



Services de santé du

TIMISKAMING

Health Unit

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To the Editor:

Re: Active Travel Important for Healthy Communities

We in public health share the community's grief for the recent tragic deaths of two community members who were cycling and express our deep condolences to the victims' families and others involved. While grieving and processing continue, we understand many are reflecting on active travel and that it might be helpful to share a public health perspective.

Encouraging people to walk and wheel is a really good idea: for the people doing it, for the families whose children play beside or in the streets, for our downtowns, for all of us as we keep working to build communities that are resilient, lively and strong.

For many, the best way to travel in town is in non-motorized ways (e.g. on foot, by bike or scooter known as active travel) or other types of mobility devices.

These types of travel are good for your body, your mood and connect you to others in your community. You sleep better, think more clearly and feel happier. This is all well-known and well-researched.

These ways of moving make sense. Less traffic plugging up the roads in our downtowns, fewer fast-moving vehicles in areas where we want our kids playing outside. Studies of downtown areas where cycling lanes have been added show time and again that business is better when there is more space for people to arrive by ways other than their car.

We are in the midst of a climate crisis, a known public health emergency. One way (of many) to help reduce the impact of this crisis and to lessen how badly our communities will be affected is to reduce the use of gas-powered vehicles.

None of this is new. Streets can be designed to be safe for everyone: people who walk, cycle, take transit, or drive, and people of all ages and abilities. Off-road paths give space for people to travel without being near motorized traffic. Some proven solutions are easy and low-cost, others need a bigger investment now to see the payout over time.

Our communities are moving in the right direction. Municipalities have taken steps to start making roadways safer, and things like public transit, sidewalks and active travel routes reduce individual car rides and help everyone get around more easily. As the main decision-makers of policy, road and land use, municipalities need all of our support in making this a priority.

As individuals or in groups we can all encourage and support healthy community design. People can also help make roadways safer by following posted speed limits, sharing the road, role modelling active travel, and ensuring young people have the skills to use roads safely. Workplaces can promote active travel with policies and supports; schools can teach the importance of active travel and encourage young people to walk and wheel to school; even the health sector can promote active travel to patients.

Let's keep working together for transportation systems that meet the needs of everyone – for healthy communities in Timiskaming.

Dr. Glenn Corneil
Acting Medical Officer of Health
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