Understanding how Communities are Built and Maintained through Direct Observation and Mapping

Background

This activity helped researchers understand how different areas of the Medicine Hat and Redcliff communities have been designed, built and maintained. The community observation activity looked at a set of specific features in the Medicine Hat and Redcliff communities. These features were chosen because they can help or prevent community residents from making the decision to walk for transportation or for leisure.

The Community Observers

From July through September, 2008, community observers walked around the entire communities of the City of Medicine Hat and the Town of Redcliff. The observers stopped at a total of 2,064 locations across both of the communities. This number represents every piece of road between two intersections, every cul-de-sac and every dead-end street. At each of these locations, the observers documented the streets on 230 different features to determine how walkable the street was.

Measuring how "Walkable" an Area is

A street, or an area of a community is found to be more walkable when it has more features that are supportive of walking and other physical activity. These features can be grouped into six categories:

Attractiveness

Features that enhance the pleasure of walking (examples: tree lined streets, sidewalks in good condition, parks and public spaces).

Diversity of Destinations

Features that are destinations community residents would be interested in accessing (examples: retail stores, schools, restaurants and grocery stores).

Density

Features that describe the number of people that could live in an area (examples: single family houses, duplexes, condos and apartment buildings).

Pedestrian Access

Features that make walking easier (examples: presence of sidewalks, access to a recreational trail system and different walking route options).

Safety from Crime

Features that suggest an area is more safe in relation to crime (examples: adequate lighting, and absence of bars on windows, graffiti and litter).

Safety from Traffic

Features that suggest an area is more safe in relation to traffic (examples: presence of marked crosswalks, traffic lights, speed bumps and a separation between the sidewalk and the road).

When streets have a larger number of the features within one of these categories, the area receives a larger category score. Areas with larger scores in all of the categories are found to be more supportive of walking, or, in other words, are more walkable.

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Overview of the Medicine Hat and Redcliff Results

Some results from the Medicine Hat community observation are shown here. It is important to note that the comparisons presented in these maps are based only on the differences between Medicine Hat neighbourhoods. For example, if a neighbourhood has a low rating for accessibility, this does not necessarily mean the neighbourhood is not accessible. This simply means that in comparison to the other neighbourhoods in Medicine Hat, the neighbourhood was observed as being less accessible.

A more detailed report from this analysis, including the results from Redcliff, can be found on the DVD included with this package.

Diversity of Destinations - Retail

Pedestrian Access - Sidewalks

Traffic Safety - Crossing