mature trees, right-of-way widths, or infrastructure would impede sidewalks on both sides of the street.

Policy 349 was under appeal until approved by LPAT on April 21, 2021. The policy is now in full force and effect.

Vision Zero (2017):

Building upon the earlier London Road Safety Strategy, Council has adopted the principles of Vision Zero, which is a global initiative dedicated to eliminating traffic deaths and injuries, and increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility. The City has initiated a number of road safety campaigns designed to take measurable steps toward implementing Vision Zero Principles such as area speed limits, protected bike lanes, red light cameras and automated speed enforcement, roundabouts, pedestrian crossovers and more.

Safe Cities (2017):

Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces is a worldwide United Nations Women initiative that draws attention to the issue of violence against women and girls in public spaces including activities while using public transportation, recreation, and mobility spaces. In 2017, Council endorsed the safe cities initiative becoming the third Canadian city to participate, along with Winnipeg and Edmonton.

Complete Streets (2018):

The City's Complete Streets Design manual was approved by Council in 2018. London's vision for complete streets meets the needs of a wide range of users as defined by place type. Streets will feature high-quality pedestrian environments and integrate seamlessly with transit service, cycling networks and automobile users. Complete Streets provide physical environments that make all forms of mobility safe, attractive, comfortable, and efficient.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2018)

The City is committed to the principles of independence, dignity, integration, and equality of opportunity, as described in the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*. The term "disability" covers a range of visible and invisible conditions that may have been present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time. For instance, disabilities include visual impairment, deafness, brain injury, intellectual disabilities, or reliance on a mobility device, to name a few.

The 2018-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan outlines the next phase of changes to continue improving accessibility throughout the City of London. The Accessibility Plan recommendations include the following action to reduce physical barriers: "*Enhance existing sidewalk accessibility through the identification and construction of accessible features such as curb cuts, curb drops and missing building links to sidewalks and pathways.*"

Climate Emergency (2019):

Council approved a declaration of a climate emergency in 2019 and Civic Administration has developed tangible actions to reduce energy use and increase climate change mitigation and adaptation. One action was the development of a Climate Emergency Screening Tool (CEST). When applied to planned major transportation projects the CEST identified the reconstruction of strategic streets that are missing components of pedestrian, cycling or transit amenities as a cost-effective approach to enable sustainable mobility choices. Reviewing road projects from a complete streets and pedestrian connectivity perspective is another way to promote sustainable modes of travel and counteract the vehicle-focused trend known as "induced demand".

1.3 Annual Sidewalk Programs

There are 3 different programs under which new sidewalks can be installed in established neighbourhoods.

Local Road Reconstruction Program (LRRP): These local road projects involve reconstructing neighbourhood streets with poor pavement conditions. The scope of work generally includes new curb and sidewalks, replacing asphalt road base, upgrading underground services, and restoring the areas disturbed by construction to current standards where necessary. Projects are typically prioritized by street Pavement Quality Index (PQI). The annual Local Road Reconstruction program is designed in-house and construction is administered by the Construction Administration Division.

Infrastructure Lifecycle Renewal Program (ILRP): These projects can be driven by either sewer, water or transportation lifecycle renewal needs. Transportation driven projects are more often along higher order streets that likely already include sidewalk infrastructure. However, sewer or water driven projects may be required on local streets and could trigger the need for a new sidewalk if one does not exist. Projects are typically driven by strategic lifecycle needs and servicing area studies. The design and tender of ILRP projects are managed by the Environment and Infrastructure Service Areas and construction is administered by the Construction Administration Division.

New Sidewalk Program: The New Sidewalk Program follows a request-based process to identify locations for new sidewalks in existing communities. Requests from the neighbourhood often highlight gaps in the existing network. Projects are prioritized using a scoring system that includes pedestrian volumes, traffic volumes, network considerations, transit connectivity, schools, seniors' facilities, and road characteristics. There are currently over 130 requests on the new sidewalk project list. Projects under the New Sidewalks Program have in-house design and construction administration completed by the Transportation Planning and Design.

It is important the City provide a consistent approach when engaging the public. New sidewalks may be introduced through different programs, but the public only sees the impacts a new sidewalk will have on their street.

1.4 Public Response to Sidewalks in Existing Neighbourhoods

In keeping with the London Plan and the various policies supporting sidewalk infrastructure, road reconstruction project designs now strive to include sidewalks on both sides of the street unless there are specific constraints that may result in it being more desirable to include one, or in some cases, no sidewalks.

In recent years, this has led to debate within communities due a conflict between the goal of providing a safe and accessible mobility network and the desire to avoid neighbourhood impacts to existing trees, parking, and driveways. This debate has intensified over the last couple years as the London Plan policies came into full force and effect. The 2021 local road reconstruction project list included eight streets without an existing sidewalk, leading to an unprecedented number of community petitions and resident delegations protesting the inclusion of new sidewalk infrastructure in April 2021.

Specific arguments against sidewalks on individual streets varied considerably. Some presentations flagged concern for physical impacts such as loss of tree canopy, reduction in available driveway parking, damage to private landscaping and irrigation systems within the right of way and shifting pedestrian movements closer to the front of peoples' homes. Others disputed the need for a sidewalk on their street based on low traffic volumes, suggesting neighbours, including those using mobility devices, are comfortable sharing the roadway and would prefer to keep it that way.

Still, a common theme did emerge through the public response. Many presentations suggested support for the overarching intent of Mobility Policy 349 to provide better

connections in our communities, but disagreed with its blanket application to every street.

Following the street-by-street debate this past spring, six of eight streets received an exception from the mobility policy.

1.5 Sidewalks in New Subdivisions

This report is focused on addressing the challenges of implementing sidewalks in established neighbourhoods. A retrofit approach is not required in new subdivisions where current standards for draft plans of subdivision provide strong neighbourhood connection and natural walkability. Streets within new subdivisions do not meet the exemptions noted in Policy 349 and sidewalks will be constructed on both sides of all streets.

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connectivity Plans (NSCPs)

2018 Byron South Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connectivity Plan

The Byron South neighbourhood had a limited sidewalk network with many missing connections, forcing pedestrians to share the road with vehicles. Following resistance to a local sidewalk project and delegations to committee, a community conversation was suggested. In 2018, Council endorsed the recommended Byron South NSCP for implementation through the 2019 New Sidewalk Program.

A Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connectivity Plan was developed with the input of the staff at Byron Southwood Public School regarding school traffic patterns and entry points and of the public through a Public Information Centre (PIC). The PIC was well attended with 36 residents of which 68% were in support of the draft sidewalk connectivity plan. Taking all comments into account, staff proposed a plan that would improve accessibility and connectivity while balancing the impacts to residents within the City right of way. The plan added 1,100m of new sidewalk on four streets, a pedestrian crossover (PXO), and upgraded two intersections to stop signs.

While it was a lively community debate, the effort of taking a wholistic neighbourhood approach through an NSCP resulted in more sidewalk segments being constructed than was originally planned. Also, there were no further objections from residents when it came time to design and construct the sidewalks.

Using Byron South as a model, developing an NSCP approach to community engagement could benefit other similar neighbourhoods by establishing community endorsed plans that responsibly connect neighbourhoods, rather than debating sidewalks street-by-street.

Benefits of Applying Mobility Policy 349 at the Neighbourhood Level

Elevating the sidewalk discussion through an NSCP provides a mechanism to look beyond individual streets and identify safe travel paths to key neighbourhood destinations, services, and active spaces. By reviewing neighbourhood connectivity wholistically, sidewalk options can be considered where they will provide the greatest benefit without automatically assuming sidewalks on every street.

Reviewing all streets in a neighbourhood together provides the ability to identify strategic sidewalk connections. Whereas, reviewing individual streets in isolation can lead to problematic gaps in the network resulting from one-off exemptions. Community engagement at a neighbourhood level, as seen with the Byron South NSCP, can result in greater overall support for sidewalks and other mobility improvements.

An NSCP would consider observed pedestrian movements, traffic volumes, transit routes, institutional destinations, and community places. It would incorporate input from local school administrations and the “Active and Safe Routes to School” program. An NSCP enables more efficient engagement with other relevant community groups, such

as incorporating the input of accessibility advocacy groups and advisory committees.

Public engagement will still be required with each individual road reconstruction project. However, with an NSCP providing a blueprint for new sidewalk locations, the conversation can focus on finding the best fit design for streets where a sidewalk has been identified rather than debating if a sidewalk is warranted.

NSCP Policy Compliance

Reviewing mobility at the neighbourhood level to identify strategic sidewalk connections may result in streets with sidewalks on both sides, one side or no sidewalks. This approach would still meet the intent of relevant Council policies.

An NSCP would create an overall connectivity plan for the community in a manner that aligns with The London Plan policy. The exceptions outlined in Mobility Policy 349 call for sidewalks on one side of the street “in most cases”. An NSCP would improve accessibility for the community as a whole. The AODA describes standards for designing accessible sidewalks but does not specify “where” sidewalks should be constructed. Still, it will be important to engage local accessibility advocacy groups. The Complete Streets Manual speaks to making best efforts to implement as many complete streets elements as possible but recognizes that constraints may require the need to balance priorities.

Any effort to increase sidewalk connections would also align with several other Council priorities including Safe Cities, Age Friendly London and Climate Emergency.

How many NSCPs would be needed?

Streets without sidewalks are a common occurrence in North American cities, which largely reduced building them in the post Second World War period. Many of London’s subdivisions built in the 1950’s to 1970’s did not include sidewalks. Older Core neighbourhoods were designed in a grid pattern with sidewalks on both sides of almost all streets. Newer subdivisions are now designed with regard for walkability and vulnerable users and have sidewalks on both or one side of most streets. This has created a ring of legacy neighbourhoods between the historic core of the city and the newer subdivisions. **Appendix A** provides a map of existing sidewalk locations and areas that would benefit from an NSCP.

NSCP reviews would focus on established neighbourhoods within the legacy ring that would benefit most from a connectivity plan. Some larger communities may need to be further broken down into smaller areas, while other smaller community pockets might be merged based on shared destinations and similar conditions. A high-level review identified just over 20 neighbourhood “pockets” within existing Planning Districts that would benefit from a NSCP.

These connectivity plans would not need to be completed all at once. They could be staggered over several years to align with works planned for the following road reconstruction season or seasons. The New Sidewalk Program could work in tandem with planned roadworks to implement the NSCP, once established.

Ongoing Reconstruction of Streets Outside of an NSCP

There will be instances of infrastructure projects on streets with no sidewalks, but in neighbourhoods that are otherwise well-connected and do not warrant an NSCP. These situations will trigger Policy 349 and a review of sidewalk will be needed on an individual street basis. In these cases, it will be important to review individual streets with regard for the surrounding neighbourhood and ask the question “If this neighbourhood had a NSCP, would this street have likely been recommended for a sidewalk?”. While it is not possible to entirely avoid street-by-street sidewalk discussions, advancing NSCP for neighbourhoods with the greatest need for improved connectivity should capture a good portion of streets under a community engagement process.

2.2 NSCP Engagement at the Community Level

Subject to Council direction, staff would develop a community engagement strategy building on the experiences of the Byron South NSCP. There may be opportunities to apply engagement methods used by the Neighbourhood Decision Making process and utilize web-based community feedback tools developed to support engagement throughout Covid-19. At this point, the conversation would focus on community-wide goals and mobility needs, travel patterns associated with essential destinations and establishing a mutual understanding of pedestrian infrastructure requirements and the overall benefits of community connectivity.

A cross-functional working group would be assembled drawing upon expertise from Construction Administration, Transportation Planning & Design, Communications, the City's Accessibility Specialist, and Community Services. A consultant resource would be retained to create a framework for NSCP engagement that could be used on a trial basis in 2022 to inform the 2023 construction season. If successful, this program could be managed internally going forward following the established community engagement framework.

NSCPs would be brought forward for Council Approval. The intent would be for staff to recommend a connectivity plan for the area based on community feedback, agency input and council policy. Members of the public would have the opportunity to present community feedback through delegations to Council. Under this model, there would be a single sidewalk conversation for each neighbourhood, after which the Council approved NSCP would guide future road reconstruction projects in the area.

2.3 Project Engagement at the Street Level

While an NSCP would provide a blueprint for sidewalk connections in a neighbourhood, individual project engagement would still be required when it comes time to implement the sidewalk. This is the point when the conversation should focus on finding the best fit design for the street and help residents understand the design considerations available to mitigate impacts of adding a new sidewalk.

Design Considerations

Establishing a new sidewalk configuration on an existing street has a major influence on the road design and every project is unique. Staff apply due diligence in reviewing existing conditions against available design options. Designs have regard for trees and vegetation, existing driveways, on-street parking, emergency vehicle access, winter road maintenance and streetlighting when reviewing sidewalk configurations.

In establishing a design, City staff complete an assessment of potential impacts and mitigation strategies to address neighbourhood needs and concerns. The preferred alignment for new sidewalks includes a boulevard, but in many cases, sidewalks can be built adjacent to the curb or built fully or partly into the road width which can have the added benefit of slowing traffic. Where projects involve a new watermain, sidewalks may be placed along the restoration path of the watermain to minimize further street impacts.

The mitigation strategies used to reach a design solution that best balances competing design priorities will vary from street to street.

Project Design Timelines

The annual LRRP design process follows a tight timeline aligned to fit with other staff responsibilities throughout year. Surveys are completed in the spring/summer while the design staff are busy with field work for the current year's projects. The design staff then spend the winter preparing drawings and contract documents for spring tender. Local road reconstruction projects have become increasingly complex in recent years as servicing partners seek to align infrastructure renewal needs (sewers, watermains, streetlights).

The ILRP annual design process differs, in that larger projects retain external

consultants to undertake the project design. In many cases, these larger projects affect higher order streets that already include sidewalk infrastructure though that is not always the case.

2021 was the first construction year with Mobility Policy in full force and effect. Last year, residents were informed of upcoming projects that would introduce new sidewalks through three standard letter notifications:

1. Notice of Land Surveying Activities (sent in the spring of the year before construction start)
 - advising residents to expect City staff and consultants in the area investigating issues for design work ahead of a future infrastructure renewal construction project
2. Project Notice and Pre-construction Notice (sent approximately 3 - 6 months ahead of construction)
 - informing of project work details, such as tree impacts, timelines, and project contacts
 - providing details of project update meeting to learn about the project as well as impacts and mitigation
 - inviting residents to complete pre-construction questionnaire related to flowing, traffic and other neighbourhood considerations
3. Construction notice (sent approximately 2 weeks ahead of construction)
 - informing residents of the official start date of construction
 - providing additional construction details, such as staging information, and traffic impacts and mitigation

Larger IRP projects may offer a Project Update Meeting (PUM), however LRRP and in-house IRP designs typically have not held PUMs prior to 2021, before the London Plan sidewalks policy came into effect. In 2021, LRRP designs were shared through online engagement through the City's Get Involved engagement website. Special project pages were provided on Get Involved for residents to view pre-recorded presentations explaining the planned work and designs and send questions and comments to the project team.

Proposed Engagement Strategy

Public engagement for individual road reconstruction projects should be considered when developing the NSCP Community Engagement framework. The NSCP is just the first part of the story. The consultant assignment for community-level engagement should also provide recommendations on tactics to enhance opportunities for resident feedback when it comes time to construct the projects where new sidewalks are planned.

Opportunities to enhance public engagement on a street-by-street basis could include:

- Expanding early project notices to include education on mobility policies, design considerations and options for mitigating impacts of a new sidewalk.
- Offering a facilitated resident webinar using the Q&A tool to collect feedback and share information with neighbours.
- Promote the great project information available on the Get Involved and Renew Road Reconstruction websites.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

3.1 Budget Implications

The annual life cycle renewal funding to support new sidewalks is financed through multiple sources aligned with the various sidewalk programs described above.

- New Sidewalks Program
- Road Network Improvements Accounts

The budget implications of implementing a NSCP program would not be substantial. The anticipated cost of retaining a consultant to develop a NSCP community engagement framework is expected to be less than \$50,000. This one-time cost would be funded from a capital account that funds the transportation components of ILRP and IRLP accounts.

Once an NSCP framework is established and proven, the ongoing completion of connection plans could be managed in-house with support from the cross-functional working group. Ideally, moving to a NSCP approach for sidewalk engagement should lead to a reduction in staff resource demands over the current street-by-street approach.

4.0 Key Issues and Considerations

4.1. 2022 Project List

Should Council direct staff to develop a community-level approach for sidewalk engagement, 2022 would represent a transition year. Projects already planned for 2022 would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Meanwhile, an NSCP framework would be developed and tested in two or three neighbourhoods to inform 2023 road and underground infrastructure reconstruction projects.

The 2022 LRRP list includes 16 streets, most of which have existing sidewalks or meet the exemptions noted in the London Plan. Two LRRP streets identified for 2022 will trigger Policy 349. Staff are recommending deferring these projects to 2023. Both are in a pocket of the Medway Planning District that would provide a good opportunity to trial an NSCP. The budget for these deferred projects will be used to advance pressing mat replacement repairs, which do not trigger the need for a sidewalk.

The 2022 ILRP list includes 16 streets, several of which do not have existing sidewalk infrastructure and will trigger Policy 349. The timing of ILRP projects is typically driven by overarching lifecycle renewal needs related to aging infrastructure and is strategically linked to other planned underground infrastructure projects making scheduling less flexible. Five of the ILRP streets with no sidewalks fall within neighbourhoods that are otherwise well connected. Therefore, sidewalks will need to be reviewed independent of an NSCP. Given the critical infrastructure needs driving these projects, staff is recommending they proceed.

Two other ILRP streets with no sidewalks are located in a neighbourhood pocket that would benefit from an NSCP. Staff is recommending proceeding with these two projects in parallel with establishing a trial NSCP for the neighbourhood to inform other projects planned in the area over the next 5-10 years.

The “New Sidewalk Project List 2022” companion report included on this agenda provides a summary of road reconstruction projects planned for 2022 including whether they trigger Mobility Policy 349 and recommendations for how they should proceed.

Conclusion

Sidewalks are a critical piece of infrastructure that increase safety, encourage active travel, improve accessibility, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and benefit all ages and abilities. Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connectivity Plans will guide communities in thinking holistically about connectivity in their neighbourhood. Planning for deliberate engagement about sidewalks at both the neighbourhood and street level creates the opportunity for residents to learn more about pedestrian experiences and generate important conversations about improving access to essential places.

Subject to Council direction, staff will develop a community engagement framework for creating Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connectivity Plans in legacy areas of the City with poor sidewalk connectivity. The framework will consider engagement opportunities at both the neighbourhood and street level and be implemented on a trial basis over the next two years. NSCPs will inform future road reconstruction and New Sidewalk Program planning and design starting in 2023.

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Recommended by: **Kelly Scherr, P. Eng., MBA, FEC, Deputy City Manager, Environment & Infrastructure**

Attachments: Map of areas that would benefit from a Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connection Plan

cc. Cheryl Smith
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Appendix A: Areas that would benefit from a Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connection Plan

