

Transit-Supportive Guidelines

Canadian Institute of Planners
2012 Awards for Planning Excellence
Award Category: Planning Publications



Project Summary

We would like to nominate the Ontario Transit-Supportive Guidelines for the 2012 CIP Awards for Planning Excellence. The Transit-Supportive Guidelines constitute a lasting contribution to planning in Canada by providing, in an accessible and graphic format, a comprehensive resource for planners striving to create environments that are supportive of transit and providing management strategies, tools and technologies to support increased transit ridership.

In 1992, the Ontario Ministries of Transportation and Municipal Affairs and Housing published the Transit-Supportive Land Use Planning Guidelines. At the time, the concept of transit-oriented development was not yet a common feature of planning practice. Ontario's 1992 Guidelines broke ground by providing a resource for municipalities, planners, politicians, developers and transit operators on planning and developing communities and transit facilities that support transit investments and the use of public transit. The 1992 Guidelines were focussed on transit-friendly land use planning and urban design practices.

Since 1992, the Ontario government has established policies and programs such as the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and the Provincial Policy Statement, 2005, to manage growth, encourage more livable and walkable communities and to develop sustainable, multi-modal transportation networks. At the same time, Ontario has made transit ridership growth a priority through its Dedicated Gas Tax Program, which provides funding directly to municipalities to deliver and expand transit services.

In response to these shifts in the policy environment, the Ministry of Transportation undertook a significant update and expansion of the 1992 Guidelines to support the province's direction toward more transportation choices and compact communities. The new Transit-Supportive Guidelines are a response to new policy frameworks, emerging ideas and lessons from a generation of transit-supportive communities.

The updated and expanded Guidelines are a distillation of transit-friendly land use planning, urban design and operational practices, drawing from experiences in Ontario, elsewhere in North America and abroad. They include over 50 guidelines and almost 450 strategies to assist urban planners, transit planners, developers and others in creating an environment that is supportive of transit and increasing transit ridership.

The purpose of the guidelines is to provide municipalities and other planning authorities an important reference in their planning and decision-making processes. The guidelines are not a statement of provincial policy but rather, are a means for the Province to present ways of meeting the objective of building transit-supportive communities in support of provincial plans, policies and directions.

Understanding that transit-supportive planning requires coordination among a broad range of participants, from community planners to transit agencies, the guidelines include considerations related to both planning and transit operations. They include transit-supportive principles and strategies to promote development patterns that make transit less expensive, less circuitous and more convenient, and to enhance the service and operational characteristics of transit systems to make them more attractive to potential transit users.

The document places a significant emphasis on creating a pattern of development within existing communities and new development that is capable of supporting increased transit ridership in existing systems and helping to facilitate the establishment of new transit systems. For smaller centres the document provides tools and strategies to create a more compact land use pattern supportive of walking and cycling, optimize the effectiveness of existing or future transit services, retain ridership and better target transit service. For mid-size or larger cities, the guideline provides guidance to better utilize existing infrastructure, grow ridership and manage urban growth in a more transit-supportive manner.

The document is divided into four key sections:

Section 1: Community-Wide Guidelines,

Section 2: District-level and Site-Specific Guidelines,

Section 3: Transit Improvement Strategies, and

Section 4: Implementation.

It is meant to be read as a whole. However, the many participants involved in the creation and operation of transit and the development of our towns and cities mean that this guideline will likely be used in different ways:

- Municipal planners reviewing a development application or property developers, land-use and urban design professionals working on development applications may focus more on the District-Level and Site-Specific Guidelines;
- A municipality drafting a new official plan or secondary plan may focus on the Community-Wide Guidelines;
- A university trying to better integrate transit into their campus may focus on the Specialized Uses Section;
- Transit agencies and transit service providers wishing to improve service or grow transit ridership might focus more on the Transit Improvement Guidelines; and
- Regions and municipalities preparing for transit might focus on the System Service and Operations guidelines and Ridership Strategies guidelines within the Transit Improvement Guidelines chapter.

The document concludes with a series of case studies, a glossary and index.

Evaluation Criteria

Innovation & Contribution to the Profession

A comprehensive document bringing together both land use planning and transit improvement strategies.

The 2012 Transit-Supportive Guidelines is a comprehensive reference tool that assembles in one location a broad range of planning, design and operational strategies to enhance the transit-supportiveness of our towns and cities. The strategies range from larger community-wide issues such as community structure and regional mobility planning, to district and site specific strategies such as the layout of local streets and open spaces, the design of buildings and responding to the unique characteristics of specialized uses such as employment or retail areas.

Recognizing that the creation of transit-supportive communities requires both supportive land use patterns and the effective delivery of transit service, the document incorporates a new, full length Transit Improvement Guidelines chapter. The chapter provide guidance on a whole range of topics not usually found in a land use and planning guideline document including opportunities to improve system operations, fare collection and quality of service, all of which are paramount to improving user experience and increasing ridership.

A document intended to assist planners in communities of all sizes

The document is intended to inform planners working in both large and small communities. The guideline includes a range of topics specifically targeted to small and mid-sized communities, including planning of rural settlement areas, creating and expanding transit service areas, and implementation of demand responsive transit services, as well as several in-depth case studies illustrating innovative transit-supportive initiatives undertaken by smaller centres and rural areas. Throughout the document strategies intended primarily for larger communities and those intended for smaller towns are identified for easy reference.

Designed as a living internet-friendly resource

Since the publication of the original 1992 guideline, the internet has changed the way planners and designers access information. The updated guideline has been designed with this in mind and includes active links throughout. This allows users to travel through the document much as they would a web page, with active links taking them to different sections of the document and between related sections. A built-in link to the table of contents is included on each page. Additionally, recommended resources and case studies for each topic area are linked directly to external websites and other sources of information so that the guideline can act as a living reference document for practitioners.

Method

The guidelines were written over the course of a year between May 2010 and August 2011.

In 2009, before work began, a core working group was formed with representatives from provincial ministries and agencies, municipalities, transit agencies and planning and development associations who lent their time and expertise to the project. Starting with the 1992 document as a base and with input from the working group, a table of contents was crafted and refined. The topic areas were identified by starting from the larger regional planning scale and working through the scales of planning influence to service, operations and ridership aspects. For each topic area an overall objective and rationale were identified followed by a series of approximately 5 to 10 key strategies.

Topics and strategies were identified through a review of best practice literature and precedents from across North America and worldwide, and confirmed through consultation with the working group and the public. The working group and later public review through the environmental registry was instrumental in bringing forward suggested revisions and material for inclusion in the document, including resources, images and case studies. Throughout the crafting of the document, language was tested for clarity and directness. Where metrics are provided they were identified through a more detailed precedent review and confirmed through interministerial discussions where appropriate.

Clarity of Goals and Objectives

Though broad in scope, the Ontario Transit-Supportive Guidelines create a succinct resource for planners, transit planners and developers wishing to create an environment or develop programs and services that are supportive of transit and can help to increase transit ridership. The document is structured around four broad themes:

- **Community-Wide Guidelines**, which set the stage for the creation of transit-supportive communities through a range of higher level planning strategies;
- **District-Level and Site-Specific Guidelines**, which contain a series of more detailed design guidelines relating to streets, built form, and unique uses;
- **Transit Improvement Guidelines**, which provide an overview of transit improvement programs, innovations and services that can help to increase transit ridership; and
- **Implementation**, containing an overview of the implementation tools that can be used to achieve the principles and guidelines within the document.

The document concludes with a series of best practice case studies, a glossary of terms, an index and a summary of resources and references.

Each theme contains a range of subject areas (such as Creating Complete Streets) and related topics (such as Supporting Pedestrians). For each topic, a succinct objective is provided and followed by a more detailed supporting rationale. Strategies are numbered for ease of reference and each is identified with a planning scale (Site, District, Municipal, Regional) indicating the level at which the strategy might be implemented.

Implementation

An implementation section that focuses on more than the planning process, with guidance on inspiring change and adapting traditional planning tools to transit-supportive initiatives.

The document concludes in Chapter 4 with a range of implementation tools that can be used to achieve the principles of the guidelines. In addition to identifying tools and mechanisms for implementation, the chapter places a significant emphasis on inspiring community change. The purpose is to assist planners in building broader support for initiatives including effectively communicating the benefits of transit investment, tying transit initiatives in to broader community objectives, undertaking effective consultation and building community partnerships. A series of innovative approaches encouraging the adaptation of traditional planning tools and mechanisms to support transit-supportive planning and design are also presented.

A widely distributed document

Since their completion the guidelines have been translated into both English and French and posted on the Ministry's website for wide distribution in printable PDF and accessible HTML format. Users can access individual chapters online or download a complete copy of the document for their own personal use.

In addition to the English and French web versions posted online, and to promote the document and educate the broader community about the document, the Province is currently undertaking an outreach program that includes:

- The distribution of pamphlets to municipal planners, transit agencies and provincial departments throughout the province. Each pamphlet clearly lays out the benefits of transit-supportive planning for

communities large and small and can be unfolded into a small, colourful poster illustrating the guideline's 'top 10' transit-supportive strategies.

- The printing and distribution of copies of the guidelines to each municipal planning department and transit agency in the province.
- Promotion of the document through journal articles, workshops and presentations. This includes a partnership with the Ontario Professional Planners Institute to deliver an in-depth workshop on the guideline to an estimated 200 members as part of their fall conference.

Uptake and implementation already underway in a variety of settings

The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) has endorsed the Transit-Supportive Guidelines as an important and informative tool for all professionals involved in land use planning and the delivery of infrastructure, stating that "widespread and effective use of these Guidelines will benefit all Ontarians and provide the basis to successfully meet the transportation challenges of tomorrow." Recognizing the utility of the document to their members, OPPI has offered their assistance in promoting the guideline. Even prior to final public release, municipal staff in communities from Sudbury to Niagara Region had begun to use the previously released draft document as a resource for projects such as municipal official plan reviews, downtown revitalization plans and economic development initiatives.

In addition, the guideline has been adopted by organizations outside municipal planning, inside and outside Ontario to support their work. The document has been included as required reading in courses offered by planning schools in both Ontario and Quebec. The Transportation Association of Canada (TAC)'s Transportation Planning and Research Standing Committee has recognized that the Ontario Transit-Supportive Guidelines address numerous items of concern to their members related to design and implementation of public transit services. As a result of the availability of the Guidelines for use by transportation practitioners across Canada, TAC is reconsidering and reducing the scope of a similar project which had been planned, in favour of promoting the existing guideline to their members.

Overall Presentation

A key area of emphasis in the guideline update has been to craft a document that is well organized, easy to understand and simple to navigate. Individual topic areas are consistently organized with a topic objective and rationale on the left hand side of the page and strategies to the right. Sections, guidelines and strategies are numbered to provide ease of reference, and strategies for each guideline topic are organized into like themes. Section numbers and guideline topics are identified across the top of each page for quick referral.

Section 2.4 Creating a Transit-Supportive Urban Form
Design of Parking Facilities: Guideline 2.4.2

Design of Parking Facilities

2.4.2 Locate and design parking so that it can support the creation of an active and attractive public realm.

Parking requirements that respond to a car-oriented environment are often the ruin of well-intentioned efforts to insert higher-density, urban places into suburban environments. Higher-density, walkable, transit-supportive places require a shift in thinking about how parking is provided, managed and designed. It is important that the design and location of parking is unobtrusive and does not detract from the vitality of surrounding streets and open spaces. This is particularly important in station areas where the quality of the pedestrian environment and streetscape are shown to have a direct relationship to ridership levels, perceptions of safety and levels of access. In downtown, town centres and areas of higher density, this means dramatically reducing surface parking and placing parking underground, in above-grade parking garages and/or screened from pedestrians behind buildings. Where surface parking exists, the creation of a street and block structure within larger lots, pedestrian connectivity, establish parcels for future development and provide additional greenery.

Strategies

parking structures

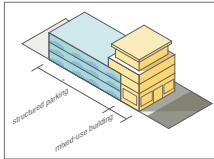
1. Provide parking in nodes or corridors in below-grade or structured parking facilities where they can be concealed from view. (S) (D) (M)
2. Where feasible, wrap above-ground parking structures in residential, retail or commercial uses to screen parking from the street and increase street-level activity. (S) (D) (M)
3. Locate parking access ramps for below grade or structured parking on lanes or local streets. Providing access ramps along active street frontages or on primary pedestrian routes should be designed to minimize conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles. (S)
4. To reduce the visual impact of structured parking along a street, treat the façade like an active building frontage (Guideline 2.4.1). Reflect the characteristics of more active building types through techniques such as:
 - screening diagonal ramps and non-horizontal parking plates with horizontal banding elements;
 - screening parked cars from view through the use of walls, windows or parapets; and
 - incorporating active uses at grade that can contribute to the animation and activity of the street. (S) (M)

street parking

5. Paid, on-street parking can minimize the need for dedicated parking spaces, providing space for short-stay visitors and helping to support main street retail uses. On-street parking adjacent to bike-ways should provide an additional 0.6m of width to accommodate car door openings, which could interfere with cyclists (Guideline 2.2.4). (D)

surface parking


6. Prohibit surface parking between a building and a street within designated nodes or corridors. (S) (D) (M)
7. Design surface parking lots to provide dedicated provisions for pedestrian circulation, including internal walkways and pedestrian priority paving treatments. (S)
8. Where larger areas of surface parking exist, encourage the introduction of a street and block pattern within the parking lot that can help enhance pedestrian access, enable the introduction of streetscape treatments and create development parcels for infill over time. (S)
9. Encourage development applications and master plans to demonstrate how large areas of surface parking can be redeveloped over time. (D) (S)
10. In the design of large areas of surface parking encourage the inclusion of a range of environmental features such as permeable paving and bio-swales that can absorb and filter stormwater run-off. (S)



Above ground parking structures should be wrapped with active uses to screen parking from the public realm.

Strategies Legend

- Green Action
- Applicable Community Scale**
- Small
- Mid-size
- Large
- Big City
- Planning Scale**
- (S) Site
- (D) District
- (M) Municipal
- (R) Regional



Surface parking lots should be screened, include incorporate environmental features such as permeable paving and bio-swales.

Recommended Resources

- Whole Building Design Guidelines – Parking Facilities (National Institute of Building Sciences)
- Design Guidelines for Greening Surface Parking Lots (City of Toronto)

Public Engagement

As a tool intended for municipal and regional practitioners in the fields of planning, transit, urban design and development, the guidelines relied on extensive input and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

Over 35 key stakeholders formed part of the working group, including representatives from municipalities, transit agencies, provincial ministries and agencies, professional urban planners, developers, engineers and members of the building and land development industries from across Ontario.

While many contributors were transit and land use planning practitioners, others worked in related fields on which the transit–land use connection has an impact, including health promotion, economic development, tourism, environmental protection, housing, cultural preservation and accessibility for persons with disabilities.

A full list of stakeholders who participated in working group consultation can be found on pages 194 and 195 of the document.

Key stages where stakeholder input was provided included the following:

- Prior to development of the table of contents, the working group provided input on areas for expansion, resources to consider, etc.;
- At the completion of the preliminary draft, the document was distributed to provincial departments and external stakeholders for review and comment;
- Following completion of the draft document, a working group session was held with key stakeholders to review the document and discuss revisions; and
- Following revisions, the draft was posted online for 6 weeks for review and comment by the wider public and project stakeholders.

Sustainability

The Transit-Supportive Guidelines provide strategies and tools for communities to take concrete steps to limit emissions and waste through more compact development and by replacing single occupant vehicle use with transit. By helping to support the creation of more transit-supportive environments and increasing transit ridership, the document is an important tool which can contribute to improving the sustainability of our towns and cities. Within the document, three central arguments are put forward to this effect.

1. Transit is good for the environment and public health.

Under normal loading conditions, less energy is needed to move a person by transit than by automobile. Since less energy is used to move people, smaller amounts of air pollutants and greenhouse gases are produced by transit per person-kilometre of travel. Transit-supportive land use patterns are also pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly, making it safer and easier for people to use active transportation along with transit. A transit-oriented city promotes greater public presence on the sidewalks, a renewal of downtown activities, and greater informal surveillance and safety.

2. Transit is good for the economy, making our cities and regions more efficient.

Congested highways and gridlocked streets result in significant delays to the trade and delivery of goods and services. The increasing costs to our health care system from smog days and the higher proportion of family budgets allocated to basic transportation are having a significant social and economic impact on our province. By helping to manage congestion and travel times, better transit can improve the efficiency of our economy, facilitating goods movement and improving commuting times. Increasing transportation choices can

help to increase the affordability of our towns and cities, reduce household costs and provide greater mobility to individuals, boosting productivity by providing access to far more employment, housing and recreational opportunities. Transit investments can also encourage revitalization of neighbourhoods and streets, attracting private investment and employers to an area by improving accessibility and neighbourhood vitality.

3. Transit infrastructure is cost-effective to provide and use.

Since transit requires less land and energy than the private car to move the same number of people, it is often cheaper to meet mobility needs with transit rather than through other measures such as road widening or new parking facilities. The higher densities and compact development transit requires also save costs by maximizing the efficiency of existing services and reducing the need for additional serviced land. In addition, land not used for transportation can be used in other ways, whether for public open space and other active uses or for the protection of environmentally sensitive areas.

In addition, the Guidelines include a broad range of strategies with a direct environmental focus, from encouraging adaptive re-use of heritage buildings to incorporation of permeable paving in surface parking. These are identified throughout with a green leaf icon to highlight these strategies and to assist communities developing sustainability plans who may wish to incorporate these actions into their planning.