Module 4: Places to Grow –
Managing Growth in Ontario’s Greater Golden Horseshoe to Support Active Travel

Introduction
This module is intended for physicians and other health professionals living in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) of Ontario who are interested in helping to shape their communities to better support active transportation and transit. As trusted members of the community, health professionals can be influential advocates for land use and transportation planning decisions that support active modes of transportation and healthy living.

This module provides basic information about land use and transportation planning processes in Ontario to help health professionals understand the processes. It also provides an overview on the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) and discusses ways in it can affect active transportation and public transit in the area. This module should be read along with Module 3: Community Design That Supports Active Travel to get a fuller picture about how land use planning can support or undermine active transportation.

Overview of Land Use and Transportation Planning in Ontario

The land use and transportation planning system is complex with many interconnected components and different levels of government. Land use and transportation planning in Canada generally follows a linear nested path where the policies of the upper level of government, such as the provincial and federal governments, must be adhered to by the lower levels of government, such as regional and local municipalities.

Federal Role
At this time, the federal government plays a minimal role in the land use and transportation planning of municipalities in Canada. There are federal policies that implicitly impact urban policy within Canadian municipalities. However, unlike many other countries, Canada has currently no national urban policy, no active transportation policy, and no transit policy (CUTA, 2010).

Ontario Government
The Province of Ontario has the authority to establish policies and plans that describe how municipalities can develop communities. These policies and plans provide guidance and direction to

What do we mean by Active Transportation and Active Travel?
The term “active transportation” is being used in this toolkit to refer to walking and cycling when used for the purposes of transporting a person from an origin (such as home) to a destination (such as work, school, or the store). When we use “active travel”, we are referring to transit and active transportation.
municipalities about where and how land can be developed, where and how facilities are to be built, how transportation infrastructure is to be developed, and how land is to be managed. Although provincial policies and plan are generally applicable to the entire province, they can be established for specific areas, such as the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), or for a specific topic, such as climate change. Municipalities are required to conform to provincial policy when developing their local plans so these policies are an important way for provinces to influence issues of provincial interest.

**Ministry of Municipal Affairs**
The Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs (MMA) is responsible for administering the **Ontario Planning Act**, which is legislation that provides the basis for land use planning by all municipalities in Ontario and establishes the process municipalities must follow. This includes outlining the requirements for engaging community. The Act allows the province to issue a Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and requires that all decisions made in the province related to planning be consistent with the PPS (Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2014).

**Ontario Ministry of Transportation**
The Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) is responsible for a number of key policies that influence how supportive roads in Ontario are for walking, cycling and public transit. Much of what falls under the influence of the MTO impacts the design and distance to travel elements of the built environment. The MTO is responsible for building all provincial roads such as highways and sets the design standards for bridges and roadways that cross over provincial highways. The Ministry also establishes guidelines and standards of practice for road building. The Ministry administers the **Ontario Highway Traffic Act**, which legislates that bicycles have the same rights and responsibilities as automobiles.

**Municipal Role in Ontario**
Ultimately active transportation occurs within neighbourhoods, so the municipalities’ role should be considered vital for the implementation of active transportation initiatives. Provincial policies require municipalities to prepare an "official plan" or a "plan d’urbanisme" (Simmons, 2015). The official plan outlines the policies that will guide where and when development can take place within the municipality and must comply with provincial policies. The official plans usually include statements on the community's social, economic, and quality-of-life goals. Often transportation master plans, which outline the transportation systems in a municipality, are developed along with the official plan.

Official plans are broad policy documents that apply to the entire municipality. In those areas that have an upper-tier municipality, such as a region, and lower-tier municipalities, such as a city or town, the lower-tier municipality's plan must conform to the official plan of the upper-tier municipality. The municipality’s development of the official plan and transportation master plan is critical for active transportation. These documents will inform project scoping, clarify priorities, protect the land needed to build transportation infrastructure, and uphold municipal/regional priorities and designs with
developers.

A municipality can also use other tools to support development and implementation of the official plan. Such tools include secondary, subdivision, and site plans that outline policies for specific areas, as well as guidelines, manuals, and strategies that guide and support the land use and infrastructure development in a community.

**Metrolinx and The Big Move**

The Province established *Metrolinx* as the agency responsible for coordinating and implementing the regional transportation plan for the GTHA. *The Big Move*, the name for the regional transportation plan, was originally released in 2008. It outlined the goal of building over 1,200 kilometres of rapid transit in the region by 2031 (Metrolinx, 2008).

Although much of this plan is focused on improving public transit, one of the strategies included in it – Strategy #2 - is directed at enhancing and expanding active transportation. One of the priorities identified in the plan is the completion of walking and cycling networks with bike-sharing programs, with the following two actions identified as key action items:

1. **Plan and implement complete, integrated walking and cycling networks for the GTHA, including Toronto’s PATH system, that address key barriers such as bridges over 400-series highways, rail corridors and major rivers, and missing sidewalks on major roads. The cycling networks will bring every GTHA urban resident to within a maximum of one kilometre of a dedicated bicycling facility. This will be supported by a provincial funding commitment increased over time to at least $20 million per year for municipalities to complete the walking and cycling networks.**

2. **Create pilot bike-sharing programs in major urban centres** (Metrolinx, 2008).

In 2016, *The Big Move* underwent a full review and the new plan is expected sometime in 2017.

**Places to Grow - Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe**

Places to Grow is the Ontario government’s program to manage growth and development across the province. It aims to ensure that Ontario develops in a way that supports economic prosperity, protects the environment, and helps communities achieve a high quality of life across the province. Through Places to Grow, the Government of Ontario develops regional growth plans that guide how communities are designed and built. There are currently two Growth Plans in Ontario: The Growth Plan

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*It is estimated that 17 per cent of all trips in the GTHA are walkable (i.e. less than two kilometres in length) and 40 per cent are bikeable (i.e. less than five kilometres in length); however, walking and cycling currently account for just five per cent of all work trips and 32 per cent of all school trips in the region (Metrolinx, 2008).*
for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH), 2006, and the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario, 2011 (Ontario, 2016). This module will focus on the Growth Plan for the GGH only.

When the Growth Plan for the GGH was originally released in 2006, it was considered a bold and visionary attempt to address urban sprawl in Canada (Eidelman, 2010). The GGH is one of the fastest growing regions in North America. By 2041, this area (illustrated in Figure 1) is forecast to grow to 13.5 million people and 6.3 million jobs, which is an increase of about 50 per cent from current levels (Ontario, 2016). This is an unprecedented amount of growth with 80 per cent of Ontario’s overall population growth expected to reside in the region by 2031 (Eidelman, 2010).

To address this growth and ensure that the province develops in a sustainable way, the Ontario Government developed the Growth Plan to guide municipalities in their land use planning processes. The policies in the Growth Plan outline how land can be developed, where and how facilities are to be built, and how land is to be managed.

The 2006 plan emphasizes compact, vibrant, and complete communities that support a greater range of transportation options including active transportation and transit. However, the Growth Plan addresses land use planning issues; it is not a transportation plan. It provides the land use planning policies needed to curb low-density suburban development that has historically characterized land use planning in Ontario.

**Additional Provincial Plans**

In addition to the Growth Plan, there are other provincial plans that work together to help manage growth, build complete communities, curb suburban sprawl, protect the natural environment and agricultural land, address climate change, and address transportation in Ontario’s GGH region. These additional plans include the following:

- **The Greenbelt Plan** (2005) which identifies where urbanization should not occur to provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base and the ecological features and functions occurring on this landscape.
• **The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan** (2002) is an ecologically based plan established by the Ontario government to provide land use and resource management direction for the 190,000 hectares of land and water within the Moraine.

• **The Niagara Escarpment Plan** (2005) serves as a framework of objectives and policies to strike a balance between development, preservation, and the enjoyment of the Niagara Escarpment.

• **Climate Ready, Ontario’s Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan** (2016) is a five-year plan that will help Ontario fight climate change over the long term.

These plans work together, along with the regional transportation plan, *The Big Move*, to encourage communities within the GGH to grow in a sustainable way. In 2015 the Growth Plan, the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and the Niagara Escarpment Plan underwent a review. Proposed plans are now available and it is expected that they will be approved in 2017.

**Proposed Growth Plan for GGH Principles**
The policies in the Proposed Growth Plan for the GGH are based on many principles, including:

- Designing complete communities which support healthy and active living
- Placing priority on intensification and higher densities to make the most efficient use of land and infrastructure and supports transit viability
- Providing for a mix and range of housing types to serve all sizes, incomes, and ages of households
- Recognizing the diversity of communities in the GGH
- Integrating climate change considerations into planning by incorporating techniques to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

**The Growth Plan, Active Transportation and Transit Use**
The Growth Plan has been prepared to address all major planning issues facing communities today and covers issues ranging from the preservation of natural heritage to the protection of water supplies. An important part of the Growth Plan is to ensure that it is easy for people to move about their communities. It includes land use planning policies that will help create communities that support active transportation choices. These policies are intended to ensure that public transit will be fast, convenient, and affordable and that active transportation is a practical choice.
This plan recognizes transit as a major priority for major transportation investments. The intent behind the plan is to ensure that communities grow at densities that can support efficient transit service with walkable street configurations. This means that existing and future communities will need to be compact. For walking, cycling, and public transit to be viable transportation choices, it is necessary to ensure that people’s homes are near workplaces, schools, stores, restaurants, and other amenities that support daily living.

Reviewing the Growth Plan Through the Five Ds

Using the “Five Ds” — the healthy community elements outlined in Module 3: Community Design That Supports Active Travel — to review the Growth Plan, we can see the many ways in which it fosters community designs that support active transportation and public transit.

Density

The intensification and density requirements in the Growth Plan are very important for active transportation and transit. By increasing the number of people who live or work in an existing or future neighbourhood, we can increase the efficiency of transit service (i.e. how frequent service is) and make it easier to attract stores and restaurants and other services that people can walk and cycle to.

The 2016 Proposed Growth Plan, if approved, would require higher levels of intensification. This means that municipalities would develop land use plans that would encourage new housing and employment sites to be developed in existing urban areas. This could mean adding a townhouse complex to an existing neighbourhood or increasing the height of the buildings along a main street. The idea is to increase the number of people living and working in existing neighbourhoods so they can attract amenities such as restaurants and stores and support efficient transit service. The minimum intensification target Proposed is 60 per cent meaning that 60 per cent of all new residential development should be directed towards existing urban areas (Ontario, 2016).

In addition to intensification, the Growth Plan establishes specific minimum density targets for different types of places. For urban growth centres, which are existing and emerging downtown centres, the Growth Plan requires densities between 150 and 400 residents and jobs combined per hectare depending on location. The 2016 Proposed Growth Plan would require a minimum density target of 80 residents and jobs per hectare for greenfield development (i.e., development on previously undeveloped lands) (Ontario, 2016). These densities would ensure that neighbourhoods could support efficient transit service. A neighbourhood built to a minimum density of 80 residents and jobs per hectare would support frequent bus service, while Urban Growth Centres with a minimum density of 150 to 400 residents and jobs combined per hectare could support light rail transit, bus rapid transit, or possibly a subway (Ministry of Transportation, 2012).
Land Use Diversity
The Growth Plan for the GGH also includes policies that require municipalities to plan for complete communities that feature a diverse mix of land uses. The plan includes policies that encourage communities that feature a diverse mix of land uses, including residential and employment uses, and convenient access to local stores, services, and public service facilities.

In addition, the plan encourages a diverse range and mix of housing, including secondary suites and affordable housing, to accommodate people at all stages of life, and to accommodate the needs of all household sizes and incomes. This allows people to “age in place”. It also allows people who work in a community to live in the community they work in.

The complete community requirements in the plan are very important for active transportation. Land use diversity directly affects distance between, and availability of, a variety of services and destinations in a community. Land use diversity is important because it can reduce the need to travel outside an area for various purposes and can reduce the distance people need to travel to meet their needs. The closer different services and destinations are to one another, the more likely people are to walk or cycle to meet their daily needs. Neighbourhoods that support active transportation are places with a large number and variety of businesses in a relatively small area (Boarnet, 2010).

Design
The Proposed Growth Plan encourages, where appropriate, infrastructure to support active transportation and transit including sidewalks, bicycle lanes, bicycle parking, and transit hubs. Specifically, the plan directs municipalities to plan and provide for a range of transportation options, including options for the safe, comfortable, and convenient use of active transportation. It also encourages municipalities to consider using a complete streets approach for existing and planned street networks to ensure the needs and safety of all road users are considered and appropriately accommodated. Municipalities are to provide safe, comfortable travel for pedestrians, cyclists, and other users of active transportation.

In addition, the plan directs municipalities to ensure that transit is a major priority for transportation planning and investment. While complete communities are important, it is a reality that individuals often must travel longer distances for some activities, such as work. The transit network envisioned by the Growth Plan would support and facilitate improved linkages between and within municipalities.
The plan also outlines the importance of expanding transit service to areas that have achieved, or will be planned to achieve, densities that support transit. The design elements of the Proposed Growth Plan are important because they seek to ensure that active transportation and transit are attractive, safe, and comfortable choices. Provisions that outline the need for specific pedestrian and cyclist amenities could improve overall safety and contribute to a more comfortable environment for all users (Lee and Moudon, 2006).

**Destination Accessibility**

The provisions in the Proposed Growth Plan that require the development of complete, compact communities address the issues of destination accessibility. The plan directs municipalities to plan for public service facilities, such as libraries, community centres, and schools, to be co-located and integrated into community hubs that are accessible by active transportation. It directs municipalities to plan for convenient access to local, healthy, and affordable food options including urban agriculture, and to ensure that there is a supply of parks, trails, and other recreation facilities. Destination Accessibility policies are important because they reduce trip distance and reduce dependence on cars.

**Distance to Transit**

Transit is an important part of the Growth Plan. The plan prioritizes densities and intensification that support transit viability. The intent is to ensure that where transit exists or is planned, there are sufficient numbers of people and jobs to support the service. The Growth Plan encourages municipalities to ensure there are reasonable connections between local and regional transit services, and to infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, including sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and secure bicycle parking. In addition, the plan encourages municipalities to ensure that trip generators, or destinations that would be frequented by many people, are connected. Much of the Growth Plan is focused on ensuring that the densities necessary to support high quality, convenient, and efficient transit are in place. This then ensures that people are within a reasonable distance of transit to make it a viable choice.