

Open Streets in Greater Sudbury

Background:

Significant strides have been made to deliver on the recommendations of the Transportation Master Plan (2016) which suggests the City explore opportunities to expand upon its leadership role through the development, implementation and promotion of outreach programs with local partners to educate residents about the many benefits that participating in active transportation provides. Providing programming and events, like Open Streets, are also a great way to engage residents in the community.

Open Streets are unique programs that have been held in over 100 cities in North America and involve temporarily repurposing municipal streets into car-free spaces for people to walk, cycle, or participate in other programmed activities. These types of events can be held on a single day or can be recurring on a weekly, monthly or annual basis and have been shown to help encourage physical activity, civic engagement, and transportation behavior changes.

To be successful, Open Streets events typically require that they take place on an iconic route at a regular frequency include activity hubs of complementary programming and are free and accessible to participate in. The best Open Streets programs are designed to be inclusive of all ages, abilities and socio-economic circumstances. All users, including walkers, runners, cyclists, rollers, strollers and those with mobility devices should feel welcome at the event.

Building an Open Streets Program in Greater Sudbury

To better understand the requirements of developing an Open Streets program and hosting regular events, staff have conducted research and reached out to other internal departments and external community partners to gather information. Considerations generally include:

- **Location** – A controlled access roadway, like the Maley Drive Extension, would generally present fewer traffic control challenges than a more urban arterial road with multiple intersections and commercial driveways. However, this type of roadway does not necessarily maximize any potential economic or social benefits to the local community that may be realized from the event being held on a commercial corridor or in a town centre.
- **Day of The Week** – Sundays are the most popular day to host open streets events as traffic volumes are typically lower, making it easier to manage traffic flow or to eliminate vehicles from the route. Hosting an event on the weekend also generally enables more people to participate in leisure activities.
- **Number of Program Dates** – There are compelling reasons to consider multiple program or event dates. As part of the goal with Open Streets is to provide the community with a consistent opportunity to get active, setting aside time at regular intervals can achieve this. These types of programs tend to also grow through word-of-mouth and providing multiple dates enables more people to participate. Multiple dates can also provide a measure of protection for the program from poor weather.
- **Road Closure(s) / Traffic Congestion** – In urban areas on commercial corridors, Open Streets programs typically have select intersections open along the route to allow traffic to flow perpendicular to the street closure. Operationally, the fewer open intersections you have the easier the route is to manage.

- **Site Accessibility / Parking** – Choosing a location that is accessible by multiple modes of transportation will ensure that the highest numbers of people are able to participate in the program. Should a site be chosen that has limited access for people on foot, bicycle or arriving by transit, parking will need to be provided, as well as a safe way for participants to access the site. One option could be to provide a transit shuttle from the parking area, which would increase the cost of providing this program.
- **Health and Safety** – Any future Open Streets events would be hosted outdoors and in full compliance with any Public Health Sudbury and Districts or other public health authority's requirements related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Communications and Marketing** – The most important factor involved in delivering a successful Open Streets program is that people show up to participate. Communicating with the public and promoting the program will be a significant undertaking leading up to and including on the day(s) programming takes place.

Beat the Traffic – Maley Drive Extension

To celebrate the completion of the first phase of the Maley Drive Extension, the City hosted its first Open Streets type of event called "Beat the Traffic". This initial event was modeled after similar events that have previously been held on freeway segments elsewhere in Ontario. On October 20, 2019, approximately 1,200 residents of all ages walked, ran, cycled, rollerbladed, wheeled and pushed strollers down the nearly 3 km of new road on Maley Drive between Barry Downe Road and Notre Dame Avenue.

Building upon the success of the inaugural event, members of Council expressed interest in continuing to provide this type of programming for residents of Greater Sudbury. On October 21, 2019, the Operations Committee passed Resolution OP2019-25 directing staff to explore the possibility of closing a section of Maley Drive on a regular basis to enable more active transportation opportunities. Staff estimates the cost to host additional Open Streets events on Maley Drive to be \$10,000 per event. This cost assumes that a future event would be held on a Sunday and includes funding for staff time, traffic material, promotional material and a transit shuttle.

Below are the specific considerations for future Open Streets events on Maley Drive:

- **Location** – Maley Drive between Barry Downe Road and Notre Dame Avenue is considered a controlled access roadway with no intersections. This would require closing access at each end only.
- **Day of The Week** – Sunday has generally lower traffic volumes on Maley Drive and surrounding roads, minimizing potential traffic interruptions to the public. The duration of an Open Streets event is typically four hours.

- **Number of Program Dates** – Costs to host this event one time are relatively fixed (approximately \$10,000) and could be scaled to the number of events which Council chooses to host. It is important to note that the unionized staff who would be working to setup and take down the event are not obligated to work Sunday shifts and would need to accept these shifts. If events are scheduled at a high frequency, it may become challenging to find a sufficient number of staff who are willing to accept these shifts. If there are not enough staff willing to accept these shifts, the setup and take down of the event could be contracted out. Staff anticipates these costs would be higher than what has been estimated in this report.
- **Road Closure(s) / Traffic Congestion** – Linear Infrastructure Services staff are able to set up and tear down any materials required for road closures.
- **Site Accessibility / Parking** – Maley Drive between Barry Downe Road and Notre Dame Avenue is relatively inaccessible by foot, bicycle or by transit and generally must be accessed by vehicle. As the roadway is now open, vehicle parking will need to be offsite which may impact the number of participants in the event. Parking could potentially be located at one or both of the post-secondary institutions near the event location and participants would then require a shuttle to access the event site. Staff have investigated the option to provide a Greater Sudbury Transit shuttle from these potential parking areas. Also of consideration is that transit vehicles currently operating as private shuttles have a recommended maximum capacity of 50% occupancy or 15 riders, due to current Covid-19 related restrictions. Detailed discussions regarding parking locations and shuttle service to take place upon approval.
- **Health and Safety** – Any future Open Streets events would be hosted outdoors and in full compliance with any Public Health Sudbury and Districts or other public health authority's requirements related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Communications and Marketing** – Communicating with the public and promoting the event may be undertaken by internal staff with funds to bolster marketing efforts with paid social media, radio or newspaper ads.



Case Study: Open Streets Windsor

During the October 19, 2019 Operations Committee meeting, a discussion took place about the potential to host an Open Streets event elsewhere in the Greater Sudbury community. Staff has also been approached previously by members of Council wishing to explore this idea further. To provide an example of what delivering this program in a more commercial or urban area may entitle, a brief case study on Open Streets Windsor is provided here for the Committee's information.

The City of Windsor has hosted the annual Open Streets Windsor event every September since 2016 to an audience of up to 10,000 participants. Open Streets Windsor covers an approximately eight kilometer span through a number of neighbourhoods from east to west. Throughout the route, Business Improvement Associations, community organizations and not-for-profit organizations host over 200 activities, concentrated in eight hub locations. Participatory activities include exercise and dance classes, art-making, installations, workshops, performances, street games, water stations, obstacle courses and neighbourhood tours.

Open Streets Windsor requires over 300 volunteers to assist in the road closures and dozens of volunteer organizations to host activities for participants. The City of Windsor dedicates a full-time staff project manager to planning this event for a minimum of four months each year and the event is allocated an operating budget of approximately \$110,000. In addition to this operating budget, Open Streets Windsor relies on community and corporate sponsorships to cover the balance of the costs associated with delivering this large-scale annual event.

Next Steps

Developing and implementing an Open Streets program would build upon the success of Beat the Traffic and the growing interest in active transportation in the community and will ultimately lead to increased civic pride, engagement and potentially more residents choosing to walk, bike, take transit or carpool to access destinations.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the uncertainty of how people may be able to gather in 2021, staff recommend that an Open Streets event only on Maley Drive be considered for 2021 and that these events be held once a month, starting in June and ending in September. These events would be limited to using active modes of transportation on Maley Drive and would not include any programmed activities. As there is no existing funding in place to host these events, staff will prepare a business case for consideration during the 2021 Budget process to host four Open Streets events on Maley Drive in 2021 at a total cost of \$40,000.

Staff also recommend that work continue with internal partners to refine the full cost of delivering an expanded Open Streets program and a report with these details be brought back to the Operations Committee by the fourth quarter of 2021 and in advance of the 2022 budget deliberations.