

**A Guide for Community Associations Using
Reports from the Transport Canada Project on
Municipal Governments Making Decisions
About Sustainable Transport Practices**

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**Ottawa, Ontario
May 16, 2009**

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A. Background and Context

The Transport Canada project on the methodologies, methods, and techniques used by municipal governments to identify, adopt, and implement sustainable transport practices commenced in August 2008. It was completed in February 2009. In addition to the eleven reports that were submitted to Transport Canada, another six presentations and publications preceded and (to date) followed the formal project contract period.

As part of the project's outreach program, the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods was among the groups informed early on about the project, and then about the project's publications. At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Federation in May 2009, I informed members that questions had been raised during the study about whether I could prepare a "road map" or a "research primer" for community associations regarding the project reports. That task was not undertaken previously because it was not in the project's terms of reference, but it was agreed at the AGM that I would prepare a guide to the documents as part of my policy and research advisory service to the Federation for 2009-2010.

After consultations with representatives from community associations, examination of several municipal transportation plans, and a review of the reports, it was decided that it would be most useful for the guide to focus on the following two key objectives.

1. Establishing the general applicability of the Transport Canada project to sustainable transport decision-making at the urban neighbourhood level. Achieving this objective makes the Transport Canada reports relevant at the urban neighbourhood scale, and provides a model or precedent that community associations can use in discussions with municipal governments about conducting similar, methodology-oriented but neighbourhood-based sustainable transport studies.

Due to the nature of a guide, and the requirement for brevity, the approach taken to achieve the first objective is to select several indicative sections in the reports which demonstrate: a) the general correspondence between the concepts of urban region and urban

neighbourhood; and b) the high degree of similarity between the design of research studies at the urban region and the urban neighbourhood scales. The central thesis here is that since an urban region is an aggregation of urban neighbourhoods, it follows that elements of the research design for a study of sustainable transport practices at the urban region scale are likely to be common to a study of sustainable transport practices at the urban neighbourhood scale.

Once that conceptual foundation is in place, it should be much easier for community associations and their municipal governments to design a sustainable transport decision process that achieves correspondence between urban neighbourhood and urban region needs and interests.

2. Indicating how the respective reports can be used by community associations to make the case to municipal governments for including explicit, due regard for the “neighbourhood factor” when making decisions to identify, adopt, or implement sustainable transport practices. On its face this objective is problematic, because of the widespread perception that many municipal politicians are fixated on their wards, and as a result do a poor job of representing the urban region-wide public interest.

However, meeting this objective does not in fact feed the ward fixation of members of council. Rather, what it does is provide a guide as to how the reports can be used to make rational choices among transportation modes, at the neighbourhood level, across an entire region. As a result, it gives no advantage to councillors who are fixated on their wards, and would even serve as a means to identify councillors who are trying to use the reports to improperly advance the case of their own wards. (That gambit falls within the rubric of what is known as “crooked logic”, and is a topic for another day.)

The ways to achieve due regard for the neighbourhood factor are different for different reports. However, for the purposes of a guide, it should be sufficient to comment on a section or two in each report to illustrate the pertinence of the neighbourhood factor to a municipality’s decision process of identifying, adopting, and implementing sustainable transport practices.

At this point, and in anticipation that the scope and function of the task could be misconstrued, or misrepresented, it is emphasized, again, that this is a guide; it is not a detailed evaluation or review of the individual reports, nor of the Transport Canada project. As a result, the comments or suggestions are limited to selected items which I believe are most likely to be instructive for community associations in general, in Ontario and elsewhere for that matter, and the comments or

suggestions are independent of political, economic, social, geographic, etc., considerations that may be particular to a municipality or neighbourhood.

Further, and this concern is one that goes without saying, but it is expressed anyway to ensure that the limitations of the guide are clear. It is my belief that the respective reports need to be read in their entirety in order to fully appreciate the comments or suggestions presented in the guide. That is, the guide might best be regarded as a form of “Wellar’s Notes” (with apologies to Coles), and by no means is it a substitute for reading the reports from cover-to-cover. Rather, and in the spirit of a guide, the comments point community associations in directions that I believe will help them use the reports to better advantage, but the guide is not a summary, an overview, or even an outline of the project and the reports.

Finally, the contents of the guide are solely the responsibility of the author.

B. Design of the Guide

For each report, the title and the link to the website containing the posted document are provided. Then, a selection of comments and/or suggestions are made to point community associations in directions which I believe will assist them to bring a neighbourhood perspective to decision processes and outcomes involving sustainable transport practices.

As some readers may recall, I have used this kind of design approach on several prior occasions. In particular, aspects of the design for the guide were previously used in the keynote presentation that I gave at the 2001 Symposium in Hamilton on *Shaping Ontario’s Urban Neighbourhoods*.

The keynote address was titled, **Strategies for Infrastructure Improvements in Urban Neighbourhoods: An Issue-Oriented Action Agenda**. In response to requests for materials that could be helpful in deciding what to do with the infrastructure “deals” currently being promoted by provincial and federal governments in Canada (and state and federal governments in the U.S.), the PowerPoint slides have been pulled from the archives and posted on <http://www.slideshare.net/>.

I note for those not aware of the 2001 presentation that it was designed to assist community associations derive, evaluate, and pursue infrastructure strategies at the neighbourhood level. As a result, it provides materials that not only contribute to this guide, but it contains ideas, methods, and techniques that extend beyond what I can cover in a brief guide to the Transport Canada project reports.

And, as a final comment on the precedent work that contributed to the design of the guide, I believe that the contents of the Hamilton presentation are even more pertinent in 2009 than they were in 2001. Specifically, in 2009 all kinds of infrastructure funding proposals are being floated among, between, and within

governments at all levels, but to date numerous newspaper scans have failed to yield much evidence in the way of strategies to direct the infrastructure funds so that they are investments rather than merely expenditures of public monies.

As a result of the seeming absence of strategies to direct infrastructure initiatives, the 2001 presentation prompts a suggestion. That is, it might be very instructive for community associations to use materials from the 2001 presentation as the basis for asking their municipal governments to explain in detail exactly how the infrastructure funds are to improve urban neighbourhoods. And, more importantly, reflecting the full spirit of the Transport Canada project and this guide, community associations should also ask their municipal governments to explain in detail exactly how they arrived at their decisions.

C. Comments on the Reports: A Neighbourhood Perspective

The titles of the eleven publications are listed in order of completion. The link to the Principal Investigator's website enables access to the reports.

1. *Methodologies for Identifying and Ranking Sustainable Transport Practices in Urban Regions. Project Synopsis.*

<http://www.wellar.ca/wellarconsulting/TCProjectSynopsis.pdf>

Comment. The project for Transport Canada was done at the urban region scale, which was appropriate for a study that was national in scope and funded by a federal agency. The following task illustrates the urban region scale:

- Consultation with experts and practitioners on the strengths and weaknesses of current methodologies for identifying and ranking or prioritizing sustainable transport practices in urban regions.

I suggest that the Transport Canada project is directly transferable to municipalities, and can be achieved by substituting “urban neighbourhoods” for “urban regions” throughout the report, with the above task serving as an illustrative case in point:

- Consultation with experts and practitioners on the strengths and weaknesses of current methodologies for identifying and ranking or prioritizing sustainable transport practices in urban neighbourhoods.

It is emphasized, to avoid misrepresentation, that while I believe the Transport Canada project can be directly transferred, no reference is made to one-to-one correspondence between the urban region and an urban neighbourhood. Clearly, there are numerous, apparent differences between urban regions and individual urban neighbourhoods, so a perfect match of a region and a neighbourhood would be a rare occurrence. However, and this is the key point, in the absence of

prior studies, and the obvious connections between the parts of a transportation system in neighbourhoods and the overall transportation system in an urban region, it is logical to attempt to make full use of the Transport Canada project (design and reports) in neighbourhood transportation studies.

My suggestion to community associations, therefore, is that they review the Synopsis Report as a potential model for similar projects in their own municipalities. The only significant adjustment is largely geographic, in that the focus of these studies is on the methodologies, methods and techniques behind decisions regarding sustainable transport practices at the neighbourhood level.

2. Groups and Individuals Contacted about the Sustainable Transport Methodologies Project. Interim Report 1.
<http://www.wellarconsulting.com/>

Comment. The outreach aspect of the project included sending variations of the following request to a number of organizations:

“It would be very much appreciated if you could post and otherwise circulate the Synopsis, or the link to the Synopsis, as part of the effort to inform community groups (underline added), advocacy groups, and other public interest groups about the project.”

In fact, because of its function as an umbrella organization with connections to community associations in different Ontario cities, one of the groups contacted was the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods:

Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods (FUN)
www.urbanneighbourhoods.ca

“Deliberations with Transport Canada regarding "Methodologies for Identifying and Ranking Sustainable Transport Practices in Urban Regions" are finalized, and the project is now a go. The project may be of interest to the FUN group, and the Synopsis could be posted on the FUN website. If a clean pdf is needed, I would be pleased to send the file.

A Project Synopsis has been prepared as an element of the outreach part of the project, and for ease of access the text has been posted at wellar.ca/wellarconsulting/TCProjectSynopsis.pdf

You are welcome to use the Synopsis for general communication, newsletter, article referencing, or other purposes consistent with the objectives of the project, and I hope that there will be an opportunity for you and other members of FUN to contribute to the study findings as experts with whom I will be in contact.”

In my experience, sustainable transport practices in urban regions begin and end with neighbourhoods, and inviting community associations to engage in the project was a logical decision. I suggest that the design of this part of the Transport Canada project could be transferred directly to municipal government projects that involve community associations in the process of identifying, adopting, and implementing sustainable transport practices at the urban neighbourhood level.

3. Background Comment on Methodologies, Methods, and Techniques to Support Decisions to Identify, Adopt, or Implement Sustainable Urban Transport Practices. Interim Report 2. <http://www.wellarconsulting.com/>

Comment. Minimizing time wasted on non-productive public service exercises is desired by all community association officials and members. It is my finding from work done for the 2007 National TravelWise Association meeting in Belfast, and the Transport Canada project, that there is great value in using the terms **identify**, **adopt**, and **implement** as the three primary categories for effectively and efficiently documenting the evolution of sustainable urban transport practices over time. As noted in Interim Report 2:

“These categories are very effective for two reasons in particular:

- They can be used for both inventory and accountability purposes;
- Each term makes a fundamental contribution to tracking the progress of a municipal, provincial or territorial government in achieving sustainable urban transport practices.”

I suggest that community groups are well-advised to use these categories to monitor what municipal governments are doing to achieve sustainable transport practices at the neighbourhood level. As part of the monitoring mechanism, I further suggest that community associations “persuade” their ward councillors to provide detailed annual reports on the municipality’s record of identifying, adopting, and implementing sustainable transport practices on a mode-by-mode basis for each ward neighbourhood.

4. Survey of Municipal Governments about Methodologies, Methods, and Techniques Used to Make Sustainable Transport Decisions. Interim Report 3. <http://www.wellarconsulting.com/>

Comment. The methodology or why part of the survey asks municipal governments specific questions about the values, principles, assumptions, or other parameters used in making decisions about achieving sustainable urban transport practices.

It is my suggestion that by using this same form and format, community groups can ascertain which values, principles, assumptions, or other parameters are used in making decisions about achieving sustainable urban transport practices at the neighbourhood level.

The second survey component involves the means, that is, the methods and techniques, behind the decisions to identify, adopt, and implement sustainable urban transport practices.

I suggest that community groups can use this part survey to attempt to learn exactly which methods and techniques are used in decisions to identify, adopt, and implement sustainable transport practices on a mode-by-mode basis at the neighbourhood level. I hasten to add that I use the phrase “attempt to learn” advisedly, since I am aware from professional experience, including feedback from elected officials, that although professional staff should know exactly which methods and techniques are used for which purposes, it sometimes proves exceedingly difficult and occasionally impossible to obtain this information.

5. Methods and Techniques that Could be Used in Making Decisions about Identifying, Adopting, or Implementing Sustainable Transport Practices.
Research Report 1. <http://www.wellarconsulting.com/>

Comment. This research report presents three questions which are critical to an informed analysis of the methods and techniques underlying sustainable transport decisions at both the urban region and urban neighbourhood scales:

- Which methods and techniques *are used*?
- Which methods and techniques *could be used*?
- Which methods and techniques *should be used*?

I suggest that those three questions are the basis for a most revealing question-answer session with municipal officials (elected and appointed) about the quality of the arguments supporting decisions about identifying, adopting, or implementing sustainable transport practices at the neighbourhood level.

In addition, and as a preliminary treatment of a topic which has seemingly received very little coverage in the sustainable transport literature, a total of 42 methods and techniques that could be used to assist in making decisions about practices are presented for consideration in Research Report 1. In my opinion it would be very instructive for community associations to critically evaluate the documentation that municipal governments have on file regarding the methods and techniques that the municipal government has examined, and is examining, as candidates to promote and support sustainable transport decision-making at the scale of the neighbourhood.

6. Results of Search for Prior Studies on Methodologies, Methods, and Techniques for Identifying and Ranking Sustainable Transport Practices in Urban Regions. Interim Report 4. <http://www.wellarconsulting.com/>

Comment. Understanding the differences between exploratory and confirmatory research approaches is fundamental to understanding the derivation of knowledge to justify decisions to identify, adopt, or implement sustainable transport practices at the urban region or urban neighbourhood levels. I suggest that it would be prudent for community associations to examine municipal documents and their authors to establish whether municipal government officials not only appreciate the distinction between the two approaches, but whether they have also named the research approach responsible for each stage in the identify-adopt-implement evolution of a practice.

In addition, it is noted that Google searches and consultations with experts failed to locate precedent studies that could provide direction for the Transport Canada project. It is my suggestion, therefore, that community associations pursue the matter of prior studies with municipal officials to ensure that all the available information on decisions involving sustainable transport practices in urban neighbourhoods is in the public domain.

7. Preliminary Report, Commentaries on Methods and Techniques that Could be Used in Making Decisions about Identifying, Adopting, or Implementing Sustainable Transport Practices. Research Report 2. <http://www.wellarconsulting.com/>

Comment. In my experience it is not unusual for both elected and appointed municipal staff to assert that the topic of research methods and techniques is too difficult for ordinary people, and is the purview of so-called “experts”.

To counter that far-fetched claim, Research Report 2 illustrates how methods and techniques that could be used in the sustainable transport decision process can be described in lay terms, and does so via commentaries on 10 of the methods and techniques. The methods and techniques range from the popular to the technical (Anatomical Sourcing, Cost-Benefit Analysis, Counterfoil Research, Follow the Money, Impact Assessment, Life-Cycle Analysis, Normative Delphi, Open House, Policy Delphi Technique, and Walking Security Index).

The commentaries in that report “deep six” the claim that such methods and techniques cannot be expressed in ways that are easy for ordinary citizens to understand. Further, they also provide a clear indication of the array of methods and techniques which can be brought to bear when making sustainable transport decisions at the urban region scale or the urban neighbourhood scale.

I believe it would be instructive for community associations to ask their municipal governments to provide similar commentaries for the other 32 methods and techniques listed in Research Report 1. And, as a further part of the initiative to

“persuade” staff to be forthcoming with citizens, I suggest that community associations vigorously embrace the habit of asking their municipal governments for similar commentaries on any other method or technique that is mentioned in a municipal document, or by a municipal official at a public meeting.

As I have learned over the years, there is nothing like a sharp question to cut through murk, or disarm blowhards. Requiring a straightforward description of a decision procedure is an effective, efficient, and sometimes deservedly painful way to deal with those at city hall who prefer to “blow smoke” rather than inform citizens.

8. *Limitations to the Literature on Methodologies for Identifying and Ranking Sustainable Transport Practices in Urban Regions.*
Interim Report 5. <http://www.wellarconsulting.com/>

Comment. The pertinent message in Interim Report 5 is, after searching the priority bodies of literature (Internet, academic journals, conference proceedings, dissertations, research institute reports), and communicating with experts and practitioners, that these bodies of Canadian literature do not provide comprehensive, systematically-organized holdings of materials that permit or promote deriving a representative set of findings about methodologies used in making sustainable transport decisions. As a result, there is no body of literature which contains materials that are germane to the task of bringing a neighbourhood perspective to bear on the methodologies behind municipal government decisions to identify, adopt, or implement sustainable transport practices.

The absence of documentation does not mean that nothing can be done; rather, it merely means that nothing much has been done to date. To correct this failure of omission or commission as the case may be, I suggest that community associations “lean on” their municipal governments to document the methodologies behind all decisions involving transport practices, sustainable or otherwise. A grassroots movement precipitated by community associations could well be the means of correcting a longstanding municipal government weakness when it comes to publicly stating the whys (methodologies) behind actions.

9. *Sampler of Commentaries on Methods and Techniques that Could be Used in Making Decisions about Identifying, Adopting, or Implementing Sustainable Transport Practices.* Research Report 3.
<http://www.wellarconsulting.com/>

Comment. In addition to the commentaries on 10 methods and techniques in Research Report 2, another nine are presented in Research Report 3 for a total of 19. It was agreed by contributors that the task of writing straightforward descriptions of decision support methods and techniques is challenging, and could be very useful as a means of testing the ability of professionals to “write in

plain English”. That is, seemingly high-level language can be used as a smokescreen to cover up for lack of competence. However, this escape route can be blocked by obliging professional staff (and politicians) to provide facts, and to express relationships, inputs, outputs, impacts, benefits, costs, etc., in clear, concise, coherent terms, as is done in the commentaries.

I believe it would be very instructive for community associations to ask their municipal governments to provide similar commentaries for the other 23 methods and techniques listed in Research Report 1. And, to help professional staff “stay in the mood” for this kind of activity, I suggest that community associations solicit the names of more methods and techniques to send to municipal government professionals for commentary purposes. Sources of names of research methods and techniques include university and college faculty in a number of departments, as well as many of the books referenced in the Transport Canada projects, and, of course, Google searches can yield numerous suggestions.

Finally, to promote “persuading” staff to develop a mindset to be forthcoming with citizens, and as noted above in regard to Research Report 2, I suggest that community associations ask their municipal governments for similar commentaries for all methods or techniques that appear in a municipal document, or are mentioned by staff at public meetings.

The point of emphasis here is that since so little methodological work has been done in municipalities in the sustainable transport field, there will no doubt be a tendency for staff to balk, or to make a fuss about being questioned. My advice is, as noted above, for community groups to stay the course despite the initial noise. Insisting upon a straightforward description of a decision procedure is an effective, efficient, and sometimes deservedly painful way to deal with those at city hall who lack due regard for citizens seeking information, and try to thwart their good public intentions..

10. *Municipal Government Responses to the Survey about Methodologies, Methods, and Techniques that Are Used to Make Decisions about Sustainable Transport Practices.* Interim Report 6.

<http://www.wellarconsulting.com/>

Comment. The survey deals with a topic that is important to every municipal government in an urban region in Canada, since every one of them has policies, plans, and programs that deal with transport issues and choices. Further, it is likely that many if not most of those issues and choices affect achieving, or not achieving, sustainable transport practices. Of the 54 municipal governments that were invited to participate in the survey, which appears to be the first of its kind in Canada, and perhaps internationally as well, ten (10) chose to do so.

It strikes me that if a municipal government has something substantive to say on an important topic it does so, in capital letters, with music blaring and lights

flashing. I therefore suggest that community associations first look at Interim Report 6 to learn whether their municipal government participated. If it did, the survey responses should be carefully examined for remarks that pertain to urban neighbourhoods. Then, I suggest, it would be instructive to ask the municipality to explain whether and how substituting urban neighbourhood for urban region would change the survey responses.

With regard to the municipalities that did not respond, I suggest that it would be informative to ask for an explanation. As noted above, and as detailed throughout the project reports, this was an important, first-of-a-kind study at the urban region level. The decision to not participate should be a heads up, or a red flag, for community associations wanting to know about the methodologies, methods, and techniques that are used to make decisions about sustainable transport practices at the urban neighbourhood level.

11. Results of an Inquiry into the Methodologies, Methods, and Techniques Used to Make Decisions About Sustainable Transport Practices. Final Report. <http://www.wellarconsulting.com/>

Comment. The reports prepared over the course of the project examine the extent to which methodologies, methods, and techniques underlie decisions by municipal governments in identifying, adopting, and implementing sustainable transport practices, including purported “best” practices. In addition to conducting a series of keyword-based literature searches, and consulting with a number of experts and practitioners about the state of use of methodologies, methods, and techniques in municipal government decision making, the project undertook a survey of municipal governments to obtain contributions to a database on the methodologies, methods, and techniques that are used by municipal governments in Canada when making decisions about sustainable transport practices.

I suggest that it would be instructive for community associations to establish and track the reports from the Transport Canada project which are being used by municipal governments to identify, adopt, or implement transport-related initiatives in general and sustainable transport practices in particular. This quest for information can be effectively achieved, with minimum cost, by directing email communications to any elected or appointed official who speaks or writes publicly about a municipal government activity which is transport-related. And, to increase the amount of useful information obtained, it is advisable to ask for details about how each report was used.

And as for those cases involving municipal government officials who are engaged in transport-related matters but do not use the Transport Canada project reports, I suggest that they be asked to provide reference information on the publications that they do use for specific tasks.. The responses could be very instructive. And revealing.

D. Conclusion

As noted in Part A, the comments and suggestions in this guide are intended to contribute to two objectives:

Establishing the general applicability of the Transport Canada project to sustainable transport decision-making at the urban neighbourhood level. Achieving this objective not only makes the Transport Canada reports relevant at the urban neighbourhood scale, but it provides a model or precedent that community associations can use in discussions with municipal governments about conducting similar methodology-oriented, neighbourhood-based, sustainable transport studies.

And,

Indicating how the respective reports can be used by community associations to make the case to municipal governments for including explicit, due regard for the “neighbourhood factor” when making decisions to identify, adopt, or implement sustainable transport practices.

The approach taken to achieve those objectives is to phrase the comments and suggestions about the project reports in ways that encourage, assist, and enable community associations to express concerns, point out issues, and ask questions in communications with elected and appointed municipal officials. And, conversely, the guide is designed to discourage community associations from trying to do the heavy lifting when it comes to incorporating the “neighbourhood factor” in the municipal government process of identifying, adopting, and implementing sustainable transport practices at the neighbourhood level. The reasoning behind this approach can be summarized as follows.

Members of community associations donate considerable amounts of time for the betterment of their neighbours and neighbourhoods, and they pay taxes to support the elected and appointed officials who comprise municipal governments. As a result, whenever community associations raise issues or pose questions, they are entitled to receive informative and timely responses from their municipal government representatives and public servants.

I believe that the comments and suggestions in the guide will appeal to and excite municipal government officials who have the will and the wits to pursue higher-order sustainable transport practices at the neighbourhood level. And, if the guide is as cutting as it is intended to be, the comments and suggestions will expose municipal officials who are not supporters of sustainable transport, or the sustainable transport interests of residents in urban neighbourhoods.