

Factsheet 3

Best practices in the planning and development of commercial arteries

Included in this factsheet:

- 1 Issues relating to planning and developing commercial arteries that are inviting and attractive to all,
- 2 Preferred solutions,
- 3 Benefits,
- 4 Some inspirational examples.



Sainte-Catherine Street East - Source : Montréal Urban Ecology Centre

At once a public space and a shared road, a commercial artery represents a central element in the economic and cultural vibrancy of our neighbourhoods and cities. The success of commercial streets is founded on their ability to offer visitors a unique experience; in this regard, physical organization plays a leading role. Key aspects to creating a dynamic atmosphere include easing the movement of pedestrians, providing people-friendly meeting spaces, enlivening public areas, carefully curating the street's aesthetics, and facilitating access through a broad range of transportation methods while favouring active and mass-transit modes.

Réseau
Quartiers
verts



Active
Neighbourhoods
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The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Public Health Agency of Canada

Commercial arteries: at the heart of the economic vibrancy of our neighbourhoods and cities

Commercial arteries have always played a major role in the economic, social and cultural growth of neighbourhoods, city centres and town squares. First and foremost, they were public spaces where a variety of people would meet and interact. As main roads, they also contributed to a burgeoning sense of community.

Today, these arteries must contend with strong competition from emergent commercial models (“power centres”, e-commerce, etc.) To maintain or renew their vitality, many arteries are now being reinvented through careful focus on the specific assets which make them unique. A redevelopment plan which prioritizes pedestrians, cyclists and public transit users is a central tenet in a winning revitalization strategy.^{1,2}

The predominance of cars adversely affects other users

Over the past few decades in North America, making roads – including commercial arteries – accessible to cars has been a focal point in urban development. The concept of creating “through-flow routes” has been dominant, often at the expense of these arteries’ commercial, cultural and social functions.

The overwhelming presence of cars - and the congestion they generate - result in an unpleasant atmosphere, rendering commercial arteries less attractive to non-drivers; they represent a significant proportion of the arteries’ customer base, particularly along local commercial streets. Reinventing our roads to be more inviting for pedestrians and cyclists is good not only for public health, but also for the economic health of our neighbourhoods and cities.³

NO PARKING, NO BUSINESS: A MYTH PROVEN FALSE

A scarcity of parking spaces is often blamed when rationalizing the financial difficulties suffered by commercial arteries. As a result, the notion of removing parking spots in order to devote space to other users’ needs (and adding features such as bike racks, terraces, wider sidewalks, parklet, etc.) is frequently considered heresy. A few facts debunk this concept, however:

- A high proportion of customers live in close proximity to these commercial arteries and travel there on foot, by bicycle or via public transit⁴;
- While pedestrians and cyclists tend to purchase less on each visit, they visit retailers more frequently. Therefore, these user groups spend more per month than drivers do⁵;
- Careful study of the real use of parking spaces often results in optimized development of the available area, thereby better addressing customer needs without increasing capacity.^{6,7}

Preferred solutions

In North America, a growing number of cities are looking to redevelop their commercial streets and transform them into public meeting spaces with a particular emphasis on pedestrians, cyclists and public transit users. Five conditions^{8,9,10} determine the vitality of a commercial artery revitalization project founded on this philosophy:

- 1) Strategic location: close to densely-populated areas and gathering spots (universities, business hubs, cultural sites, tourist attractions, etc.) to fully leverage the surrounding pedestrian and bicycle traffic;
- 2) Commercial diversity: a diversified but balanced mix of commercial merchants and service providers, stores offering goods for convenience, occasional or thoughtful purchases, and restaurants and entertainment spots¹¹;
- 3) Accessibility: designed and laid out in ways which favour access via active and mass transit modes (wide sidewalks, traffic-calming measures, bicycle paths and racks, efficient public transit service along the road or nearby, presence of bus shelters, universal accessibility, etc.);
- 4) Fun and friendly atmosphere: an alluring ambiance created through its design (rest areas, benches, trees, landscaping, lighting, architectural interest, high-quality façades and signage, public art, etc.) and entertainment (special activities, event programming, etc.);
- 5) Willingness and effort expended by political and economic stakeholders: managed by a representative committee of key players (retailers, elected officials, bureaucrats, citizens, community organizations) which promotes a strategic vision and development plan for the site, emphasizes the area's unique identity and organizes special events along the street.

Saint-Hubert Street, before



Source: Google Street View, 2012 and 2015

BEST PRACTICES INCLUDE BABY STEPS...

Once the broad guidelines of the development/revitalization project have been determined, planners should take a measured, progressive approach - through temporary facilities or a pilot project - in order to experiment with various design ideas and evaluate the opinions of users and merchants before permanent decisions are made.

A pilot project for Saint-Hubert Street

As the Saint-Hubert Street water and sewer upgrades approached, the business community and the borough developed a pilot project to be tested in the summer of 2014 before carrying out the work. This development concept aims to reduce drive-throught traffic, make trips safer and enhance the commercial vitality of the Plaza Saint-Hubert and improve the customer experience. These are 400 businesses in the Saint-Hubert Plaza.

Characteristics of the pilot project

General traffic management

- Development of a landing lane representing 122 free parking spaces.
- The addition of new street furniture (benches, garbage cans, bicycle racks and lighting).
- Reducing the number of lanes from two to one
- Development of rest areas.

The section entrances

- Installation of bollards and flower boxes to secure pedestrian movements.
- Marking on the ground in order to structure the space.

Source : http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=7357129519632&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

Saint-Hubert Street, after



Advantages / benefits

Developing commercial arteries which favour pedestrians, cyclists and public transit users is a win-win situation!

Repurposed spaces and reduced costs

A healthier environment

An enhanced quality of life¹²

EASIER TRAVEL

A POSITIVE, INSPIRATIONAL IMAGE

ENHANCED ECONOMIC VITALITY OF OUR COMMUNITIES

An inspiring example from a winter city

16th Street Mall (Denver, Colorado) Pedestrians and public transit – a harmonious coexistence

The City of Denver has introduced the concept of the “transit mall” - which integrates public transit into traditional pedestrian spaces - to its downtown core. A free shuttle service that carries over 45,000 passengers daily serves this two-kilometre stretch of road along 16th Street. By facilitating the mall’s accessibility, the city has significantly contributed to the success of this commercial artery.

A vibrant mix of coffeehouse terraces, office space in historic buildings, skyscrapers, hotels, restaurants and retailers mingle along this road, attracting up to 25,000 pedestrians every day. The street exhibits such vitality that its businesses generate 35% of all revenue drawn from sales taxes collected within Denver’s downtown district.¹³

The highly-engaged Downtown Denver Partnership organizes special events which encourage citizens to use the street as a public space. Family activities, seasonal celebrations and cultural events are held all along the street.

Design also plays a leading role in elevating the pedestrian experience. While the roadway was paved in a traditional manner, a broad green corridor dotted with urban furniture was added between the two shuttle lanes. This attractive space invites visitors to sit and enjoy the street’s unique ambiance.

LINK TO TOOLKIT



<http://www.ecologieurbaine.net/fr/transformer-sa-ville>

LINK TO UP GUIDE



<http://www.ecologieurbaine.net/en/documentation-en/technical-guides/79-urbanplanningguide>

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