



ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

About Active Transportation

Active Transportation (AT) contributes to safer, healthier and stronger communities. Increased investments in and awareness of AT is linked to improved health and well-being, community and social engagement, economic growth and environmental sustainability.



Active Transportation Means:

- any human-powered, non-motorized mode of transportation for commuter and recreational purposes
- moving from one destination to another for work, childcare, school, shopping and recreation
- walking, hiking, running, cycling, in-line skating, skateboarding, non-motorized wheel-chairing, skating, skiing, canoeing and kayaking

AT Improves Physical Health

In recent years, Canadians have become less physically active, resulting in increased health concerns, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, certain cancers and decreased mental health. ⁱThe link between AT and reduced obesity is clear. Research has shown that the risk of obesity increases by 6% for every hour spent in a car each day, while the risk of obesity decreases by 5% for every kilometre walked per day. ⁱⁱ

AT Improves Mental Health

AT is good for our mental health. Higher rates of physical activity have been linked to lower levels of stress and depression. ⁱⁱⁱ Studies show that AT users enjoy their commute more than those who drive cars: 19% of cyclists feel their commutes are the most pleasant activity of the day, whereas only 2% of drivers feel the same way. ^v Reducing motorized traffic also decreases traffic noise, which is often associated with anxiety, depression, sleeplessness and irritability.

AT Benefits the Natural Environment

Natural environment includes all living things occurring naturally on Earth:

- forests, green space and open fields
- wetlands and waterways

Communities that promote AT can positively impact air quality, reduce environmental pollution and decrease the impact of climate change.

AT Enhances the Built Environment

Built environment includes the physical features of a community:

- land-use patterns
- large and small features including architecture, landscaping and parks
- transportation systems including sidewalks, trails and roadways

Investment in the built environment and expansion of AT networks can provide increased opportunities for physical activity and ensure that active transportation is a safe option for all residents and visitors.



AT-friendly communities and natural spaces are seen as happy places. Walkable, bikeable communities are increasingly in demand, commanding higher property values than similar properties in more car-dependent neighbourhoods.

AT Enhances Quality of Life

Increasing AT can have a positive impact on both the community and the individual. Studies have shown that AT is closely linked with social cohesion, positive community identity and increased equity.^{vi}

Promoting AT also provides increased access to opportunities for social interaction, fostering an overall sense of neighbourliness and belonging within a community. Designing safe streets for residents and visitors, and creating attractive public spaces where people are more inclined to spend time, increases social interaction and active engagement. These benefits create a strong sense of place and community identity, and support the concept of place-making.

AT Spurs Economic Development

A recent study shows that walking and cycling cost approximately 3 cents/km, where an average mid-size car driven 16 000 km/year costs 46 cents/km. Integrating AT into daily routines, and decreasing dependence on motorized transit, can help save money, especially in households that completely eliminate the use of a car (which costs about \$8000/year to own and operate).

Increasing AT in the community benefits local businesses and attracts new development. Reducing the number of cars on the road by shifting to active modes will reduce traffic congestion, address parking challenges and decrease road maintenance costs.

AT Supports Safer Communities

While AT users sometimes face greater risk from traffic collisions than other road users, the health benefits experienced by individuals who choose AT far outweigh the risks.^{vi} Well-designed and connected routes for AT improve pedestrian and cyclist safety. Built environment assets, such as bike lanes, reduced traffic speed, traffic calming and streetscape improvements that encourage AT can increase the safety of our streets. Improved walking infrastructure, such as connected trails, pathways and well-maintained sidewalks, can decrease the number of slips, trips and falls.

With more people choosing AT, drivers are growing accustomed to commuting alongside cyclists and pedestrians, in fact many motorists may also be AT users. This helps create a culture of aware and alert drivers who are better prepared to share the road and prevent traffic collisions. More people walking and cycling means more eyes on our streets and trails, decreasing the risk of crime and vandalism.

A well-developed AT strategy will support a network of integrated hubs and nodes, positively impacting everyone's health, well-being and quality of life.

AT Increases Equity and Access

Creating environments that are conducive to AT helps ensure that all activities and services are equitable and accessible to all members of society, regardless of income or physical ability.^{vii}

In Canada, 20% of households do not own a car: 10% cannot drive because of a disability, and the remaining 10% do not have the income to support car ownership.^{viii} Further approximately 40% of the average Canadian's life is spent either as a senior or as a child without a driver's license.^{ix} Safe pedestrian and cycling routes are particularly important to support citizens who do not have the option of driving.

Take Action!

Move more! Each time you start a commute, ask yourself if you can integrate more walking, hiking and cycling. Since every journey starts with a walk, see if you can increase the steps you take before hopping into an automobile.

Choose AT more often by finding ways of incorporating AT into your daily routine. For example, park once and walk between the different stops, instead of driving from spot to spot.

Write to your municipal leaders

encouraging them to support AT investments. Well connected roads, trails, sidewalks, lighting and naturalized spaces — the integration of more trees and green spaces — contribute to safer and more attractive communities.

Be an AT community champion!

Get involved in promoting AT in your home, school and workplace.

Get started by walking or cycling to work and school!

References

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