ETP-A1-1

Region of Peel
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REPORT
General Committee

DATE: May 25, 2009

REPORT TITLE: **PEEL SAFE AND ACTIVE ROUTES TO SCHOOL**

FROM: Dan Labrecque, Commissioner of Environment, Transportation and Planning Services
Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services
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RECOMMENDATION

That the Region of Peel continue to support the Peel Safe and Active Routes to School Program Committee;

And further, that Regional staff from Health and ETPS continue to work in collaboration with area municipal staff, Peel District School Board and Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board on the Peel Safe and Active Routes to School Program;

And further, that a copy of the subject report be forwarded to the area municipalities for their information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Canadian children's fitness grade is an "F" according to a recent report card prepared by Active Healthy Kids Canada. Ninety percent of Canadian children and youth are still not meeting the guidelines set forth in Canada's guide for physical activity[1].
- Less than one third of children are regularly using active transportation to get to school in Ontario[2].
- With 220,555 school-aged children in Peel Region, a significant number of cars and buses are transporting children to school each day.
- The Ontario 2004 Chief Medical Officer of Health Report, Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives[3], highlighted the need to provide safe walking and cycling routes and designing neighbourhoods with shops and schools within walking distance.
- The activities and programs to be initiated by this Committee will complement and integrate with the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton Smart Commute Initiative and the Greater Toronto Area Clean Air Council's work that are supported by the Region.

[1] Active Healthy Kids Canada
http://www.activehealthykids.ca?Ophea?ActiveHealthyKids_v2/programs_2006reportcard_schoolcommunity.cfm
[2] O'Brien, Catherine. York University. Last Updated November 2003
http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/guide/Impact%20Sheet-Nov%2003.doc
[3] 2004 Chief Medical Officer of Health Report Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives Pages 4/5.
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/ministry_reports/cmoh04_report/healthy_weights_112404.pdf

May 6, 2009
PEEL SAFE AND ACTIVE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

An Environics survey suggests that less than 50 per cent of Canadian children walk to school. This shift has significant health, safety, traffic congestion and environmental implications. Children who do not walk to school miss out on an opportunity for daily physical activity, an important strategy to prevent childhood obesity. Obesity among children and youth has tripled in Canada since 1981, and subsequent disease such as Type 2 diabetes has also increased dramatically.

Within the Greater Toronto Area, 25 per cent of morning rush hour trips consist of parents taking children to school. Since motor vehicle collisions are a leading cause of death and hospitalization for children in Peel Region, these rush hour trips are a concern. Traffic congestion around schools also contributes to smog, with idling engines producing twice as many exhaust emissions as when in motion. Smog is responsible for almost 2,000 premature deaths annually in Ontario and is linked to the development of asthma and allergies.

Encouraging children to use alternative modes of transportation, such as walking, cycling, and carpooling to school will reduce traffic congestion and air pollution on roads, and increase children's physical fitness. It has the potential to decrease motor vehicle crashes and smog-related health problems.

a) Health Services (Public Health)

Public Health offers a variety of programs which promote physical activity as well as safe and active transportation within the community.

Research shows that students who are physically active are less likely to be stressed; have a positive view of themselves; play better with others; and have increased performance in the classroom in the areas of math, reading, memorization and categorization. Furthermore, inactive children are at risk of becoming overweight or obese, developing other medical problems including Type 2 diabetes.

b) Environment, Transportation and Planning Services

Walking and cycling are two of the best forms of active transportation; however they represent only five per cent of daily Peel trips (2006 Transportation Tomorrow Survey). The median trip length in Peel for auto drives is 6.4 kilometres (2006 Transportation Tomorrow Survey). This means that 50 per cent of all trips are shorter than 6.4 kilometres. The majority of these trips can be undertaken by bicycle, walking or public transit mode.

The Region of Peel is committed through policies in the Regional Official Plan and the Corporate Strategic Plan to create a healthy regional community for those living and working in Peel as well as to promote sustainable transportation, energy and environmental practices.

Regional Official Plan Amendment 16 (ROPA 16) states that the Region will have a safe, convenient, efficient, multi-modal, sustainable, integrated transportation system that supports a vibrant economy, respects the natural and urban environment, meets the diverse needs of residents and contributes to a higher quality of life.

The Peel Safe and Active Routes to School (PSARTS) Program coordinates with the Region's Active Transportation Initiative, which will support people of all ages in using active modes of transportation.

2. Findings

Since the formation of the PSARTS Program Committee in 2004, initiatives that have been developed to encourage students to walk or bicycle to school include:

- **Peel Safe and Active Routes to School (PSARTS) Website** - a comprehensive user friendly website that parents, teachers, students can use to initiate a safe, active, and environmentally-friendly walking and biking programs in their local neighbourhoods that is implemented with support from the PSARTS Committee. The website offers registration and downloads on starting active routes to school programs. It makes an information and registration portal for partners in Peel schools. There have been a total of 92 downloads from October 2008 to Feb 2009 with website visit times averaging almost five minutes in January 2009.

- **Walk to School Start-up Kit** – The Start-up kit material enables schools to establish a successful and ongoing Safe and Active Routes to School Program and ultimately enhance the safety and health of our community for years to come. To date, 20 kits have been distributed to interested schools. Furthermore, 42 schools are formally participating in a walking program for the 2008/9 school year.

- **Partnerships with various organizations throughout the region** - PSARTS continues to work with community stakeholders and champions to promote, advocate and educate the benefits of families choosing 'active transportation' to get to school and other local destinations.

- **Bicycle Safety Program in Schools** - A program offered by Peel Public Health designed to teach Grade 4 children, parents and teachers safe riding techniques, the importance of wearing a helmet; bicycle maintenance, encouraging safe physical activity and ultimately safe and active transportation to schools.

- **School Health 101** - Public Health also provides a variety of curriculum support resources on physical activity for teachers and school administrators which can be assessed online at the School Health 101 website (schoolhealth101.ca) or through the School Health Team.

- **Ongoing Support/Resources** - PSARTS provides consultation, displays, presentations, and promotional incentives. For example, the Student Frequent Walking Card is offered to students who walk to school. The child checks off each time they walk to school and once the card is full, they put their card in a ballot box for an opportunity to win a special prize. Offering incentives to students allows them to become more engaged in physical activity and recognizes their efforts over the course or a day, week or month. The Frequent Walker cards have been well-received and have increased the number of students doing physical activity and using active transportation to get to school.

- **Pilot Project: Stepping It UP Program** – Metrolinx submitted and received funding from Transport Canada's ecoMOBILITY Program to develop the "Stepping It Up" Program. The objective of this program is to develop best practices that encourage students, and staff in schools to use active and sustainable modes of transportation such as carpooling, transit, walking and cycling. This program aims to improve the health of children, increase travel options and decrease greenhouse gas emissions. It is a unique pilot project that will target students as well as staff commute trips,

allowing for a synergy in which teachers and school officials motivate students and vice versa.

Recognizing the experience and success of our PSARTS initiative, Metrolinx has requested Peel Region to participate in this pilot project. Hamilton is another municipality that was invited to partner in this project. Other partners in this program include University of Toronto and Green Communities Canada.

Over the next two year period, ten schools each in the Region of Peel and the City of Hamilton will be chosen to participate in this program starting in the 2009/2010 school year.

The overall budget for this pilot project is about $1 million dollars. Fifty per cent of the funding will be provided by Transport Canada, while Metrolinx will contribute (cash and in-kind) about 23 per cent, University of Toronto will contribute (cash and in-kind) about 14 per cent and the rest will be in-kind contributions, such as staff time, from the City of Hamilton, Region of Peel and Green Communities.

The Peel Safe and Active Routes to School committee is important to the work of the Region of Peel. The mandate of the committee supports the Region's Public Health Programs in injury prevention, promotion of physical activity and prevention of health hazards and the Region's Environment, Transportation and Planning Services Department's commitment to reducing congestion levels on roads, especially in school zones. The mandate also supports the Greater Toronto Area Smart Commute Initiative and the Greater Toronto Area Clean Air Council where the Region is an active participant. Funding for this initiative is provided in the 2009 budget in the Region's Health and Environment, Transportation and Planning Services Departments.

CONCLUSION

Traffic congestion on our roads has a significant impact on the health of children. Encouraging children to walk or use other alternative modes of transportation to school will increase their physical fitness and contribute to a decrease in motor vehicle accidents. Reduction in vehicle trips will also improve air quality and decrease smog-related health problems. With the Regional staff coordinating the PSARTS Program Committee and initiatives, the Region of Peel will continue to educate the community to promote active and sustainable modes of transportation.

May 25, 2009
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TN

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P-09-17/rs