

ASSESSING THE PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENTS
OF THREE TORONTO STREETS:

Bloor Street, Queen Street West, and Yonge Street

By: Sharlad Sukumaran

A Report Submitted to the School of Urban and Regional Planning
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Planning

School of Urban and Regional Planning
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
May 2012

Acknowledgements:

I would like to express my gratitude to all the people who helped and supported me throughout my academic career. Dr. John Meligrana, I am grateful for your continuous support and encouragement, from the refining of the initial proposal through to the completion of this report. To my friends, thank you for keeping me motivated and for the great time at SURP. To my family, without you I would not be where I am today.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

People move between locations throughout each day, utilizing motor vehicles, public transit, bicycles, their feet, or a combination of these modes. While each has its benefits and disadvantages, walking is the most accessible and simplest form of transportation. It is increasingly recognized for its health benefits and accessibility. In addition to being a mode of transportation, walking is a moderate type of exercise that does not require any special training or equipment. As congestion, the costs of car ownership, and obesity rates continue to rise, the value of building streets and communities that are pedestrian-friendly is increasingly apparent.

The purpose of this study is to assess and compare the walkability of three urban, commercial streets in the Toronto downtown core. Segments of Queen Street West, Yonge Street and Bloor Street were assessed for the physical and perceptual qualities they currently exhibit, and recommendations were made to improve the pedestrian environment through design features.

The three street segments are as follows:

- Queen Street West (University Ave. to Peter St.)
- Yonge Street (Dundas St. to College St.)
- Bloor Street (Yonge St. to Avenue St.)

This report seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What design features are currently increasing or hindering the walkability of these three urban streets?
2. What design recommendations could improve their walkability?

METHOD

This study relied on a literature review, photographic documentation and an environmental audit to collect the data necessary to compare and improve the pedestrian environments of the selected streets. The PEDS audit tool is comprised of 36 criteria, including 4 subjective questions pertaining to the sense of safety and attractiveness of the streets. The criteria are divided into the following categories: Environment, Pedestrian Facility, Road Attributes, Walking/Cycling Environment, and

Subjective Assessment. The photographic documentation followed a photo shooting guide (see Appendix A), which was developed once the audits for each street were completed.

ANALYSIS

The data collected through the audit, along with the photographic documentation, allowed for a systematic comparison of the streets for each criterion. The literature review of pedestrian friendly design practices was conducted in order to provide recommendations for improving the pedestrian environment of each street.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recent transformation of Bloor Street has certainly improved the pedestrian-environment. The widened granite sidewalks, large planters, general cleanliness, and aesthetically cohesive design make the street visually pleasing and inviting. The comparative assessment revealed, however, that there is still room for improvement. Bloor Street, in its current condition, fails to adequately meet the needs of cyclists. This results in cyclists using the sidewalk instead of the road, thereby endangering themselves as well as pedestrians, and ultimately discourages

cycling as a form of transportation. Ultimately, a cyclist-friendly environment contributes to the pedestrian friendliness of a streetscape.

The second major impediment to a pedestrian-friendly environment is the small and uncomfortable seating provided along the street. Although the benches are well suited to the aesthetic theme of the street, they do not entice pedestrians to sit and enjoy the space, and they are not the best type of seating to provide rest for those who may tire from walking.

The recommendations for Bloor Street are therefore:

1. Improve cycling infrastructure
2. Provide better seating

The observations and comparative assessment demonstrated that Queen Street West has the potential to be a great, pedestrian-friendly street. The major problems were the large amount of parking, poor cycling facilities, narrow sidewalks and the lack of pedestrian amenities. Parklets and corrals were recommended as solutions to some of these problems, following a literature review of pedestrian-friendly design practices. Parklets and bicycle corrals would turn on-street parking spaces

into bicycle parking, or spaces for pedestrians to sit and enjoy the street. Improved and increased seating would further improve the pedestrian environment and turn the street into an even greater destination.

The recommendations for Queen Street West are therefore:

1. Parklets to increase pedestrian space and amenities
2. Bicycle corrals to increase bicycle parking
3. Turn Queen Street West into a destination street with improved pedestrian amenities

Although the northern segment of Yonge Street is quite pedestrian friendly, much improvement is needed in the southern segment, from Dundas to Gerrard. The sidewalks along this segment are quite narrow, and the overall condition and cleanliness of the segment is in need of improvement. Therefore, the recommendations made for this street include improving the

condition of the road, sidewalk, buildings and crosswalks.

Another recommendation, that takes into account the narrow sidewalks, is the installation of modified bus shelters. Although the standard design is too large to place on such narrow sidewalks, the modified design would only slightly inhibit the flow of pedestrian traffic.

Yonge Street:

1. Improve condition of road, sidewalks and buildings
2. Increase visibility and condition of crosswalks
3. Provide modified bus shelters

The final conclusion of this report is that the PEDs audit tool provides an effective method for assessing the pedestrian environment of a street. The format allows for a systematic comparison between street segments, as well as economy in time and administration.