

Walkability of Three Southern Ontario Inner City University Campus Thoroughfare Streets.

Assessing the Physical and Perceptual Qualities of the Built Environment

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Executive Summary

Background and Objectives

In recent years, the quality of the pedestrian environment, and the importance of planning and designing streets for *all* users, has gained considerable traction among planning professionals. There is growing recognition that streets should provide environments for pedestrians that are inviting, safe, aesthetically pleasing, and equipped with sufficient pedestrian amenities. This is even more important when considering pedestrian environments on university campuses because of the volume of pedestrian traffic they see.

The objective of this report is to evaluate the walkability of three Southern Ontario inner city university campus thoroughfare streets: Union Street at Queen's University, Laurier Avenue at the University of Ottawa, and St. George Street at the University of Toronto. Through a walkability audit and direct observations, along with the analyses of relevant policies and plans for improvements of these thoroughfares, this report presents assessments of the overall quality of each pedestrian environment and presents recommendations for improvements.

Research Methods

The research involved two primary methods for each campus thoroughfare street: a walkability audit tool and direct observations. Use of the PEDS audit tool provided a systematic approach to easily compare and evaluate the presence and quality of pedestrian features on each street based on 36 criteria. Two secondary methods - a literature review and policy analysis - provided contextual information for the three study sites, supplementary information to the audits and observations, and insights into the planned improvements of the three streets.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The information gained from the PEDS audit and direct observations showed varying levels in the pedestrian quality and walkability of the three campus thoroughfare streets. Each street both excelled and lacked in different areas. Overall, St. George Street was the strongest in terms of providing an environment that is inviting, accommodating, and safe for pedestrians, which is likely attributable to its recent revitalization. Specifically, St. George had the highest quality pedestrian environment because of the buffers between the sidewalk and street, the variation in

sidewalk width, its high level of connectivity, the high degree of enclosure, aesthetics and building articulation, pedestrian and street lighting, and the walking amenities it provides. Meanwhile, the analysis suggested that Laurier Avenue has the lowest quality pedestrian environment, most notably because of the conditions of the sidewalks, lack of pedestrian lighting, and unsheltered bus stops. Through an analysis of the audit results and direct observations, recommendations were created for each of the streets.

Union Street

Union Street Recommendation #1:

Add pedestrian friendly landscape architecture and buffers between the road and sidewalk.

Union Street Recommendation #2:

Apply traffic calming measures at numerous points on the street to enhance safety.

Union Street Recommendation #3:

Repair unsafe bike lanes along the segment and make them more visible.

Laurier Avenue

Laurier Avenue Recommendation #1:

Add more pedestrian level lights to the street.

Laurier Avenue Recommendation #2:

Improve transit comfort through the introduction of sheltered bus stops.

Laurier Avenue Recommendation #3:

Widen the sidewalk along the segment.

St. George Street

St. George Street Recommendation #1:

Incorporate more crossing aids.

St. George Street Recommendation #2:

Introduce wayfinding aids to nearby points of interest and transit options.