



Complete Streets Policy Analysis

The Toronto Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT) uses a revised version of the National Complete Streets Coalition’s Policy Measurement Tool to assess the prevalence and strength of Complete Streets language in Canada’s Official Plans. In this policy analysis, we look at City of Markham’s recently adopted Official Plan.

In December 2013, the City of Markham adopted a new Official Plan (OP) that will guide land use and development in Markham over the next 20 years. In a positive development, Markham has adopted a Complete Streets approach in the transportation and urban design chapters (chapter 7 and 6, respectively). The OP recommends that a “complete streets” philosophy be applied to the future development of the City’s road network to balance mobility between modes, increase safety for all users, and position streets as places within Markham’s communities. This OP has very strongly integrated a Complete Streets approach, but a few components that would make the OP exemplary are absent. This document analyzes the strength of the Complete Streets components of this OP based on the 10 elements outlined by TCAT on the Complete Streets for Canada [website](#).

Markham’s OP includes many strong references to planning for pedestrians, cyclists and transit users, however the existing language specifically citing Complete Streets is minimal. The OP also demonstrates a general commitment to pedestrians, cyclists and transit users of all ages and abilities, but could benefit from more explicit consideration of users of all ages and abilities for each mode. Importantly, the Complete Streets approach outlined applies to all road projects, which ensures that pedestrian, cyclist, and transit infrastructure will be reviewed for inclusion in new road projects, routine road retrofitting, and repair/maintenance road projects.

“Designing, constructing and integrating new streets and retrofitting existing streets, where appropriate, to focus on the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and persons with disabilities and ensuring safety, accessibility, convenience, and comfort of all street users are considered”
- City of Markham Official Plan, Chapter 7

A strong Complete Streets policy requires that all levels of government work towards the same goals when adopting and implementing a Complete Streets approach. Markham’s OP does a good job of committing to working with stakeholders from the provincial, regional, and neighbouring municipal governments, as well as private developers. Unfortunately however, the OP is not clear about any exceptions there may be to its commitment to consult with these groups. It is similarly vague about when a Complete Streets approach (or integration of the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and transit users) will not be followed, and there is no mandated mechanism for approvals of any exceptions. For example, the quote above references a variety of road projects and the consideration of all street users, without any indication of how the City will determine when it is “appropriate” to consider all user groups.

Markham’s OP does a great job of encouraging connectivity,; stating a clear aim for the development of an integrated, comprehensive network of pedestrian, cycling, and transit infrastructure. It also makes specific reference to both Complete Streets and the public realm in the urban design chapter. The OP takes significant





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strides in reimagining streets, which are recognized as destinations in their own right and not only thoroughfares. Part of this shift in thinking is embodied in the strong references to context sensitivity. The OP recognizes that local context, whether urban, suburban, or rural, will have an impact on how a given street is designed and experienced.

“Apart from its role in knitting together the urban structure, the transportation network has an important and defining placemaking function. As well as being thoroughfares, urban streets are to be regarded as places, recognizing that great streets make great communities.”

- City of Markham Official Plan, Chapter 7

One the Markham OP’s biggest weaknesses is its lack of performance measures. It does not establish, recommend, or direct use of any new or specific measures. A Complete Streets approach should directly list performance measures in the OP, and provide in-text reference to any other performance measures listed in other policy documents (e.g., Transportation Master Plan). Unfortunately Markham’s OP does neither. In general the OP appears to be aware its weakness, and acknowledges, in the urban design chapter, that the OP does not entirely fulfill the principles of Complete Streets design.

“The design for arterial roads adopted by York Region in the Towards Great Regional Streets document addresses a number of these design challenges but does not fully encompass the more sustainable “complete streets” design philosophy.”

- City of Markham Official Plan, Chapter 6

Finally, the OP is generally strong on implementation. It includes a detailed implementation plan that specifically cites that secondary plans shall be prepared to address provisions for a sustainable transportation system. This includes a transit and road network, transportation demand management and active transportation, and transit-supportive development, including the development of mobility plans as identified in the Regional Official Plan. The OP also regularly references design guidelines, specifically the Urban Design and Sustainable Development chapter of the OP (Chapter 6), but also Markham’s Accessibility Design Guidelines, Ministry of the Environment rail network guidelines, and Regional and Provincial guidelines and policies for transit-supportive development. Merely mentioning design standards in the OP can strengthen the potential for implementation.

Overall, Markham’s new OP includes a robust but incomplete Complete Streets approach. It applies this approach to all road projects, encourages connectivity and context sensitivity, regularly references design guidelines, and outlines a clear implementation plan. It acknowledges some weaknesses preventing it from being a fully encompassing Complete Streets approach. It could benefit from more clearly defined exceptions, performance measures, and more detailed planning for pedestrian, bike and transit users of all ages and abilities.