



SECTION C: SUPPORTIVE POLICIES AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT ENCOURAGING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



Introduction

Population-based physical activity strategies include initiatives to create more supportive policies and physical environments. Ecological approaches that include social, policy and environmental aspects, in addition to traditional individual approaches, are important as they can potentially affect a larger proportion of the population than strategies targeted solely towards at-risk individuals. Examples of strategies at a policy and physical environment level can include: increased number of or improvement to walking and bicycling trails and paths, mixed zoning and land use, ensuring that new developments or modifications to infrastructure include opportunities to be active (i.e., parks, paths, lights, green space, playgrounds, etc.), and policies ensuring public buildings are adequately equipped with options that can encourage activity, such as stair signage, bicycle racks, adequate changing facilities, or showers. The Task Force on Community Preventive Services of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States conducted systematic reviews of physical activity interventions at a community level.³ One of the six interventions that were recommended or strongly recommended as effective was the *creation or enhancement of access to places to be active* combined with information outreach activities.

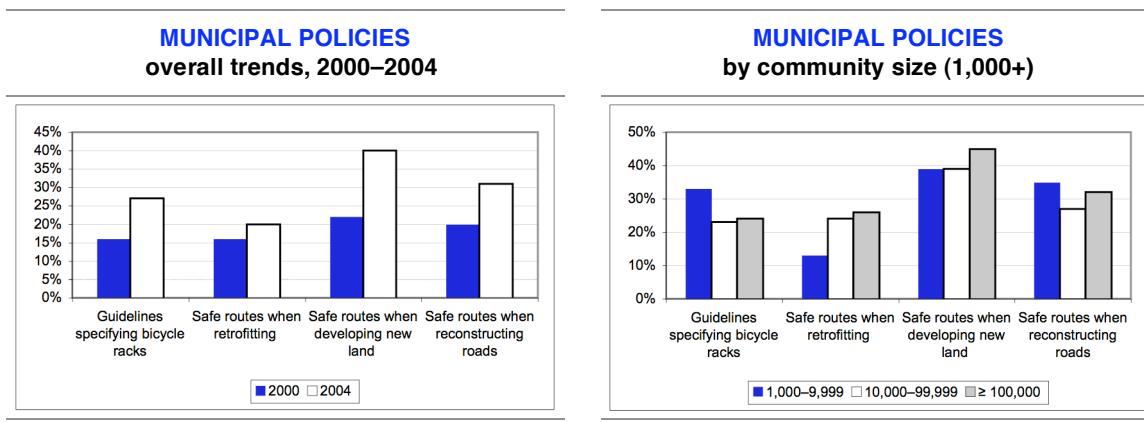
This section examines the adoption of municipal policies that ensure opportunities for residents to be active in the community, agreements for sharing facilities in the community, incentives or rewards for participation in physical activity, the availability of a public transportation system with supports for physical activity, and the availability of amenities and facilities in the community for residents to be active. The factors are examined by region and community size, as well as examining trends with data collected in 2000. For the purpose of these analyses, small towns and cities are categorized as having between 1,000–9,999 residents, mid-sized towns and cities include 10,000–99,999 residents, and larger towns and cities have over 100,000 residents.

Municipal policies supporting physical activity

Towns and cities (1,000+ residents) There are a number of ways that municipalities can ensure municipal infrastructure policies support physical activity. Data from this survey reveal that a modest proportion of municipalities incorporate these types of policies. For example, just over one quarter of municipalities say that they have guidelines specifying bicycle racks at public buildings. In addition, 20% of municipalities indicate that they have policies requiring safe pedestrian and bicycle routes when retrofitting existing communities. A higher proportion (40%) have policies to ensure the incorporation of safe pedestrian and bicycle routes in the development of new areas and 31% of municipalities require incorporating such routes when reconstructing roads. Small municipalities are more likely than mid-sized municipalities to report having guidelines for ensuring that bicycle racks are available at public buildings. Larger municipalities are slightly more likely than small and mid-sized ones to institute policies regarding safe routes when new land areas are being developed.

Region When compared to Canadian municipalities overall, Quebec municipalities are the most likely to say that they have guidelines specifying that bicycle racks are available at public buildings. Municipalities in Western Canada are slightly more likely to report policies ensuring safe pedestrian and bicycle routes when new land areas are developed.

Trends There has been an increase in the proportion of municipalities that report having guidelines specifying the availability of bicycle racks at public buildings over the 5 year span of 2000 to 2004.⁵ Although there has been no change in the last 5 years in the proportion of municipalities reporting policies for safe walking or bicycling routes when retrofitting existing communities, there has been an increase in the number of municipalities citing policies for ensuring safe walking and bicycling when developing new areas or when reconstructing roads. In 2000, the percentage of municipalities citing policies regarding bicycle racks and safe pedestrian or bicycle routes when reconstructing roads increased with community size; however, in 2004, small municipalities are more likely than mid-sized municipalities to report these policies.



2000 and 2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

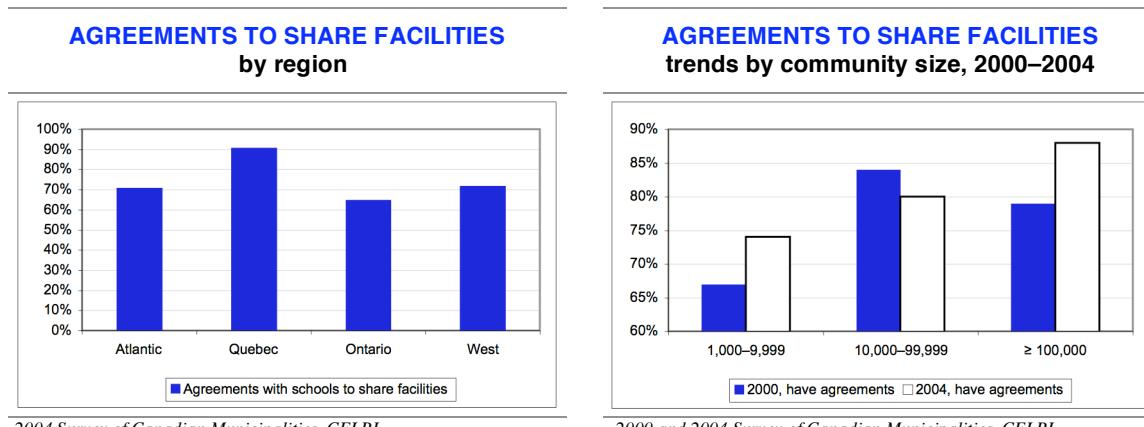
Agreements to share local sport and recreation facilities

Towns and cities (1,000+ residents) A previous topic revealed that, in practice, the majority of municipalities (86%) work with schools to try to encourage people to be more active. Furthermore, most municipalities (76%) report having agreements with one or more local school boards regarding shared use of school or municipal facilities, and the proportion having such agreements increases with increased size of the municipality. That is, small municipalities are slightly less likely than mid-sized, who it turn are slightly less likely than larger municipalities, to state that such an agreement exists in their community.

Region Over nine in ten Quebec municipalities indicate that they have agreements with at least one local school board regarding the use of school or municipal facilities, making them the most likely to report this. Municipalities in Atlantic Canada are *slightly less* and those in Ontario are *less* likely than Canadian municipalities overall to indicate that they have an agreement regarding shared use of facilities with schools.

Smaller communities (< 1,000) Municipalities with less than 500 residents are substantially less likely than communities with a population of 500–999 to say that they have agreements with local school boards regarding shared use of facilities.

Trends Overall, there has been no change in the number of municipalities that have policies for shared use of school or municipal facilities with local school boards between 2000 and 2004.⁵ In 2000, a smaller proportion of small municipalities reported policies ensuring these types of agreements compared to mid- and larger sized municipalities. However, in 2004, the pattern has changed so that the proportion of municipalities indicating that they have such shared-use agreements increases as community size increases.



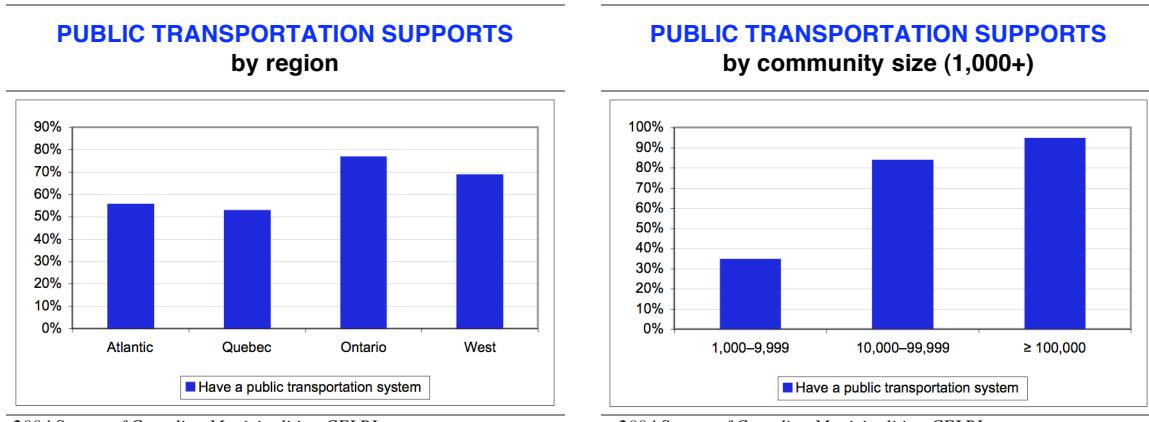
2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

2000 and 2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

Public transportation supports for walking and bicycling

Towns and cities (1,000+ residents) The majority of Canadian municipalities (65%) have a public transport system in place in the community. In addition, just over one in five municipalities provide bike carriers or ski racks on their buses or other public transport vehicles. The availability of a public transportation system increases with increased size of the municipality. That is, small municipalities are substantially less likely than mid-sized municipalities to report having a public transport system, with only 35% indicating that they have this type of infrastructure. Almost all communities with populations over 100,000 (95%) have public transportation available to their citizens.

Region Municipalities in Quebec are less likely to indicate that they have a public transportation system, whereas those in Ontario are more likely to report having one. When compared to Canadian municipalities overall, Western municipalities are more likely to provide bicycle carriers or ski racks on their buses or public transport vehicles.



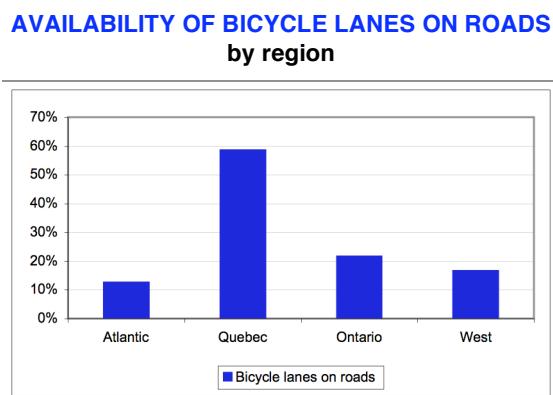
Places to walk and bicycle—bicycle lanes on roads

Towns and cities (1,000+ residents) The majority of municipalities indicate that they do not have designated bicycle lanes on roads. Of the 30% of municipalities having some designated lanes, just over one-quarter say that these lanes are maintained during the winter months. The larger the size of the municipality, the larger is the percentage reporting that they have designated bicycle lanes on roads. That is, small municipalities are less likely than mid-sized municipalities, who in turn are less likely than large municipalities, to indicate that there are designated bicycle lanes on roads in their community.

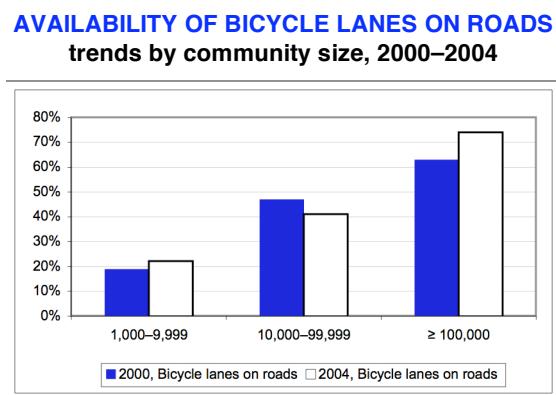
Region Compared to Canadian municipalities overall, communities in Quebec are more likely to have designated bicycle lanes on roads, with nearly three in five communities indicating this. In contrast, municipalities in Ontario and Western Canada are less likely to report this. Western municipalities are more likely than Canadian municipalities overall to state that these lanes are maintained in the winter months.

Smaller communities (< 1,000) Designated bicycle lanes are not prevalent in very small communities. Indeed, less than 10% of very small communities indicate that they have such lanes.

Trends The proportion of municipalities stating that they have designated bicycle lanes on roads has been stable over the past 5 years.⁵ The linear increase that appears between the percentage of municipalities reporting the availability of such lanes and increasing municipality size in 2004 also was evident in 2000. The percentage of municipalities that maintain these lanes during winter months decreased slightly during this 5 year time span.



2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI



2000 and 2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

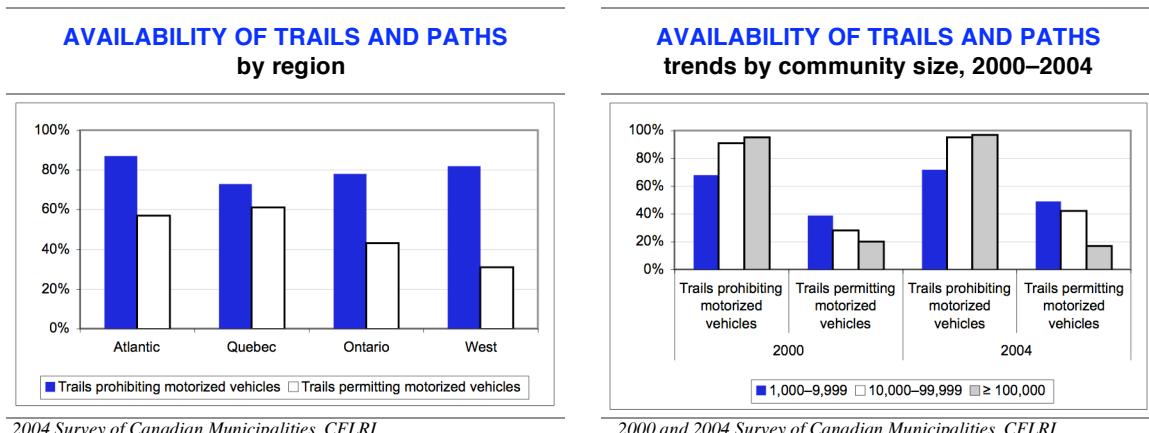
Places to walk and bicycle—off-road trails and paths

Towns and cities (1,000+ residents) Nearly 80% of municipalities indicate that there are multi-use trails and paths for walking, bicycling, inline skating, cross-country skiing, and so on available in their community which *prohibit* motorized traffic. Of the municipalities indicating that they have these types of trails and paths, nearly half (48%) report that they are maintained during the winter months. In addition, 45% of municipalities report having multi-use trails which also *permit* motorized vehicle use, and of these, 70% indicate that these trails are maintained in the winter. Small municipalities are the least likely to report having multi-use trails where motorized traffic is not permitted yet are slightly more likely than mid-sized municipalities to indicate that they have trails that permit motorized vehicle use.

Region Compared to Canadian municipalities overall, municipalities in the Atlantic are slightly *more* likely to report the availability of multi-use trails where no motorized traffic is permitted. Atlantic and Quebec municipalities are more likely to indicate having multi-use trails which do permit motorized vehicles, whereas Western municipalities are less likely to do so. However, Atlantic and Western municipalities are less likely, whereas those in Quebec and Ontario are more likely, to report maintaining trails shared with motorized vehicles during the winter months, compared to the national rate.

Smaller communities (< 1,000) Municipalities with less than 500 residents are less likely than communities with a population of 500 to 999 to report having multi-use trails where motorized traffic is prohibited. This same relationship is apparent when multi-use trails that do allow motorized vehicles are examined.

Trends The percentage of municipalities with multi-purpose trails *permitting* motorized traffic has increased slightly over the past 5 years.⁵ In contrast, there is no difference over this time period in the rates of trails that prohibit motorized vehicles. The finding that mid- and larger sized municipalities are more likely than smaller ones to cite the availability of trails prohibiting motorized traffic was first observed in 2000 and continues in 2004.

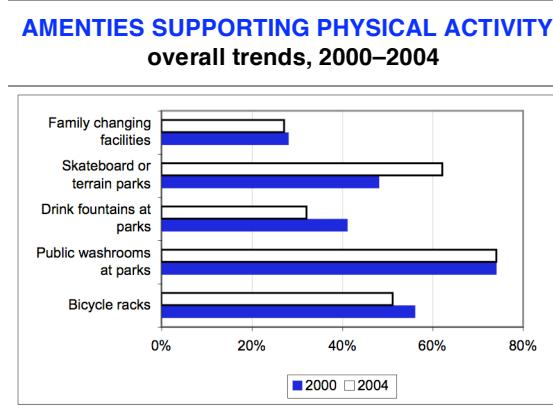


Amenities supporting physical activity

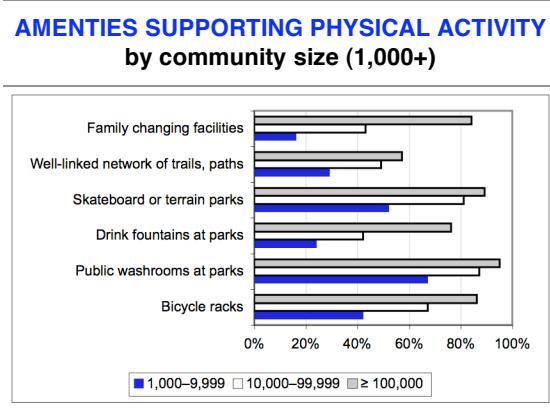
Towns and cities (1,000+ residents) Just over half (51%) of municipalities report having bicycle racks available at municipal buildings. Nearly three-quarters of the municipalities (74%) indicate that they provide public washrooms at parks, and 32% say that they also provide drinking fountains in these green spaces. Moreover, 62% have skateboard or terrain parks available for their citizens to use, and 36% say that they have a well-linked network of trails, paths, and sidewalks. A further 27% of municipalities report having family changing facilities. Overall, small communities are less likely than larger communities to report offering any of the above amenities to support physical activity within their community.

Region Municipalities in Quebec are more likely than others to report having drinking fountains in local green spaces. Ontario municipalities are more likely than others to provide family changing facilities and washrooms at parks. Atlantic municipalities are less likely than others to report having bicycle racks available at municipal buildings, whereas those in Quebec are slightly more likely to have these amenities. Atlantic municipalities are also slightly more likely to have a well-linked network of trails, paths, and sidewalks; however, they are less likely than others to have skateboard or terrain parks.

Trends In the 5-year span from 2000 to 2004,⁵ there has been: a decrease in the proportion of municipalities indicating the availability of bicycle racks at public buildings and drinking fountains in parks; an increase in the availability of skateboard or terrain parks; and generally no change in the overall proportion of municipalities reporting the availability of family changing facilities in their community. Generally speaking, the availability of such amenities increases with increased community size and this pattern is apparent at both time periods.



2000 and 2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI



2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

Summary of section

The majority of municipalities with populations greater than 1000 in Canada have a public transportation system in place. Moreover, 20% of these municipalities provide additional supports encouraging physical activity on their transportation system by adding bicycle or ski carriers on transport vehicles.

Availability of other urban design features that support physical activity is diverse. For example, 30% of municipalities have bicycle lanes on roads, whereas nearly 80% of municipalities indicate that there are multi-use trails and paths available for physical activity that prohibit motorized traffic, and 45% have multi-use trails that are shared with motorized traffic. Amenities available to support physical activity also vary widely. For example,

- 27% of municipalities have family changing facilities;
- 32% have drinking fountains in green space;
- 36% have a well-linked network of trails, paths, and sidewalks;
- 51% have bicycle racks at municipal buildings;
- 62% have skateboard or terrain parks; and,
- 74% have public washrooms at parks.

Generally speaking, small municipalities are much less likely than larger ones to report the availability of all of these types of supportive infrastructure.

Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

Despite the benefits of bicycling as a mode of travel during leisure time and for utilitarian purposes, including energy-efficiency, reductions in pollution and road congestion, economics and health benefits,¹⁵ in practice, only a modest amount of municipalities report having designated bicycle lanes on roads. It would appear that there still remains a notable gap between policy and practice as another topic in this report reveals that between 20–40% of municipalities have policies in place requiring safe pedestrian and bicycle routes when retrofitting existing communities, developing new land areas, and when reconstructing roads. Indeed, for both policy and practice, the commitment to providing safe routes appears to be more prevalent in the largest municipalities. This makes sense, as large communities may have higher population density than their smaller counterparts, they may be encouraging walking and bicycling for utilitarian or commuting purposes as part of the plan to create sustainable communities, have greater needs to manage traffic congestion, and have greater levels of traffic flow, where segregation of bicycle traffic from automobile may be preferred. Factors to consider in providing a supportive infrastructure for walking and bicycling include the provision of safe walking and bicycling routes that are well linked, bicycle-only privileges in traffic such as bicycle signal lights, permitting transport of bicycles in public transportation systems, the provision of secure bicycle racks and storage in the community and at retail facilities, and the provision of change facilities in the workplace or at schools.

The majority of municipalities indicate that they have multi-purpose trails and paths that can be used for physical activity; however, these are more likely to be found in larger municipalities. Research has shown that traffic on trails is greater in neighbourhoods that have higher-density populations¹⁶ and that greater proximity to trails increases the likelihood of physical activity.^{17,18} The data mirror results found in the general population in that Canadians are aware of these trails; however, residents of smaller communities are less likely to report that there are *many* trails in their community and are more likely to be *not at all satisfied* with the number of trails locally. Other topics in this report also indicate that small communities are less likely to state that *more* trails and facilities would help their residents become more active and are also less likely to state that physical activity is a high priority for them. As residents of these communities lack satisfaction with the opportunities to be active in their own community, it is important to find ways of promoting physical activity to these residents, keeping in mind limited municipal resources. These can include schools, the use of non-designated physical activity facilities (i.e., church halls) and promotion of physical activity through local community papers or bulletin boards. In addition, the establishment of walking trails in smaller or rural communities may be a relatively low-cost way of encouraging accessibility to physical activity among these smaller communities.¹⁹ It is important to delve deeper into the understanding of barriers reported by residents of smaller or rural communities. For example, concerns of “traffic” in rural environments may not be due to the sheer number of vehicles but rather due to relative speed, the fact that sidewalks are not available, and that people are forced to walk on the road. Perceptions of lack of safety may not be due to street crime but rather the lack of street lighting on many rural roads preventing people from feeling safe when walking on roads or paths at night. Further exploration of the barriers that specifically relate to these residents is warranted.

Larger municipalities are substantially more likely to report having a public transportation system in their community. Indeed, this mirrors existing research of the general population in that, although 62% of adults agree to some extent that their home is within a 10 to 15 minute walk of a public transit stop, residents of larger municipalities are 10 times more likely to *strongly agree* with this statement.⁴ In addition, one out of five municipalities report provision of bicycle carriers on public transit to support active commuting. Studies have shown that individuals who live in more “walkable” communities (closer to destinations, higher levels of route connectivity) are more active and less overweight than people in less walkable communities.^{20,21,22,23,24} Evidence also exists to show that the total percentage of trips taken by walking, bicycling, and public transit is inversely correlated with obesity rates. Together these findings suggest that policies promoting these modalities (individually or in combination with each other, through, for example, bicycle carriers on buses) for commuting may help to increase population levels of physical activity while at the same time helping to combat escalating obesity rates in this country.