



ASAP

active streets // active people

Consultation & Key Findings

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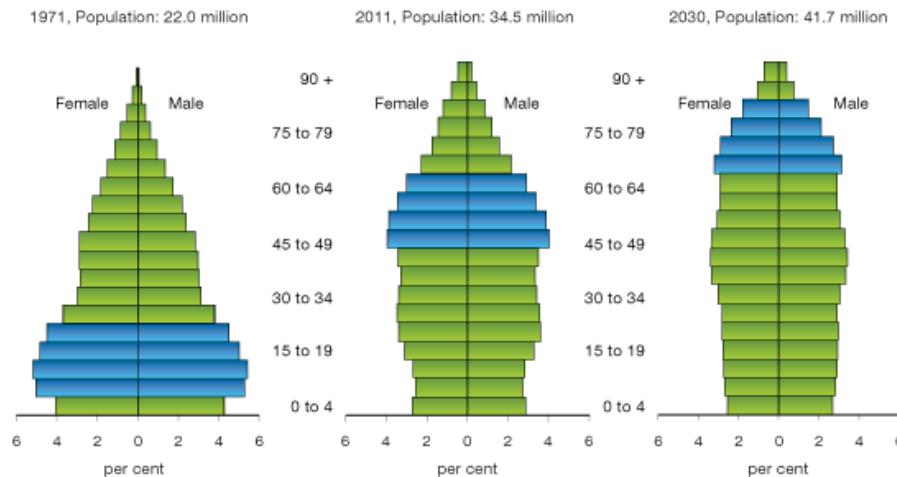
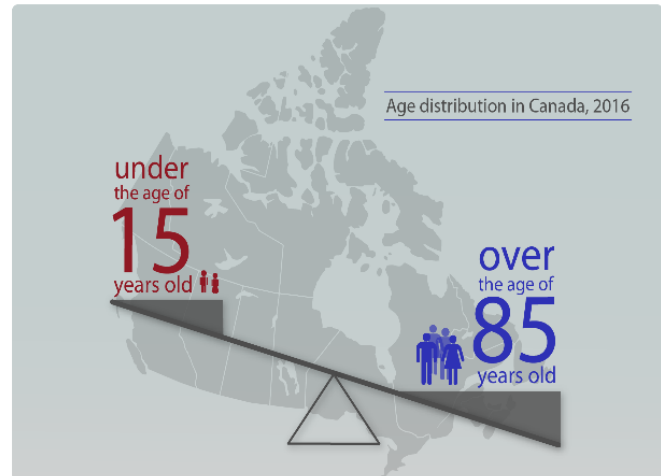
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Why Make Cities Good Places to Grow Old?

Our population is aging. Improvements in life expectancy and declining fertility rates are largely responsible. The population of Canada is expected to age even more rapidly than other countries as baby-boomers fast approach retirement age ¹.

For the first time ever, experts predict that in the coming years the number of Canadians over age 85 will outnumber young Canadians under age 15. This reality must guide investments we make in our cities.

Importantly, investments in urban spaces that promote social connectedness, health and mobility of older adults are good for children, youth and families.



Changes in the Canadian population age structure

Source: Statistics Canada¹,

¹ Statistics Canada, <http://www.fin.gc.ca/pub/eficap-rebvpc/report-rapport-eng.asp>

Consultation & Evaluation with Older Adults

Consultation

The Centre for Hip Health and Mobility with the City of Vancouver engaged older adults living in Vancouver downtown neighbourhoods in conversations about neighbourhood design features that could promote active transportation and place-making. What we learned informed the City of Vancouver's urban development project called the Comox- Helmcken Greenway—an important east-west connection through Downtown from False Creek to Stanley Park. The Greenway was designed to connect parks, schools, community centres, neighbourhoods and retail areas. This change to the west end's urban form encourages people of all ages and abilities to explore their city by foot and bicycle. The greenway offers accessibility, convenience and comfort, improves pedestrian and cyclist safety, beautifies the street with gardens and trees and provide places to pause, sit and socialize.



Our team visited places where older adults live, work and play (e.g., BC Housing supported living facilities, community centres and neighbourhood houses). During these consultations we recorded the voices of some of Vancouver's most senior residents, most of whom would be unlikely to attend traditional public open house events. Through a series of focus groups, we facilitated conversations and guided walking tours with more than 50 older adults who live along and would potentially use the Greenway.

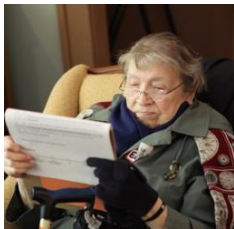
The sessions and walking tours provided an excellent mechanism for older adults and persons with disabilities to offer first hand, their thoughts and ideas on environmental design features that mattered to them (e.g. as timing of pedestrian crossings, curb cuts). To illustrate, while on one of the walking tours an older adult noted that the sidewalks near City Hall (Cambie and 10-12th) were ideal for individuals in wheelchairs. Within focus groups and through individual conversations we connected with older adults who admittedly did not 'get out that much'. They had much to offer in terms of accessible neighbourhood design that would encourage them to do so. We heard many ideas for change to make the Greenway a place where individuals with physical and cognitive challenges, families and people of all ages could engage more fully with the outdoor urban environment.

When we analyzed the data four key themes surfaced:

- 1. Comox is not a destination...but it could be**
- 2. Benches are essential**
- 3. Sidewalks must be wide with smooth curb cuts**
- 4. The importance of parking, cycling and pedestrian zones**

The “ASAP Sr.” Study

Our team at the Centre for Hip Health and Mobility used what we learned during consultations to design, and conduct an externally funded (Peter Wall Institute of Advanced Studies) study called “Active Streets Active People”. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the health, mobility and social connectedness of older adults who lived along the Greenway before starting (2012) and after completion (2014) of the Greenway project. Similarly, we assessed “micro features” of the urban environment along the corridor before and after the City of Vancouver’s work on the Greenway. We collected information in the following ways:



Questionnaires

- 300+ questions on health status, physical activity, social connections, and perceptions of neighbourhood
- (n=193 adults 60+ living within 400m of the greenway)



Activity monitors

- Accelerometry: to assess physical activity
- GPS Monitors: to assess where participants go



Street audits

- Seniors Walkability Environment Audit Tool (100+ street blocks including 14 blocks directly on Greenway)



Interviews

- In-person interviews (27 participants)

1. Comox is not a destination...but it could be

What we learned during consultations

Most older adults we spoke with did not consider the Comox-Helmcken corridor a destination with amenities they would choose to use. Many preferred to walk in areas populated with shops and services (i.e. Robson, Denman, and Davie) or that were more aesthetically pleasing (the seawall). Many older adults took daily walks to get out and see what was going on in their neighbourhood and to run errands.

A number of participants noted that gardens (planters and colourful, aesthetically pleasing flowers) and spaces for local artists to showcase their work would encourage more older adults to use the Comox-Helmcken corridor. They suggested an “artist” walk or transformable, programmable theatre/display space would bring community out and together along the corridor.

What our study showed

After Greenway construction, a majority (53%) of older adults who participated considered changes made were either positive or neutral; only 10% were unaware that changes had been made.

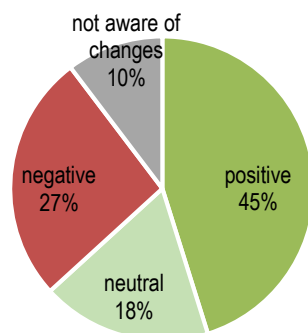


Above: Compared with 2012 (before greenway development), in 2014 (after greenway development), 6 additional blocks had street garden areas as part of the City of Vancouver’s Green Streets Program.”

"We needed an east-west corridor in the middle of the West End... I also hear lots of people complain about it ... because it did change their pattern, traffic ... this summer I was amazed how many people do use it. Especially at this end from Jervis to Burrard."

~ASAP Older Adult Interview Participant

On the whole, I think the Greenway changes are...



2. Benches are essential

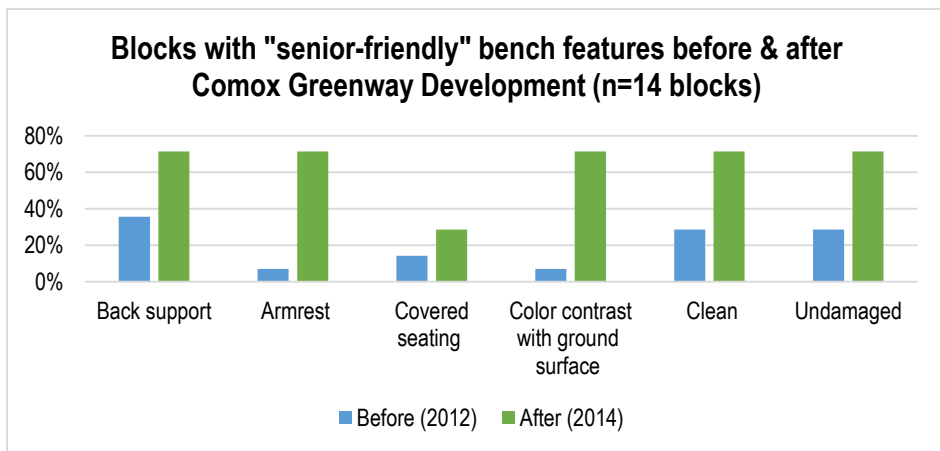
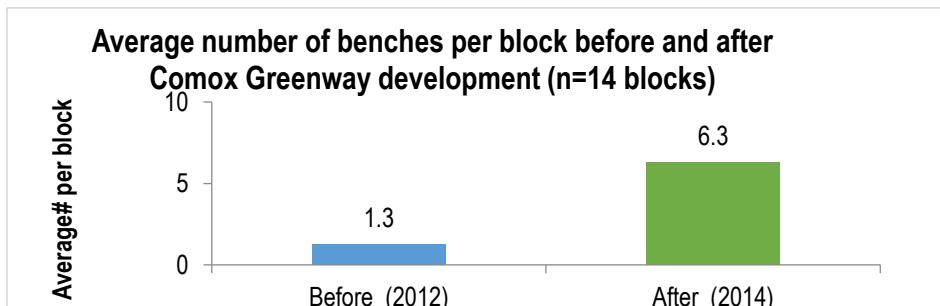
What we learned during consultations

Every older adult we spoke with indicated that appropriate types of street furniture were an important feature of place-making. Many older people require frequent rest stops, especially in areas with hills (i.e. Comox). They considered benches or street chairs near gardens with traffic calming ideal. They also noted that seating must be easy to use, transitions must be considered, and spaces for mobility aids must be provided. A number of older adults commented they would like “to walk, sit and look at something interesting.”

What our study showed

“I think [providing benches] encourages people to come out of their apartments and sit on benches, especially if they have a bit of sun. And so I see them used, and I’m always happy to see public spaces used because it means that we’ll keep them.” ~ASAP Older Adult Interview Participant

Our street audit clearly demonstrated improved seating along the greenway after development. Importantly the improved quality and frequency of seating offered “senior-friendly” features (i.e. back support, arm rests, covering).



Benches on Comox

New seating at Nelson Park with armrests



Back support on stools in seating area on Comox St



Existing bench being well maintained

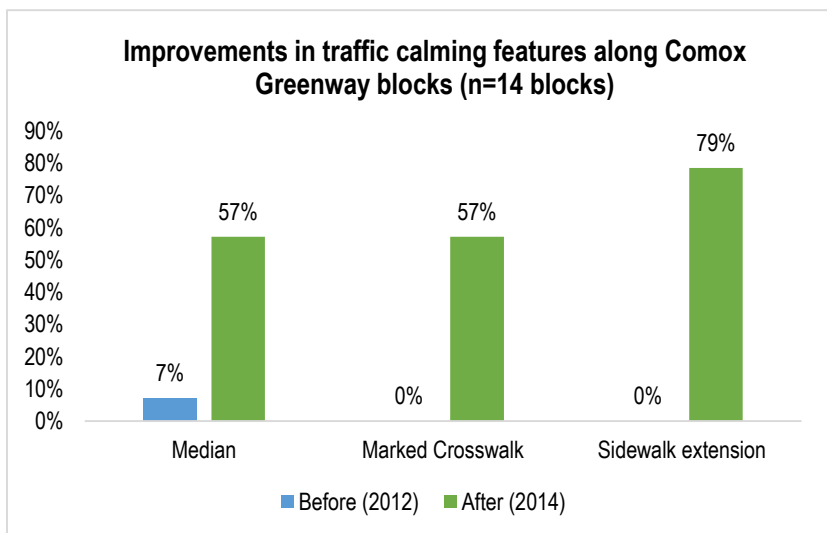
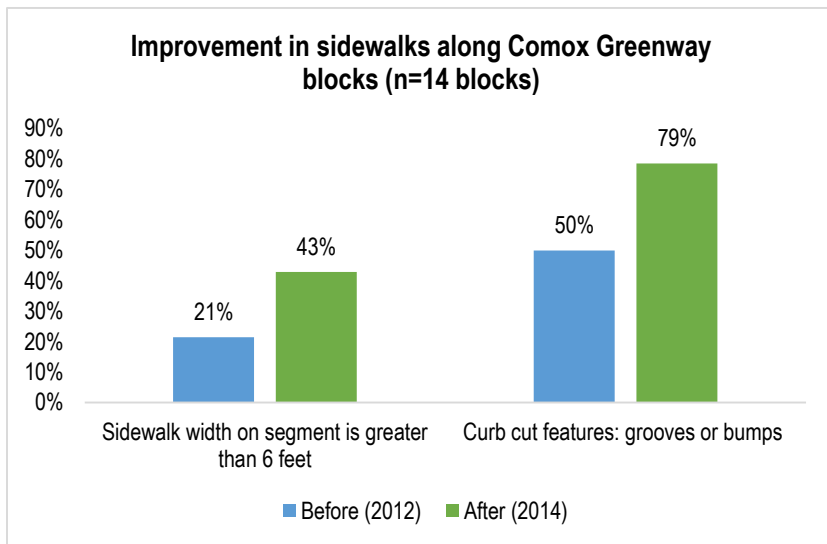


3. Sidewalks must be wide with smooth curb cuts

What we learned during consultations

Many older adults we spoke with used some type of mobility aid and many are visually impaired. They suggested that smooth walkways with clear visual cues for transitions and smooth curb cuts with clear indications as to where a wheel chair could roll would be desirable. Even slight bumps in the pavement can cause a wheel chair to catch and proves uncomfortable terrain for wheeled mobility. Many of the wheelers currently use alleys or less busy streets to get around as they were considered smoother, more comfortable and safer than the sidewalks.

What our study showed

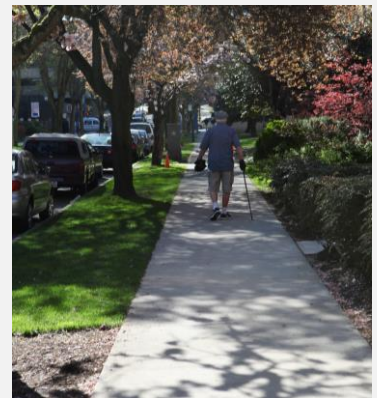


Sidewalks on Comox

Grooves on broad apron curb cuts



Wide sidewalks with green buffer from street



Median between vehicle and bike lane



4. Parking, cycling and pedestrian zones are important

What we learned during consultations

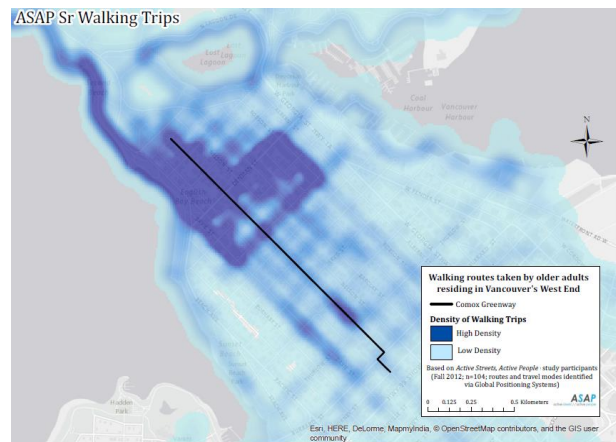
A number of older adults felt that parking was essential along the Greenway and should not be compromised. There were also a number of older residents who felt the Greenway should be a pedestrian only zone. These differences appeared to be related to car ownership or concerns about access for visitors. Similarly, some older adults supported the idea of increased cycling access along the Greenway while others were against it. Many older adults mentioned the danger they faced when cyclists used sidewalks. They wanted to ensure that cycling on sidewalks would change with a Greenway along the corridor.

What our study showed

99% walk
22% cycle

Nearly every older adult we assessed who lived along the Greenway (99%) indicated that in a usual week they walked

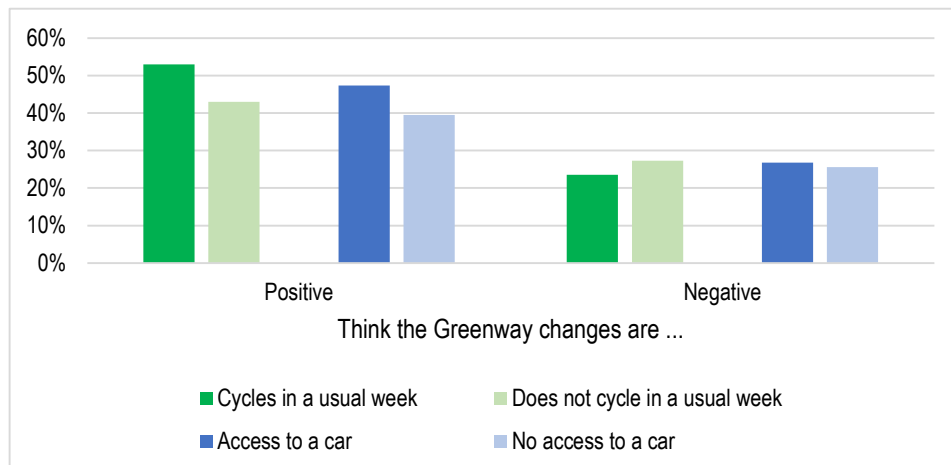
somewhere (either for transportation or leisure/fitness). The map to the right represents the density of trips taken by walking by older adult participants. Note the very high density of walking in the West End neighbourhood and that many walking routes cross the Greenway.



Above: Density of walking trips for ASAP-Sr participants in 2012 as measured by GPS trackers worn for one

Before Greenway development, 30% of older adults indicated they took a trip by bicycle in a usual week. This declined to 22% two years later. As we interviewed the same participants two years later, this could reflect participants reduced mobility.

However, overall those who regularly cycled and those who had access to a car considered Greenway changes to be positive.



Additional Resources

Study Publications

1. Haggis, C., Sims-Gould, J., Winters, M., Gutteridge, K., & McKay, H. A. (2013). **Sustained impact of community-based physical activity interventions: key elements for success.** *BMC public health*, 13(1), 892.
2. Voss C, Sims-Gould J, Ashe MC, McKay HA, Pugh C, Winters M. (2016). **Public transit use and physical activity in community-dwelling older adults: combining GPS and accelerometry to assess transportation-related physical activity.** *J Transp Health*. [in press].
3. Winters, M., Sims-Gould, J., Franke, T., & McKay, H. (2014). **“I grew up on a bike”: Cycling and older adults.** *Journal of Transport & Health*.
4. Winters, M., Voss, C., Ashe, M. C., Gutteridge, K., McKay, H., & Sims-Gould, J. (2014). **Where do they go and how do they get there? Older adults’ travel behaviour in a highly walkable environment.** *Social Science & Medicine*.

Website

- <http://www.hiphealth.ca>
- <http://www.hiphealth.ca/research/research-projects/active-street,-active-people-senior/active-streets,-active-people-senior>

Further Information on Comox-Helmcken Greenway

<http://vancouver.ca/streets-transportation/comox-helmcken.aspx>