

CENTRETOWN ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION AUDIT REPORT: BANK STREET

FEBRUARY 2014



OTTAWA, ONTARIO



Acknowledgements

Centretown Citizens' Community Association and Ecology Ottawa would like to wholeheartedly thank the Centretown Community Health Centre, and Walk Ottawa for partnering with us in our Centretown Active Transportation Audit.

In addition, we also thank the following individuals and organizations for their advice and guidance:

Hilda Chow, Ottawa Public Health

Rob Wilkinson, Safer Roads Ottawa,
City of Ottawa

Karen Scott, Council on Aging in Ottawa's
Pedestrian Safety Committee

Heather Elliott, Ecology Ottawa Volunteer

Sean Fish, Ecology Ottawa Volunteer

Michel-Adrien Shepard, Transportation
Committee, Centretown Citizens' Community
Association

Liz Bernstein, Vice-President, Lowertown
Community Association

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01	Introduction	06	Annex 1: Street-by-street breakdown of observations
02	About us	11	General Observations
02	Why conduct an audit?	12	For more information
03	Background	12	Glossary
04	Issues and Recommendations (Bank St.)		



INTRODUCTION

The Transportation Committee of the Centretown Citizens Community Association (CCCA), in conjunction with Ecology Ottawa, organized an active transportation “walkability audit” on October 3rd, 2013, along Bank St. between Laurier and the Queensway. The organizations had previously completed an audit in the Elgin St. area in August 2013 with a number of volunteers and partner organizations.¹

In a walkability audit, a group of volunteers from a number of organizations, from different age groups and with different levels of physical ability roams through the community according to a predetermined route to identify obstacles to walking, bicycling and wheelchair use, as well as to comment on any positive elements that make the streets friendly and conducive to “hanging out”.

The audit looks at the condition of sidewalks and intersections, as well as a number of other factors that influence the friendliness of the environment and the comfort and safety of people moving around in the street.

The model used for this audit was a June 19 “walkability audit” in Lowertown, organized by Ecology Ottawa and the Lowertown Community Association² and utilizing a walkability checklist from the National Heart Foundation of Australia.

Participants were provided with:

- a map of the route to cover
- the checklist of criteria to use during the walk to discuss and evaluate the safety of the route, and its comfort, friendliness and convenience

The time of the walk was from just before 6:00 pm until just before 8:00 pm. There was a moderate amount of walking traffic on the sidewalk, and car, bike and skateboard traffic on the road. People travelled as one group south on Bank Street from Laurier Ave. to Catherine Street, going from Laurier to Gladstone on the east side of Bank Street, then from Gladstone to Catherine on the west side of Bank Street, returning northward almost to Somerset Street on the west side of Bank Street. However, throughout the trip, there was a good view of both sides of the street and around onto the side streets.

1 CCCA & Ecology Ottawa. (2013). Centretown Action Transportation Audit Report – Elgin St.

2 Lowertown Active Transportation Audit Report - <http://ecologyottawa.ca/2013/09/19/active-transportation-audit-calls-for-safe-and-accessible-streets/> CCCA & Ecology Ottawa. (2013). Centretown Action Transportation Audit Report – Elgin St.



ABOUT US

Ecology Ottawa

Ecology Ottawa is a not-for-profit volunteer-driven grassroots organization, working to make Ottawa the green capital of Canada. Ecology Ottawa provides residents with information and tools they need to understand local environmental issues and promote environmental leadership in city hall. Ecology Ottawa has focused on Smart Growth and Sustainable Transportation: aiming to help Ottawa adopt a sustainable urban form based on compact, complete and transit-supportive communities. <http://www.ecologyottawa.ca/>

Centretown Citizens Community Association

The Centretown Citizens Community Association (CCCA) is a volunteer-based organization that seeks to represent and promote the interests of Centretown in Ottawa, Ontario. <http://www.centretowncitizens.ca/>

WHY CONDUCT AN AUDIT?

There are many reasons why these active transportation audits are undertaken. Among the major ones are the following:

- City traffic and safety officials have explained to us in the past that they are **interested in receiving citizens' input** to help them identify problematic/unsafe intersections and sidewalks.
- Last year, the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario completed a Pedestrian Death Review that looked at ways municipalities can increase citizens' safety, in particular in areas where there are large populations of pedestrians and many different uses and destinations, including school areas, seniors' homes, community and recreation centres and businesses (<http://www.mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/stellent/groups/public/@mcscs/@www/@com/documents/webasset/ec161058.pdf>). Some of those recommendations include changes such as bulbouts at intersections, more visible crosswalks, advanced green lights for pedestrians, pedestrian countdown signal timers, or wider sidewalks to accommodate mobility aids. An audit will help us **identify where some of those fixes would be most appropriate**.
- Public health officials also like reminding us that our transportation choices have a significant impact on the environment, with fossil fuel engines of cars and trucks contributing up to 34% of Ottawa's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Active transportation includes any form of human-powered transportation, walking, cycling, using a wheelchair, skateboarding, rollerblading. Active transportation choices help **promote healthier communities**.
- Centretown is an area of high pedestrian traffic and Centretown residents value accessibility for people of all ages and abilities. We envision a community featuring safe, comfortable, convenient, accessible, pleasant sidewalks with healthy trees and public art. At the recent spring 2013 public consultations for the City of Ottawa's Master Plan Review ("Building a Liveable Ottawa"), many **residents called for improved pedestrian, cycling accessibility** and vibrant public spaces.

BACKGROUND

The audit we conducted will be of interest to all citizens of Ottawa. We value a walkable community not only for residents and the people who work in Centretown but also for the many people who visit from other parts of the City.

What happens here impacts Centretowners AND citizens of other neighbourhoods who visit us.

Centretown presents particular challenges because it is both a destination with traffic to and from elsewhere as well as a residential neighbourhood with a high volume of internal traffic by car, bike, transit and foot. Streets are often narrow and busy and are home to a complex mixture of businesses, institutions and residences of all shapes, heights and sizes. It is a neighbourhood with very high pedestrian traffic.

Centretown comprises two distinct communities:

1. an almost exclusively commercial Central Business District in the Northern section, and
2. a predominantly residential district, south of Laurier Avenue.

In the predominantly residential neighbourhoods of Centretown, pedestrian traffic is more evenly spread over the entire week and into the evening with residents travelling between home, shopping, entertainment, and dining destinations along Elgin and Bank Streets.

Pedestrians in residential Centretown face the challenge of high volumes of vehicle traffic on their roads. The four road arterials that transport commuters between the Central Business District and Highway 417 (The Queensway) transect the residential areas.

During the morning weekday peak, around 900 cars per hour travel north on Metcalfe Street with a lesser number later in the day. The traffic on O'Connor Street is even heavier with around 1,600 vehicles per hour at the afternoon peak.

In the latest Community Design Plan for Centretown, the community's population is expected to grow by 10,000 residents over the next 20 years as development is targeted for areas within 600 metres of the Confederation LRT Line.

Population growth will entail a significant increase in the number of travellers on the streets of Centretown. If problems in the pedestrian realm remain unresolved, those who would ordinarily travel by foot will seek out alternative and less active modes of transportation.

The primary objective of the walkability audit was to assess whether the pedestrian network was safe, comfortable, convenient, and age-friendly. The secondary objective was to determine any possible improvements.





ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS (BANK ST.)

More detailed street-by-street comments are in the next section (Annex 1)

Generally speaking, participants concluded that:

- Sidewalks are in much better condition than in the Elgin zone – Bank St. between Laurier and the Queensway is easily walkable / travelable by wheelchair. Sidewalks are fairly smooth and without disruptive seams, except for a few slightly raised edges or steeper slopes at a few intersections that caused some relatively small inconvenience for wheelchair users. Except for a few stretches of narrower sidewalk, in most spots three people can walk side by side easily. Some obstructions on the narrower stretches were caused by sandwich boards encroaching on the walking space

Recommendation: audit team members recommend that any outstanding deficiencies be reported to the city's 311 service. Obstructions such as sandwich boards that impede pedestrian traffic should also be reported to 311.

- There were several places on the East side that are very poorly kept. For example, the old Imperial Hall is vacant and the segment will steadily decay if not properly restored, bringing down the overall atmosphere of the block

Recommendation: audit team members recommend that bylaws about garbage and cleanliness be better enforced. In addition, city economic development officials in cooperation with the local BIA should work on getting new tenants to occupy vacant spaces

- Many participants identified a need for more “security” such as an “on street” police presence. Some areas such as the area at and near the Bank/Somerset intersection drew many comments: there have been problems of public drunkenness, drugs and outdoor sexual activities witnessed in alcove-like areas at or near this corner

Recommendation: audit team members recommend that there be more “beat” police officers patrolling on foot or on bike along Bank St.

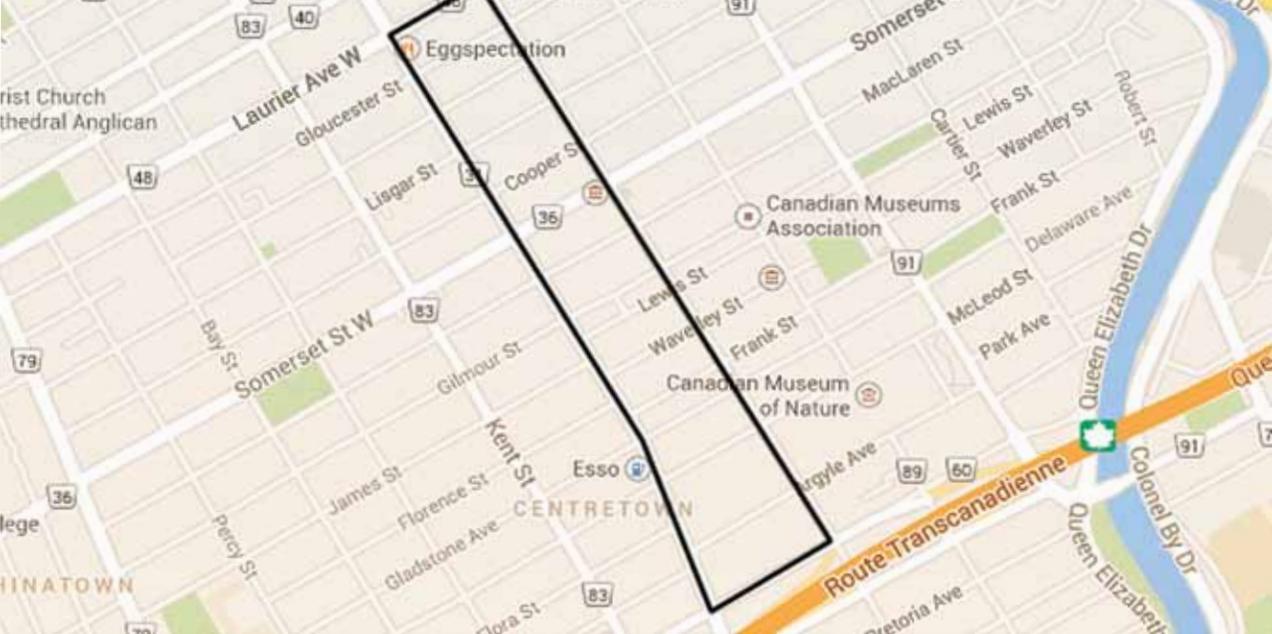


- Many beautification opportunities were identified: intersections with bulb-outs that could accommodate more benches and parklets; blank walls that could be embellished with murals; wide stretches of shop fronts along relatively wide sidewalks on the East side of the street that could be made more enticing with display stalls or awnings (a good example was felt to be the tables and awning in front of the Herbs & Spice food store - see photo at <http://www.bankstreet.ca/en/all-listings/herbs-spice-shop/> - the Bank St. BIA may be the appropriate recipient of any comments, conclusions or suggestions relating to beautification)

Recommendation: audit team members recommend that city staff, the Bank St. BIA and community members create a committee to come up with a list of “beautification” projects including possible initiatives relating to landscaping, parklets, murals and/or other public art

ANNEX 1: STREET-BY-STREET BREAKDOWN OF OBSERVATIONS

Below is the complete list of observations and action recommendations for the audit of October 3rd, 2013.



Map of active transportation audit route

- ⊖ Negative comment
- ⊕ Positive comment
- Immediate Action
- Short-term action
- ▲ Mid-term action
- ◆ Long-term action

Location	Observations	Action
Bank St. Laurier to Gloucester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Segregated bike lane on Laurier ⊕ Nice open space in front of ⊕ L'Esplanade Laurier entrance ⊕ Lots of bicycle parking and variety of rack styles ⊕ Sidewalks flat and smooth, wheelchairs had no difficulties ⊕ Benches off to the side, do not impede pedestrian traffic ⊕ Food vendor ⊕ Audible crosswalk signals ⊖ Needs more greenery, possibility of a parklet at L'Esplanade Laurier ⊖ Needs greenery on bulb outs at Gloucester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Create parklet ■ Plants on bulb out

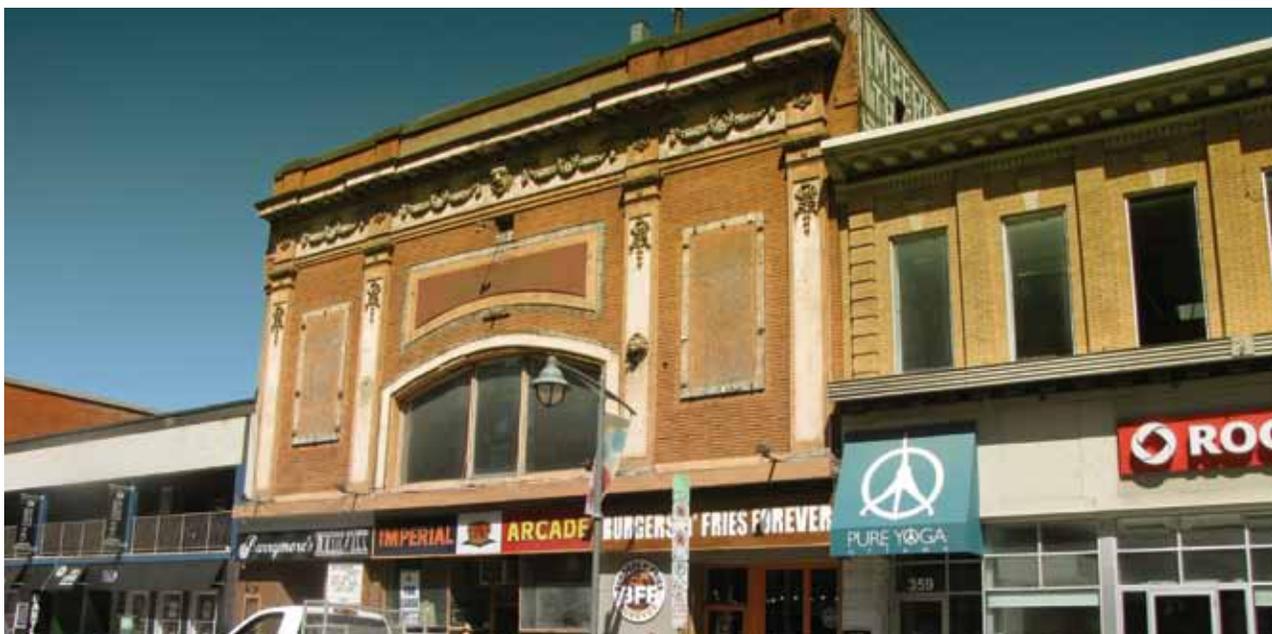
Location	Observations	Action
Bank St. Gloucester to Nepean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Pedestrian signals give long crossing time ⊕ Well designed curb cuts ⊕ Patio in front of Bread and Sons well used ⊕ Audible crosswalk signals ⊖ 2 dead trees, need replacement ⊖ Transit users and smokers can block the sidewalk in front of Tim Hortons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Replace trees ■ Get bylaw officers to talk to Tim Hortons to have them request customers not to block sidewalk
Bank St. Nepean to Lisgar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Mural on wall of Computer Warehouse ⊕ Public telephone booths ⊖ 3 dead trees, need replacement ⊖ Lots of sandwich boards ⊖ Nepean could use a crosswalk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Replace trees ■ Bylaw officers to check whether boards respect minimum width of unencumbered sidewalk room for pedestrians ▲ Conduct study whether crosswalk needed
Bank St. Lisgar to Cooper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Chip truck during the day ⊖ Sidewalk narrower than previous sections ⊖ Lots of sandwich boards ⊖ Needs a bench 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bylaw officers to check whether boards respect minimum width of encumbered sidewalk room for pedestrians ■ Install bench(es)



Location	Observations	Action
Bank St. Cooper to Somerset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Chip truck during the day ⊕ Café with covered patio ⊕ Very wide sidewalk on east side ⊖ Blind alley in between Henry's and the Woman's Credit Union ⊖ Uneven sidewalk outside of Gabriel's ⊖ Dead tree ⊖ Cooper could use a crosswalk ⊖ Bus stop on east side needs a shelter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Install signage in alley to warn drivers to slow /stop ■ Fix sidewalk ■ Replace tree ■ Conduct study whether crosswalk needed ■ Contact OC Transpo about installing shelter
Bank St. Somerset to MacLaren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Lots of bicycle parking for Hartman's Grocer ⊖ Somerset suddenly narrows east of Bank, cyclists need to swerve into traffic ⊖ Near a dead tree on the north-east corner of Somerset and Bank, the sidewalk is uneven here ⊖ Vacant building is covered in advertising and graffiti ⊖ Light post further inset into sidewalk than other blocks ⊖ Bicyclist was seen riding on the sidewalk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Find out if a wider road will be restored once Somerset House is rebuilt. We assume this will change with renovation ■ Fix sidewalk ◆ We assume this will change with renovation ▲ Relocate post ▲ Post signs that cyclists should get off of bikes and walk them on sidewalks



Location	Observations	Action
Bank St. MaLaren to Gilmour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Mural of wall of Foster's Sports ⊖ Needs a bench ⊖ Imperial Arcade been vacant a long time, looks unkempt ⊖ Sidewalks dirty ⊖ Balconies over the sidewalk on west side 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Install bench(es) ◆ In cooperation with BIA, city should work on getting new tenant ■ Ensure sidewalks kept clean
Bank St. Gilmour to James	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Mural of wall of Herb and Spice ⊕ Covered patio at Herb and Spice ⊖ Needs benches ⊖ Needs trees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Install bench(es) ■ Plant tree(s)
Bank St. James to Florence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Bixi bike rack at James St. Pub ⊕ Bike racks at Waverley ⊖ Vacant corner lot with nothing on it ⊖ Massive white wall on side of Staples needs a mural ⊖ Bank and Florence is a good spot for a parklet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ In cooperation with BIA, city should work on getting new tenant/ building ◆ Perhaps in cooperation with BIA & Staples, hold an art contest ▲ Create parklet



Location	Observations	Action
Bank St. Florence to Gladstone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ Garbage covering north-west corner ⊖ Needs bench at Frank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Install bench(es)
Bank St. Gladstone to McLeod	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Flower box at Esso station ⊖ Balconies of condo complex hang over sidewalk (people walk underneath) ⊖ Bagged garbage overflowing into bus stop ⊖ Sidewalk seems narrower, more congested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Perhaps place planters underneath balconies ■ Enforce bylaws about garbage
Bank St. McLeod to Flora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ Lots of construction at condo complex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Revisit after construction
Bank St. Flora to Arlington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Benches and trees at Centretown United Church ⊖ Lots of weeds at Flora, needs trimming ⊖ Bench or flowerpot needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Landscaping ■ Install bench(es) or planters
Bank St. Arlington to Catherine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Lots of greenery between Catherine and the Queensway ⊖ Lots of weeds at Arlington, needs trimming ⊖ Needs greenery near gas station ⊖ Could use bench at Arlington 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Landscaping ■ Install planters ■ Install bench(es)





GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

- ⊖ Negative comment
- ⊕ Positive comment

-
- ⊕ The Gay Village, for its cultural significance, celebration, public art and colour!
 - ⊕ Hydro boxes covered in colourful and graffiti resistant artwork
 - ⊕ Trees along street (although some have been removed and should be replaced in the spring)
 - ⊕ Lots of bicycle racks (ring and post, blue racks, long grey racks, public art)
 - ⊕ Many traffic light poles have space dedicated for posters
 - ⊕ Use of murals but there is lots of available blank space for even more
 - ⊕ Awnings on several buildings – BIA or city should encourage more shops to install colourful awnings
 - ⊕ Traffic calming measures (bulb-outs) in place on side streets onto/off of Bank St.

 - ⊖ Not every major intersection had a crosswalk to traverse Bank, encouraged lots of jaywalking
 - ⊖ Street needs more garbage cans - Recycling stations (like on Elgin)?
 - ⊖ Bank could benefit greatly from more parklets
 - ⊖ Sandwich boards can obstruct pedestrian right of way in some (not all) locations – much more room on East side of street for sandwich boards than on West side
 - ⊖ Questions of safety along Bank, should beat cops be reinstated? (Expressed by several auditors and passing pedestrians)



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Lowertown Active Transportation Audit Report

<http://ecologyottawa.ca/2013/09/19/active-transportation-audit-calls-for-safe-and-accessible-streets/>

Building a Liveable Ottawa 2031: City of Ottawa strategic documents under review in 2013 include: Official Plan; Transportation Master Plan; Infrastructure Master Plan; Cycling Plan; and Pedestrian Plan.

<http://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/official-and-master-plans>

Pedestrian Death Review, Office of Chief Coroner for Ontario, September 19, 2012 <http://news.ontario.ca/mcscs/en/2012/09/chief-coroner-releases-pedestrian-death-review.html>

Neighbourhood Walkability Checklist, National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2011. <http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/active-living/Documents/Neighbourhood-walkability-checklist.pdf>

ccca@centretowncitizens.ca

info@ecologyottawa.ca

GLOSSARY

Complete Streets

Complete Streets is a planning framework that holds transportation planners and engineers to designs that ensure streets are accessible to all users, not just cars. Streets are designed to accommodate all ages, abilities and modes of travel, including forms of Active Transportation. This includes infrastructure that provides safe and comfortable access for pedestrians, cyclists, transit-users and the mobility-impaired.

<http://completestreetsforcanada.ca/what-are-complete-streets>

Active Transportation

Active transportation refers to all human powered forms of transportation, particularly walking and cycling, but also skateboarding, rollerblading and skiing, and using a wheelchair. Active transportation can also be combined with other modes, such as public transit that together can decrease dependency on vehicles and promote healthy households by increasing exercise. Active transportation also helps to build bustling, safe and complete communities.

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/at-ta-eng.php>