

## **Pedestrian Mobility Plan is big step for pedestrian safety, equity, economic development and revitalization**

### **City staff present a detailed walkability strategy to Hamilton's Councillors on Wednesday**

*By Sara Mayo, Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton  
November 4, 2013*

Almost every week in the past few months, there's been news of steps towards making Hamilton's streets safer for pedestrians: new [painted cross walks](#), and [pedestrian signals](#) are popping up all over the city.

While positive, these small steps are not enough. There's a glaring need in our city for a more comprehensive, coordinated and transparent strategy to make our streets safer and more convenient for pedestrians along with modern, clearly defined, rules for what kinds of changes can and must be made to our streets to get to the goal of a more walkable city made up of complete streets.

This month promises a big step towards an effective strategy and helpful rules to bring complete streets across Hamilton, if City Council adopts the [Pedestrian Mobility Plan recently released by City staff](#).

The full plan, including the accompanying staff report, is a massive 244 pages. The summary below is intended to help interested residents understand in detail both the good and not as good parts of this plan and how this plan relates to [a complete streets policy](#).

### **'Pedestrians experience the streetscape more intimately' so more attention to their needs is required**

Hamilton is the first city in Canada to consider such a detailed Pedestrian Mobility Plan, and the Plan gives a good explanation of why pedestrians need specific attention to their experience of our streets:

"More attention to Detail is needed: Pedestrians experience the streetscape much more intimately than cyclists or motorists because they are traveling slower and interact much more with the streetscape. Consequently, more attention to detailed design is needed to create interesting pedestrian environments. The context areas developed in this Pedestrian Mobility Plan are intended to focus attention on this detail and the improvements that are needed for each specific area."

The Plan's six goals are a definite step forward for the city, but still realistically achievable, with most being doable in the relatively near term if the plan's strategies and tactics are adopted:

- Creating healthy, efficient and sustainable communities where people

choose to walk.

- To increase the number of people walking in the City.
- To provide a pedestrian environment that ensures personal safety and an attractive and interesting walking environment.
- To increase public health, active transportation and pedestrian links.
- To improve pedestrian movement by focusing on access to community institutions, recreational and leisure opportunities and employment and retail services.
- Create a walkable City to attract new residents.

At the centre of the Pedestrian Mobility Plan, is a, frankly, *pedestrian* term: Routine Accommodation. Before you roll your eyes and stop reading, let me give you the good news that very boring sounding name is actually a significant change for our city. Routine Accommodation simply means that street improvements for pedestrian will be added by default to all construction, reconstruction, and maintenance activities on our roads. No additional Environmental Assessment requirements, no special motion at council needed, instead incrementally, one by one, each of streets becomes more walkable over a period of about 20 years. Routine Accommodation solves the question of how to we improve each of our streets without adding enormous costs and construction time.

Along with Routine Accommodation, the Plan calls for a complete reversal in how our streets are designed. Currently roads are designed from the centre line out – determining how much space vehicles need and then whatever’s left over can be space for pedestrians and/or cyclists. The plan explicitly reverses this, and the accompanying staff report highlights it this way: “Council’s endorsement of the Pedestrian Mobility Plan authorizes and directs a shift from traditional road design by starting with the requirements for pedestrians and cyclists first at the right of way (ROW) and working to the centre line”. Lest any drivers complain that no room will be left for them, staff are also clear that the city should “[provide] for pedestrians’ needs while accommodating vehicular traffic”.

### **36 countermeasures to improve pedestrian safety and access**

The Plan calls for the Routine Accommodation strategy is to be implemented through a selection of one or more of 36 specific “countermeasures” that give photo examples of best practices from cities all over North America, along with an estimate (where data is available) of the reduction in pedestrian collisions (ranging from 5% to 70%) for each of these countermeasures.

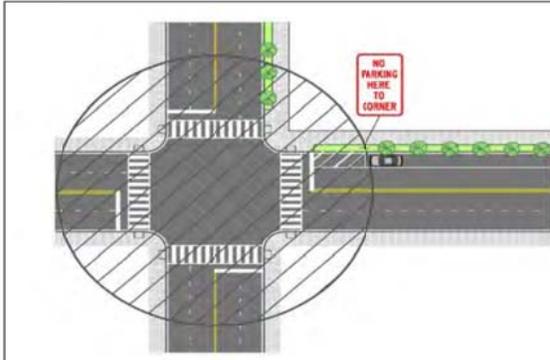
Many of these countermeasures are already present on some of Hamilton’s streets, but the Pedestrian Mobility Plan decrees that these be put on supercharge and applied to as many streets as possible. For example, the plan includes in the “Toolbox” for staff to consider:

- Increasing the length of sidewalk where parking is restricted near intersections to ensure better sight lines. (Countermeasure #1)

Crash Reduction Factor: ITE reports a 49% decrease in all crashes when parking is restricted near an intersection.

Reference/Guidance

- NCHRP Report 500, Volume 10, 2004



The City currently restricts parking within 6 m of an intersection.

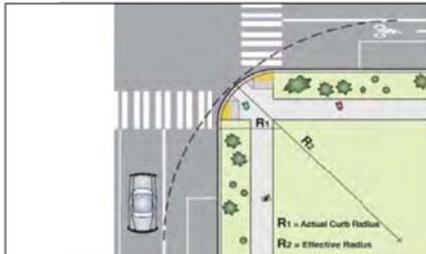
Restricting vehicles from parking a given distance from intersections improves sight lines and pedestrian safety at crossings.

- Making the “curb radius” at intersections is smaller so that drivers are forced to slow down before turning. (Countermeasure #5)

Crash Reduction Factor: Research Incomplete

Reference/Guidance

- PEDSAFE—Curb Radius Reduction
- FHWA - Signalized Intersections: Informational Guide, 9.1.1, Reduce Curb Radius



The effective radius should include the width of parking lanes and bicycle lanes, where present, on both streets.

Small curb radii, prevalent in the downtown area, slow the movement of turning vehicles.

The Plan’s pictures of Hamilton generally focus on area where the city gets it right. As a contrast below is a picture of where the city gets curb radius wrong, made all the worse because it is a very high pedestrian area (Fennel and West 5<sup>th</sup>). The red line shows how a tighter curb radius would give more room to pedestrians, allow them to have a more direct path of travel to an intersection, and force cars to slow down when turning right. (Note this picture was taken before the start of the Fall semester at Mohawk, when there would be many more pedestrians.) So the Plan’s specific direction about paying more attention to curb radius issues is very welcome.

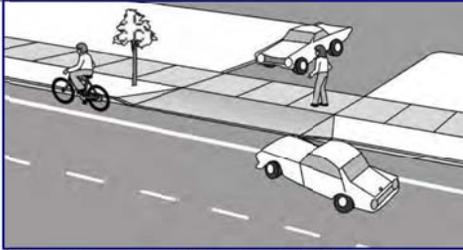


- Changing driveway design so that the sidewalk stays continuous and driveways no longer resemble intersections (which make drivers forget about pedestrians). (Countermeasure #7)

Crash Reduction Factor: Research incomplete

Reference/Guidance

- PEDSAFE--Driveways



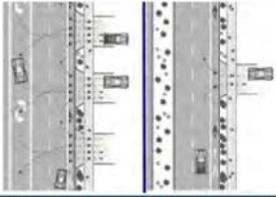
The sidewalk zone should be clearly delineated across the driveway.



This driveway in Hamilton is a good example extending the sidewalk design through the driveway.

- Consolidating driveways out of shopping mall developments so that pedestrians only have one or two driveways crossing the sidewalk, instead of three or more. (Countermeasure #8)

<p><b>Crash Reduction Factor:</b> Varies depending on access management is achieved, e.g., medians, driveway closure, minimum spacing. CRF= 5%-31%</p>	<p><b>Reference/Guidance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FHWA--Access Management Publications and Resources</li> <li>• TRB—Accessmanagement.org, Access Management Manual</li> <li>• NCHRP Report 548: A Guidebook for Including Access Management in Transportation Planning</li> <li>• FHWA--Proven Safety Countermeasures: Corridor Access Management</li> </ul>
--	--

	
<p>Consolidating driveways can improve conditions for pedestrians.</p>	<p>Access management often involves both median installation and driveway consolidation.</p>

- Narrowing traffic lanes (Countermeasure #16: Lane Diet) or removing lanes (Countermeasure #28: Road Diet)

<p><b>Crash Reduction Factor:</b> Research Incomplete</p>	<p><b>Reference/Guidance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PEDSAFE—Roadway Narrowing</li> <li>• PBIC—The Truth About Lane Widths</li> <li>• TRB—Relationship of Lane Width to Safety on Urban and Suburban Arterials</li> <li>• 2011 AASHTO Green Book</li> <li>• FHWA – Evaluation of Lane Reduction</li> </ul>
---	---

	
<p>Travel lanes narrowed to create space for a crossing island and bike lanes</p>	<p>Travel lanes were narrowed to create space for bicycle lanes.</p>

<p><b>Crash Reduction Factor:</b> 29% for all types of crashes. Unknown specifically for pedestrians.</p>	<p><b>Reference/Guidance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FHWA—Proven Safety Countermeasures: Road Diet</li> <li>• FHWA—Evaluation of Lane Reduction “Road Diet” Measures and Their Effects on Crashes and Injuries</li> <li>• Walkable Communities—Road Diets: Fixing the Big Roads</li> <li>• ITE—Road Diet Handbook: Setting Trends for Livable Streets</li> </ul>
---	---

	
<p>Road diet (Before)</p>	<p>Road diet (After)</p>

- Ensuring that parking is always behind buildings, not between sidewalks and business entrances. (Countermeasure #15)

Crash Reduction Factor:	Reference/Guidance
TBD Research incomplete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AASHTO—Guide for the Planning, Design, and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities</li> <li>• FHWA—University Course on Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation</li> </ul>



### Better sidewalks, buffers and trees

The plan also calls for more consistent approach to sidewalks, with the city taking more steps to make sure that pedestrians *always* have at least 1.5m of clear space, so that two people can walk side-by-side. To remedy situations like the ones in the photo below the plan recommends the city “work with utility companies to ensure that they do not place poles and control boxes in the pedestrian zone and that they do not cause sight obstructions at intersections” (Countermeasure #3 Clearance from Obstructions). And the plan is clear this direction applies to existing utility poles as well, as Countermeasure #31 Sidewalks includes the direction: “Remove or provide access (adequate sidewalk width) around sidewalk obstructions such as utility poles.”



The plan also recommends that all sidewalks have buffers from car traffic: “Buffers between pedestrians and motor vehicle traffic are important to provide greater levels of comfort, security, and safety to pedestrians”. On many streets we already have a buffer via parked cars. But for our many sidewalks with no buffer, the Plan says (in one of the more urgently worded sections): “Providing buffers should be a priority for all sidewalks. Lane diets, road diets, bicycle lanes and sidewalk widening are strategies that can be used to provide greater separation between the sidewalk and traffic lanes.”

Street trees are one of the recommended countermeasures (#33), with the Plan recommending City staff “consider street trees as part of all street design projects including annual repaving projects” and “Require all new private development to provide streets trees as a component of street frontage improvements”. The plan notes that “Currently, street trees are generally not allocated an adequate space for the amount of soil, width of tree pit or area needed to properly grow a tree”, and specifies improvements to help trees grow properly.”

The plan lists some of the benefits of streets trees including calming traffic “by narrowing the visual width of the roadway”. But the plan neglects to mention the [important air quality improvements of street trees](#), and with last month’s recent news of the [direct link between air pollution and cancer](#) and the [pattern of lung cancer rates in Hamilton’s neighbourhoods](#), street trees become even more vital.

### **Missed opportunities to make better argument about economic development revitalization and mental health benefits**

In what is one of the weaker aspects of the Plan, there is a lost opportunity here and in many sections of the plan to make a clearer link between pedestrian improvements like buffers and street trees and overall beautification of our city, and [how these help in “Placemaking”](#) which promotes [economic development](#) and [revitalization](#). Hamilton’s own Chamber of Commerce has been quite [vocal](#) in saying that “walkability is closely tied to quality of life, which in turn is closely tied to the attraction and retention of the highly desirable creative class” – a workforce demographic sought after by many businesses.

In another conspicuous omission, the plan does have a section outlining some of the physical health benefits of complete streets, but makes no mention of the [growing body of evidence](#) on the benefits of walkability and placemaking on [mental health](#), an urgent issue in [Hamilton](#) and across Canada.

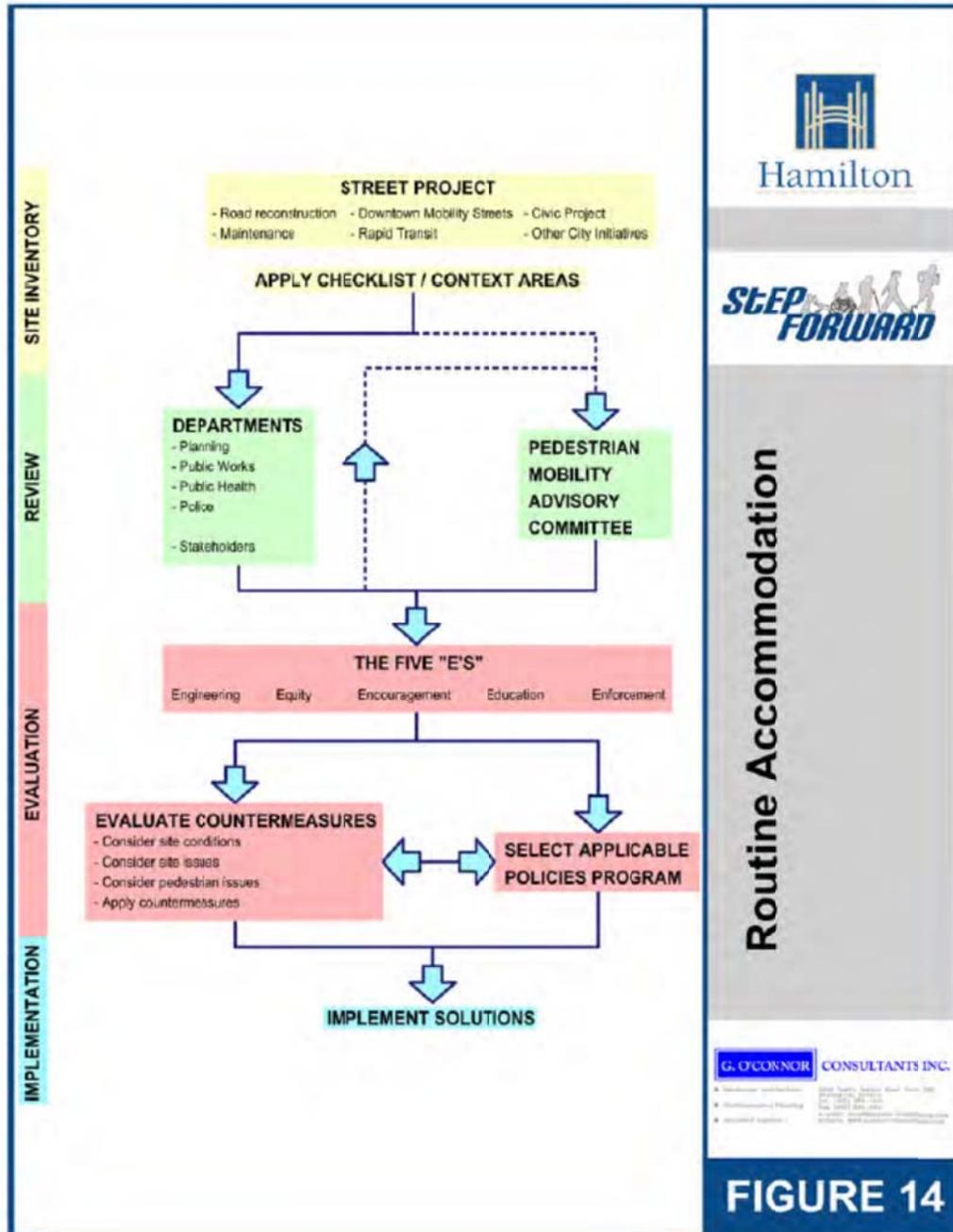
### **Implementation of Routine Accommodations and Countermeasures**

One of the Plan’s strengths is the level of detail provided about how the Routine Accommodation strategy is to be implemented by City staff. The summary graphic provided below is just a summary of a fairly complete process described in the text of the Plan. The three major implementation steps include:

1. The process starts in a **complete streets checklist** that is to be filled with information such as local context (natural, rural, village-hamlet, suburban, urban general, urban core, etc.) and use of the street (neighbourhood, arterial, collector, etc.), current pavement markings, traffic signals, etc.. Strangely, the actual checklist form is missing from the report, so presumably the checklist process also includes the volume of all different types of users. A Complete Streets approach would also include the assumption that the volume of pedestrians and cyclists will increase if better infrastructure is provided for them. When the checklist is ready, I would hope the city makes it public to increase the transparency of its decision-making. One important way for the city to increase its accountability would be to release the completed checklists for each project as well. The plan more or less calls for this, via a recommendation to “maintain pedestrian updates on the City website as part of ongoing public outreach.”

2. Next City staff from all relevant departments, including public health, are involved in the decision-making process, as well as a recommended “**Mobility Advisory Committee**” (made up of residents, the details of which are not yet decided). Then staff are to **apply the 5 “E”s**. It is very refreshing to see along with **engineering, encouragement, education and enforcement**, that **equity** is included as one of the criteria for decision-making. The Plan defines equity as “addressing community equity issues, such as the mobility of its citizens between the ages of 8 and 80, no matter their abilities”. The staff report accompanying the report further adds “and the neighbourhood initiatives being undertaken to address poverty” to the definition of equity.

3. Finally, **all 36 countermeasures are examined to see if they fit for the context and desired outcome**. The Plan has pre-scored each countermeasure on a series of outcomes such as natural environment, public health, safety, interface with other modes of transport, creating a culture of walking, and conformity to municipal and provincial policies. **They have also pre-scored “Do Nothing”, which gets a -1 score on almost all criteria**, for a total score of -17. This is another paradigm shift that now the cost and lost opportunities of doing nothings is now more explicit in the city’s decision-making processes.



### Where to start and how it will impact budgets

The question of where to focus the most attention and resources to improve the walkability of our city comes up a few times in the report. While the Routine Accommodation strategy will eventually improve streets across the city, the Plan notes that the lower city has many more pedestrian trips, and should be a focus for particular attention. The Plan calls more specifically for City staff to support the implementation of pedestrian improvements in the areas of the city's part of the [Neighbourhood Development Strategy](#). Linking the Plan with neighbourhood

development makes sense, since almost all neighbourhood plans already include traffic calming and street improvements. [Using this approach is an important way that the city can help to reduce economic, social and health disparities between neighbourhoods.](#) Treating all neighbourhoods equally would only reinforce these inequalities.

In general the staff report is a faithful summary of the Plan, which was prepared by a consulting firm (G. O'Connor Consultants Inc.). One notable exception is that the Plan recommends hiring a full-time Pedestrian Coordinator who can monitor the implementation of the plan. City staff do not recommend to Council that more staff is needed, and say "there are no immediate staff impacts at this time". They do leave the door open to a request at a later time. Just adding pedestrian-related work to already very staff may not be a realistic strategy is the city is serious about fully implementing this plan. The staff do include in their recommendations that Council "understand that implementing this plan will add about 2-7% to costs of road projects". They don't however list any of the economic benefits and savings that can mitigate that extra cost.

### **Pedestrian Plan is a partial Complete Streets policy**

This Plan includes many similar [components to a complete streets policy](#). In fact, the Plan's central strategy, Routine Accommodation, is an older term developed by pedestrian and cycling advocates and more recently re-branded to the more inclusive and inspiring term "Complete Streets". Here's a quick overview of how I think this Plan stacks up against the most important Complete Streets elements cited by [Complete Streets for Canada](#):

<a href="#">Complete Streets policy element</a>	<b>Pedestrian Mobility Plan</b>
Strong language and intent	Good
All users and modes	Good
Applies to all projects	Very good
Clear exception procedures	Not clear
Encourages connectivity	Good
Cites use of latest and best design criteria	Very good
States community context	Very good
Performance measures	Not clear
Implementation plan	Very good

The main reasons that the City must still adopt a complete streets policy, even if they adopt this Pedestrian Mobility Plan, are:

- There is no acknowledgement in this plan that on some streets, there won't be the physical space, the perceived political will, or enough pedestrians to justify the extra costs (in the opinion of City staff) to make changes to better accommodate pedestrians. A strong exception mechanism in a Complete Streets policy incorporates this reality, but makes sure that exceptions are well documented and approved at a high

level, so that the public can better understand why these decisions were made and staff become more accountable for these exceptions when they do occur.

- Despite its focus on pedestrian issues, the plan is clearly supportive of transit and cycling as well. A Complete Streets policy, however, is more explicit about listing all users, so that no one is “an afterthought”.
- Similarly, due to the main focus on pedestrians, not all changes that could improve our streets are listed. The 36 countermeasures documented in the plan are a great start for Hamilton-specific Complete Streets guidelines. Preparing these guidelines in other cities have been key to implementation of Complete Streets.
- Lastly, the Plan does not recommend that the City seriously examine its performance measures when it comes to deciding when a street is performing well or not. Currently, the main measure used is “Level of Service” which is focused on motor vehicles and making sure they can move as fast as possible through our city. The draft Complete Streets that we have prepared lists other measures that better measure how a street helps or hinders all users from getting to their destinations.

The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton along with partners have been calling for the city to adopt a Complete Streets policy. While the SPRC fully supports this Pedestrian Mobility Plan, a full Complete Street policy remains a priority so that we can reap in the economic, social and health benefits that will come from streets that better serve all users.

We encourage groups and residents who want to [make a deputation](#) or send a letter/email to the General Issues Committee of Council, or to their [councillor](#) about this plan. Please contact me at [smayo@sprc.hamilton.on.ca](mailto:smayo@sprc.hamilton.on.ca) or 905-522-1148 ext. 310 if you need any help at all with preparing your deputation or letter.