

WALK21 - VIII
Toronto, Canada, October 2007
'putting pedestrians first'

Conference Conclusions

1. The publication of an International Charter for Walking has been universally welcomed as a practical tool to help secure political support, benchmark current activity and steer future policy and investment. When senior politicians sign The Charter they should be encouraged to commit to a Walking Action Plan at the same time to ensure a programme of measurable benefits are delivered to encourage and support more walking. Practical experiences should be shared and inform the development of national and international best practice.

2. Professionals should not feel restricted to trails, footways and shopping centres as the only spaces to be made available for people to walk. When communities have more space to walk they become more liveable places. Opening streets (reallocating space in favour of pedestrians) and sharing space with vehicles can improve a community's sense of place, safety and comfort. Designs should be consultative and inclusive to ensure that all walkers, whatever their abilities, remain confident in using and enjoying them independently.

3. Individual and social marketing programmes promoting walking for health and for everyday travel are increasingly successful in motivating people to walk more. Programmes and interventions that can demonstrate evidence of overcoming social, cultural and institutional barriers to walking need to be shared more at an international level to inform the development of best practice.

4. We have an ethical responsibility to ensure that the positive emotional and spiritual responses - which are known to increase happiness and a sense of well being when walking - are not ignored by social policies and public realm investments. Communities need to be designed and managed to support routine relaxation and connection to nature, and to provide places that move the spirit, where people can't stop smiling.

5. Encouraging more people to walk will make a major contribution to reducing the rate of climate change. Walk21 seeks to work with eight communities in each of the North American, European and Asia-Pacific Regions:

- to facilitate the development and delivery of local Walking Action Plans;
- to develop international best practice on the eight principles of the International Charter for Walking;
- to launch a Best Practice Handbook on Walking and Climate Change at the United Nations Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Walkability Roadshow

Street networks

All the communities had (at least in some part) an urban fabric that is a sound foundation for supporting walkable communities. Many of the downtowns are designed on a grid system, which provides high levels of connectivity and capacity for providing alternative routes for vehicles or were small and compact enough for people to walk. And there is certainly plenty of space to reallocate! Road diets were an idea that found fertile ground amongst participants.

Open the streets!

Many communities identified opportunities for closing roads to traffic and opening them to people, particularly during the summer months. Maps with travel time (not just distance) marked on via minute circles (5, 10, 15mins) were identified as a great way to promote walking and encourage people to realise how close destinations actually are.

Transport planning

The need to comprehensively integrate walking with other transport modes and to incorporate trails into transport plans and maps was identified by many communities. Combining these two documents will help balance the provision for all modes. The option of actually putting pedestrians at the top of a road user hierarchy – ‘pedestrians first!’ was a revelation to many, but readily embraced as a great way forward and an essential underpinning to all future decisions.

Crossing points

In communities where the road system is so big and wide and provision at intersections gives priority to motor vehicles, there is a strong need to pay careful attention to how pedestrians cross the road. Unfortunately the experts observed poor quality crossing points for pedestrians in all communities and often where they needed the best provision. Situations like allowing vehicles to turn on a red light, short crossing times, inconsistent request buttons and crossings where people have to give way to motor vehicles all undermine the status of pedestrians within the system and create confusion that can lead to unsafe actions by both walkers and drivers. Good crossing opportunities are essential for reducing the severance impact of the road system and supporting people to choose to walk.

‘It has given us the language and confidence to ask for what we want’

‘It has built trust and relationships within our council that we continue to grow’

‘it has kicked my mind into a different gear’

Youth Forum

Toronto Walk21 2007 saw the launch of Walk21's first ever youth component: the YWALK Youth Forum. Throughout the summer leading up to the Forum, a steering committee of thirteen Toronto teenagers helped plan this full-day event. The morning focused on inspiration and the afternoon on empowerment. Before lunch, presentations, skits and videos showcased young people already active in environmental and sustainable transportation projects. After lunch, several of these presenters led smaller break-out sessions offering tools and resources for the delegates to bring these projects back to their community.

David Godri, a recent graduate of a Toronto secondary school, did a spectacular job as keynote. Mr. Godri is the founder of SWITCH – a youth-driven non-profit organization responsible for the installation of solar-panels on school roofs. His work is an example of collaboration with the School Board and his key message: *'We need to be the innovators of change because it is not the job of big bureaucracies like the School Board to initiate change.'*

The YWALK Youth Forum attracted 120 participants - the average age being 15.5 years old. *Confidence* was listed as the most valuable lesson learned or tool gained that could be brought back to school. Many delegates recognised for that sustainable transport was a real means of helping themselves, their school and their family reduce their ecological footprint. And, as a means of sustaining the Forum's enthusiasm, participants were asked to list a goal that they would like to work on. The ongoing progress of these projects can be viewed at <http://ywalk.dreamnow.org>

World Record Walk

The World Record Walk was a huge success with people joining all across Canada. As of October 30 the unofficial total number of participants was 197,333! The deadline for event organizers to send us their verification documents is November 12 and we believe this number will go much higher. Results will be posted to <http://www.worldrecordwalk.ca>.