Active Transportation Infrastructure in Canada

Federal Pre-Budget Submission

Presented by the Federal Active Transportation Coalition

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About The Federal Active Transportation Coalition

The Federal Active Transportation Coalition is comprised of organizations representing commuters, walkers, bicycle and automobile users, health agencies, urban planners and transportation engineers. Together, these organizations are calling for greater federal investment in active transportation infrastructure.

Overview

The Federal Active Transportation Coalition has developed this pre-budget consultation around this government's stated goals to: (1) reduce GHG emissions and address climate change, (2) build infrastructure that helps grow the economy, and (3) meet the local needs of communities, including Indigenous communities, and improve health outcomes for our citizens.

Infrastructure that facilitates active transportation improves mobility in our urban spaces, encourages the reduction of GHG emissions and contributes to positive health outcomes for Canadians. Active transportation infrastructure can also improve economic productivity and help mitigate the problem of traffic congestion on Canadian roads and highways. It will also provide economic and healthy living opportunities for those living in rural, remote and northern communities.

Such infrastructure can also help reduce Canada's burden of chronic diseases and other health problems resulting from physical inactivity. Obesity, heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes are just some of the major health problems in Canada. These cost health care systems billions of dollars, but can be reduced by investing more in active transportation infrastructure. Without active transportation infrastructure, Canadians are less likely to take up daily active transportation because of road safety concerns.

Many municipalities across Canada have stated their desire to invest in active transportation infrastructure projects and the demand for this type of vital groundwork will only continue to grow across the country. Therefore, the Federal Active Transportation Coalition urges the federal government to ***establish a fund of at least $270 million per year over three years to support active transportation infrastructure.***

What is Active Transportation Infrastructure?

Active transportation is any type of human powered transportation, as well as public transit. Walking, in-line skating, biking, non-motorized wheelchairing, skiing and taking a public transit bus are all examples of active transportation. For the purpose of this particular budget request, we recommend that the following types of active transportation infrastructure be addressed: bike and pedestrian lanes/sidewalks, footpaths, traffic calming measures, roundabouts and recreational trails. Research shows that active transportation infrastructure is associated with more walking and bicycling, greater physical activity and lower obesity rates. As well, active transportation infrastructure has many economic and health benefits.

Reducing GHG Emissions by Reducing Congestion

Active Transportation infrastructure helps mitigate traffic congestion, which not only hinders

economic growth, but also contributes to urban air pollution and GHG emissions. According to Environment Canada's Emissions Trends report in 2011, emissions from transportation (including passenger, freight, and off-road emissions) were the largest single contributor to Canada's GHG emissions, representing 24% of overall GHGs.

Investing in active transportation will make it easier for Canadians to shift to less carbon intensive modes of transportation. In an American study involving 43 major U.S. cities, researchers found that there was a positive correlation between higher rates of bicycle infrastructure and higher rates of bicycle commuting. Another study in Seattle indicated that adults who lived within a half of a mile from a bike lane were 20% more likely to bike at least once a week. Similarly, the presence of sidewalks and pedestrian paths are also a major factor in increasing physical activity.

Promoting Economic Growth and Reducing Congestion

Active infrastructure is economically sustainable and can complement existing infrastructure intended for cars. The construction and maintenance costs for active infrastructure are substantially more cost efficient than traditional infrastructure intended for automobiles. According to Transport Canada's Guide *Active Transportation in Canada*, widening a road to accommodate a new bike lane costs $20,000-$150,000 per km compared to an average $1.3 million per km to widen a two lane urban arterial road to four lanes. Sidewalks can accommodate 20 times the volume of people per hour than urban roads and are much cheaper to construct.[1] Also, the less land we use for roads, the better use we will make of land within our urban centres and rural farming areas.

The current impact of traffic congestion from daily commutes also stifles trade and commerce. According to the Toronto Board of Trade, the direct and indirect costs of traffic congestion in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton totaled $6 billion in 2006. Reducing even a small proportion of automobiles on the road in exchange for active transportation can have a large impact. In 2007-2008, the U.S. Federal Highway Administration study determined there was a three percent drop in traffic on "urban interstates", which translated to a nearly 30% reduction in peak hour congestion. If only a small percentage of Canadians chose to take a bike or walk to work instead of a car, the impact could significantly reduce commute times on roads and highways.

The presence of active infrastructure can also spur on local economic growth. Area businesses benefit from pedestrians and cyclists who are more likely to spend money at local destinations than people who drive cars. This was illustrated in a 2009 study of Bloor Street merchants in Toronto, which found that people who walked or cycled to their businesses spent more money in the area than those who drove. Not only do large urban centres benefit economically from active transportation, but small towns and rural communities can also reap the rewards of active transportation infrastructure through increased tourism and property value. For instance, Wasaga Beach, Ontario has developed biking trails along with an active transportation plan to promote healthier lives and attract more tourists using these bike lanes.

Many municipalities are recognizing these benefits and have stated their desire to invest in

active transportation infrastructure, which has received a strong endorsement from the public.

Creating Healthier Communities by Addressing Local Priorities

Investing in active transportation infrastructure can help address some of the country's current health problems. We know that 85 percent of adults and 93 percent of children do not get enough daily physical activity, which is a direct risk factor for obesity, cardiovascular diseases and other chronic health conditions.[2] Physical inactivity costs the Canadian health care system $6.8 billion annually from preventable chronic diseases.[3]

Studies indicate that the most effective means of increasing physical activity is to incorporate it into day-to-day activities such as daily commutes to school or work. But physical inactivity is not the only health problem that active transportation infrastructure can help address. Polluted air is strongly associated with serious health conditions including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, a variety of lung conditions, and cancer. In 2008, short and long term exposure to air pollution was estimated to result in 21,000 premature deaths in Canada, as well as 620,000 doctor visits, 92,000 emergency department visits, and 11,000 hospital visits.[4] That same year, exposure to air pollution in Canada costs the economy roughly $8 billion. Active transportation infrastructure can reduce the amount of pollution in the air by encouraging people to use modes of transportation that do not emit pollution.

Road safety is another health concern that remains a large deterrent for Canadian commuters considering active transportation. Safety concerns keep one in five Canadians from cycling or walking. Furthermore, a lack of active infrastructure such as bike lanes, sidewalks, paved shoulders and traffic calming measures has a negative impact on biking and walking. A survey of adults who lived in Metro Vancouver revealed that potential and occasional cyclists would cycle more often if cycling routes included separate bike paths, traffic calming measures and paved shoulders. Without the presence of this infrastructure, adults were less likely to take up daily active transportation.

Canadians Support More Active Transportation Infrastructure

There is an increasing demand for active transportation infrastructure across the country. An Ipsos/Reid poll indicated that 81% Canadians strongly or somewhat support the creation of more bike lanes.[5]

Conclusion: Canada Needs More Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment

Active transportation infrastructure can encourage economic growth, reduce the costs on Canada's health care system through disease prevention, contribute to a reduction in GHG emissions, and increase physical activity rates. Canadians are supportive of active transportation infrastructure and, while many municipalities have stated their desire to invest in healthier, sustainable and efficient modes of transportation, much more needs to be done. For these reasons, the Federal Active Transportation Coalition recommends that the federal government:

Establish a fund of at least $270 million per year over three years to support active transportation infrastructure.

Endnotes

[1] Active Transportation in Canada: A Resource and Planning Guide *Transport Canada* 2011 http://www.tc.gc.ca/media/documents/programs/atge.pdf

[2] Obesity *Statistics Canada* 2013 http://www.statcan.gc.ca/search-recherche/bb/info/obesity-obesite-eng.htm

[3] Jansen, Ian Health care costs of physical inactivity in Canadian adults *Applied Physiology, Nutrition and Metabolism* 2012 803-806

[4] Canadian Medical Association. No Breathing Room: National Illness Costs of Air Pollution. August 2008.

[5] IPSOS-Reid "More Bike Lanes on City Roads (81%) and Mutual Biker/Driver Respect Needed" 2011 http://www.ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=5427