



July 22, 2021

County Wide Active Transportation System (CWATS) Committee  
Attention: Diana Radulescu, Active Transportation Coordinator, County of Essex  
360 Fairview Ave. W.,  
Essex ON  
N8M 1Y6

Dear CWATS Committee,

**Re: Importance of Sidewalks and Active Transportation Facilities in Our Communities**

---

At a recent Essex County Accessibility Advisory Committee (ECAAC) meeting, a member noted their personal struggle when navigating their neighbourhood, due to the absence of sidewalks. This person uses a visual impairment cane and has to walk on the roadway to get around their neighbourhood. Discussion on the matter raised some concerns that perhaps sidewalks are not getting the attention they deserve. It was resolved that in order to reiterate the importance of sidewalks for all people, not only those with disabilities, the ECAAC would send a letter outlining a few important points to consider when deciding whether to add or remove sidewalks and/or active transportation facilities in our communities and especially in new developments.

Sidewalks and/or active transportation facilities provide many benefits including pedestrian safety, mobility, and healthier communities. Sidewalks and/or active transportation facilities play an important role in transportation, as they provide a safe path for people to walk along that is separated from the motorized traffic. Providing walkways for pedestrian traffic is thought to increase how well people interact and engage with their surroundings and neighbourhoods. They aid road safety by minimizing interaction between pedestrians and motorized traffic.

Since the 1940s, accessibility features, such as curb ramps, textured surfaces, wider design etc. have been consistently added to public sidewalks and active transportation facilities to better accommodate people using mobility devices, canes and wheelchairs, especially when crossing streets. More recently, auditory signals and wayfinding tools have been considered as enhancements for people who have vision loss, cognitive disabilities and even language barriers. All of these improvements throughout the years have made municipalities, public spaces and navigating our communities more inclusive.

☎ 519-776-6441  
TTY 1-877-624-4832

📍 360 Fairview Ave. W.  
Essex, ON N8M 1Y6

💻 [countyofessex.ca](http://countyofessex.ca)

During COVID-19, all our activities were limited. It has been recommended by top officials, medical and political, to head out for a walk, to get some exercise not only for your physical health, but also for your mental health. Now imagine that you have no sidewalks or active transportation facilities to navigate your neighbourhood. How do you get around in the snow? In traffic? Get around parked cars? This pandemic has highlighted the importance of our homes, our neighbourhoods our communities.

CWATS has recognized and advocated for many years, that everyone benefits from improving the prevalence and quality of sidewalks and/or active transportation facilities in our neighbourhoods. We would like to ask that adequate and accessible sidewalks and active transportation facilities be kept top of mind when considering new developments and when reconstruction of existing roads takes place. Entire communities can benefit from accessible public spaces, especially sidewalks and active transportation facilities. By looking at the challenges people with disabilities face every day, even with a simple task, like walking to a neighbourhood destination, the lack of adequate paths of travel can be a barrier.

The ECAAC would like to thank the CWATS Committee for your advocacy and our municipal leaders for their support of continuous improvements in the area of active transportation investments in our communities. The ECAAC heartens continued investment in sidewalks and active transportation facilities in our communities as a matter of top priority for the safety and well-being of all our citizens.

Regards,

Christine Easterbrook, Chair  
Essex County Accessibility Advisory Committee

CC: Local Municipal Clerks  
Warden Gary McNamara and County Council