

ACTIVATE AURORA: Active Transportation

By Ron Weese

This is one of those phrases that has become popular for all the wrong reasons.

'Active Transportation' was never discussed; wasn't even a phrase 50 years ago. It just happened because people walked or rode their bicycles out of necessity. Cars weren't the preferred form of transportation, so human-power was the only way to get around. Streets were considered safe for walkers and cyclists.

A lot has changed.

One glaring example is that in one generation walking to school is almost extinct. With it goes 2,000 steps on average per day lost to every child. According to the Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity, children (6 to 11 years) should be walking between 12,000 and 16,000 steps per day. Recent data regarding school-aged children during school days, suggest that there is a 2,000 step deficit daily.

Lost then are the calories and the cardiovascular benefits of walking, but also gone are the social and emotional benefits that come from spending twenty minutes with friends before school. Remember the fun you had walking to school with your friends?

But parents should also understand that when the same data is collected over the weekend, a further 3,000 step deficit is reported.

What is evident is that walking to school and physical activity on the weekend is in decline as we prefer 'passive transportation' over active. Kids aren't as active, parents aren't as active and health and social benefits are lost.

Creating a community where active transportation is valued, supported and enabled is important if we want to be considered a 'Healthy Place'. The 'Healthy Places' concept is one that is global in scope and, in each one, there is a theme called 'Active Transportation'.

Here are some suggestions about building a community that supports active transportation and building Aurora as a healthy place. I am proud to say we have a few of these in place. The rest need some work.

Encourage Safe Routes to School programs to enable children to walk and bike to school safely.

Construct a connected network of multi-use trails.

Accommodate all roadway users with comprehensive street design measures such as 'complete streets,' including sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and share-the-road signs that provide safe and convenient travel for all users of the roadway.

Separate motor-vehicle traffic from non-motorized traffic with physical barriers, such as the construction of bicycle boulevards.

Prioritize infrastructure improvements near transit stops and public transportation stations.

Provide safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian connections to public parks and recreation areas.

Promote safe roadway crossing through use of small block sizes, pedestrian refuge islands, and cross-walks.

Provide streetscape amenities such as benches, landscaping, lighting, and public art.

Encourage way-finding with signs, maps, and landscape cues to direct pedestrians and bicyclists to the most direct route.

Encourage bicycle parking at workplaces and transit stops.

Encourage the development of street-level shopping and restaurants along pedestrian and bicycle routes.

Educate bicyclists and pedestrians on local laws, as well as on safe practices.

Some good news! Our Trails Committee is working now, among other things, on the development of trails-use strategies. This includes a Bike Aurora Event on June 24 that will encourage bike-use on our extensive trails system.

Likewise, Activate Aurora and their partners are implementing 'Open Streets Aurora' on June 4, designed to encourage walking in the Cultural Precinct and more Open Street Aurora events are being planned. An 'Open Trails' event has been suggested to bring people to our trails system. Three new Activate Aurora Schools are coming on-stream in September and Travel Plans are being developed.

But let's all start by leaving the car at home.

It is a big paradigm shift but is needed to boost active transportation. Consider taking some time to engage in activities that explore our Town as a pedestrian, not just for recreational purposes but as a part of every-day life.

Join us on June 4 at Open Streets Aurora and walk our Cultural Precinct and join in activities at Town Park. Find one of our trails at goo.gl/GbQeYN and take the family for a walk. Consider joining Bike Aurora on June 24 for a trails bike experience.

As the Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu once stated, 'the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.' Let's take that first important step.