

DATE 12 April 1999

TO/DEST. Grant Malinsky
Manager, Safety & Traffic Studies Branch
Mobility Services Division

FROM/EXP. Councillor Wendy Stewart

SUBJECT/OBJET **WALKING SECURITY INDEX**

Under cover of a memo dated December 23, 1998, from Rosemary Nelson, I received a copy of the report "Walking Security Index" submitted to your Department by Barry Wellar, University of Ottawa. At that time, the report was on circulation for public consultation and I understand it is now scheduled to be considered by the Transportation Committee on April 21st.

I am in receipt of very detailed comments on Mr. Wellar's report submitted by two constituents from my Ward, Mr. Robert Crout and Ms. Grace McClelland-Crout. In accordance with your telephone conversation with my Assistant, Bonnie Conlon, I am forwarding a copy for consideration and would ask that your Department respond directly to Mr. Crout and Ms. McClelland-Crout in due course.

By copy of this memo, I am also forwarding the comments to Rosemary Nelson and request that copies be circulated to members of the Transportation Committee when the Agenda for the April 21st meeting is distributed.

Thank you for your assistance.

Wendy Stewart

Attach. (1)

cc: Rosemary Nelson, Transportation Committee Coordinator

Reference Item 2
Transportation Committee Agenda, 21 April 1999

fileG:sidewk99

Robert Crout
Grace McClelland-Crout
74 Viscount Avenue
Ottawa, On, K1Z 7M9

Councillor Wendy Stewart
Regional Municipality of
Ottawa-Carleton
111 Lisgar Street
Ottawa, On, K2P 2L7

February 18, 1999

Dear Councillor Stewart

Thank you for lending me your copy of Walking Security Index.

We must complement the region with being foresighted in ordering this study. We are both impressed and at the same time disappointed with it. Impressed with the detail, disappointed with the disabled being relegated to a further study. As long as the disabled are considered as "additional work" we will never be fully integrated into society, & never have the place in society as promised by the 1983 Charter of Rights & Freedoms. In other words we don't integrate by doing segregated studies.

Furthermore the report seems to have a common ailment that TABS (temporarily able bodied persons) come down with when dealing with disabled issues. The author writes about talking to professionals. We the disabled are the most knowledgeable and best spokespersons for ourselves, not occupational therapists, not doctors etc. We hope in the next study the author will talk to all segments of the disabled community.

Robert uses an electric wheelchair and Grace uses a scooter. In 1998 after a number of near accidents, mostly in the vicinity of our home, we decided to document the problems with streets, sidewalks, shopping centers, and medical buildings etc. We have not finished. However when we learned about this study from the radio, and Councillor Stewart said it would be dealt with on March 17, 1999; we decided to give you an abbreviated version. Our comments apply equally to streets under regional and city of Ottawa jurisdiction.

We believe the region could do much better. What really irks us is that a major intersection such as Merivale & Carling was dug up just a few years ago. Yet today it is hazardous & has many of the problems listed. The south east corner does not even have a curb cut. Heavy equipment has worn away the very corner to give a slight appearance of a curb cut. Do planners not consider making an intersection accessible when it is going to be dug up? Do city auditors not look at such things during audits? We feel that random audits of plans & sites should be done. If necessary mention on performance appraisals of the discriminatory action of

omitting to ensure accessibility should be made. Only then will all staff realize accessibility is not just talk.

This is not an exhaustive list of the problems, that we or other persons in wheelchairs & scooters have with the region. Nor does it mention problems that people using other mobility aids have. Nor does it cover the problems people with other disabilities encounter. However it will give you a little idea of SOME of the daily problems people using wheelchairs & scooters encounter as they go about Ottawa-Carleton. It should be noted that improved access for wheelchairs & scooters would also benefit baby carriages & people pulling carts for their groceries.


We hope it will spur the councillors to have a proper study done. Also we hope in future that no more studies will be conducted in which the disabled are DISCRIMINATED AGAINST by being excluded. We suggest that a generic paragraph prohibiting discrimination be written. That paragraph would have to be included in all new contracts for all kinds of work.

We believe before action is taken to implement the recommendations it would be prudent to complete the study on the needs of the disabled. Otherwise the region has no idea what effect these recommendations would have on the disabled. We believe some recommendations such as modifying posted & painted roadway signage & modifying roadway marking would need to be re done. Why do it twice? Furthermore priorities of what should be done & where might change completely.

Also if this study is implemented without a study of disabled needs, the latter will never be done. What usually happens in such cases is that no more studies are done, because of cost, or because TABS think little more need or can be added. Here are 2 persons who will not accept those excuses.

Thank you again for lending me your copy. We thank you in advance for taking the time to read this. If you have any further comments or questions please call us.

Yours truly


Robert Crout
725-9477


Grace McClelland-Crout

CC. Mr Rick Chiarelli,
Mr. Peter McGrath, Indep Living

=====

1. PROBLEM - HEIGHT OF PERSON IN WHEELCHAIR/SCOOTER

Some wheelchair/scooter users are very short or the wheelchairs may be low to the ground. Consequently this can make the wheelchair user the height of a child with all the inherent problems of not being seen in crowds or, over the top of hedges & parked cars in driveways. This is particularly so when vans and pickup trucks are backing up out of driveways or, in shopping center parking lots which we must travel through to get to the mall. This lack of height can make some of the following problems more serious.

2. PROBLEM - ACCESSIBILITY TO MALLS

Pedestrians & wheelchairs cannot go from the sidewalk into most shopping centres. It is assumed even local people will always drive cars to the mall. No one will walk or drive their wheelchair to their local mall. Consequently we must travel through parking lots & across or along thoroughfares used by buses & cars. Compounding the problem often only one or a few entrances to the buildings have curb cuts & or accessible doors.

Take Westgate Shopping Centre as an example. There is no sidewalk access from either Merivale or Carling. In fact on Merivale there are trees & grass between the sidewalk & parking lot in order to force the wheelchair to use the roadway used by buses & cars. This is dangerous.

RECOMMENDATION

1. In future all new malls large or small should be accessible from the sidewalk without requiring wheelchairs & pedestrians to go through parking lots and across or along thoroughfares used by buses and cars.
2. For existing malls there should be requirement to retrofit it making a curb cut from the closest sidewalk to the closest entrance. This is necessary for the wheelchair person's safety.
3. All entrances should have curb cuts & automatic door openers.

3. PROBLEM - WIDTH OF SIDEWALK

Sidewalks must be wide enough too accommodate both the wheelchair/scooter and the person passing in the opposite direction. Every person using a wheelchair or scooter has a story about being forced too close to the edge of the sidewalk by pedestrians, having the wheel drive off the sidewalk onto the street, and the wheelchair or scooter tipping over. Not only does the disabled person fall into the path of oncoming traffic, but he/she is usually hurt and the wheelchair damaged.

RECOMMENDATION

Sidewalks must be wide enough to accommodate both the wheelchair/scooter and persons or wheelchairs passing in the opposite direction. Wheelchair users must be encouraged to stay on the inside of the sidewalk, & TABS (temporarily able bodied) educated to take the outer side next the street.

4. PROBLEM - SLOPE OF SIDEWALK

Some sidewalks slope toward the street. When the sidewalk is wet or covered with ice wheelchairs/scooters are more likely to skid into the street & tip over, injuring the occupant & damaging the wheelchair.

5. PROBLEM - INTERSECTION DESIGN-DRAINAGE

Intersection and sidewalk design could be improved to prevent puddles and to facilitate drainage. Most scooters sold here are made in the southwest U.S.A. These manufacturers instruct operators not to travel through more than one inch (1") or, one and a half inches (1 1/2") of water. Our occupational therapist from the region was unaware of this when advising Robert on choice of wheelchair/scooter.

When snow is involved this is a very small snowfall. Often ridges of snow on sidewalks are greater in height than this. Grace's scooter just stops when it encounters a little ridge of snow on an otherwise dry sidewalk.

RECOMMENDATION

Training of all planners & work crew supervisors (white hats), & snowplow operators as to the requirements for sidewalks & curb cuts with regard to wheelchairs/scooters. Retrofits must be done. Audits should also be done.

6. PROBLEM - CURB CUT WIDTH

Width of curb cuts vary greatly. The width of a wheelchair, the distance between the back wheels can vary from about 17 inches to 28 inches. We have seen special order chairs even larger. Very often TABS assume that if one wheelchair can fit in the space all wheelchairs can.

RECOMMENDATION

The width of the curb cut should accommodate everyone and be standard form not adhoc as is now the case.

=====

7. PROBLEM - LOCATION OF CURB CUTS AT THE CORNER

Some curb cuts cover a very small area and are only at the very corner. This requires the wheelchair user crossing in either direction to pull out into the path of the oncoming traffic. This is very dangerous! An example of this is on the south east corner of Merivale & Carling which really isn't a curb cut but just a little of the cement worn away at the corner.



RECOMMENDATION

Curb cuts should be on each side of the corner.

8. PROBLEM - LOCATION OF CURB CUT-TOO FAR FROM CORNER

When a curb cut is located too far from the corner of the street the wheelchair person's safety is comprised by vehicles turning right.

RECOMMENDATION

All curb cuts must be visible to traffic.

9. PROBLEM - LOCATION-CURB CUTS-ON EITHER SIDE OF STREET

Often curb cuts are not opposite each other, sometimes not even in the crosswalk. This makes it difficult for a wheelchair/scooter especially if in a crowd. The crowd prevents the wheelchair person from seeing the the lack of or new location of the curb cut. Futhermore even if the wheelchair/scooter person knows the location of the curb cut on the other side of the street it requires the wheelchair to forge into oncomming pedestrians or, cut across the path of people following the wheelchair, in order to arrive at the curb cut.

RECOMMENDATION

Locate curb cuts directly across from each other in standard format in the crosswalk.

10. PROBLEM - LACK OF SNOWPLOWING OF MISPLACED CURB CUTS

When the curb cut is not in the crosswalk section of the sidewalk, a wheelchair operator finds the crosswalk has been snowplowed but there is a snowbank on the curb cut, proibitting its use.

RECOMMENDATION

Training of all work crew supervisors (white hats), & snowplow operators as to sidewalk & curb cut requirements for the wheelchairs/scooters. Eventually all these curb cuts should be relocated in the crosswalk. Meanwhile supervisors must ensure that they are plowed! There should be audits done of both.

11. PROBLEM - POSTS & SIGNS IN CURB CUTS-REMANOEUVERABILITY

Posts and signs may be placed in the curb cut. Scooters especially the 4 wheel type (which may be up to 54 inches long) may have difficulty manoeuvring around the sign or post at the best of times. Any wheelchair or scooter may tip over as it tries to go around the post or sign, particularly if the curb cut is very steep or, if there is insufficient space and the wheelchair/scooter wheel falls off the sidewalk onto the street.

RECOMMENDATION

Posts and signs should not be placed in the curb cut, existing ones must be moved.

12. PROBLEM - CURB CUTS & CARS TURNING RIGHT ON RED

At busy intersections cars turning right on red lights stop in the crosswalk requiring pedestrians to walk around them. However wheelchairs/scooters often don't have the manoeuverability and often there is insufficient space between cars to do this. Even if the wheelchair can manoeuver around the car the access to the curb cut is blocked. For persons like Grace with environment sensitivities such close proximity to car exhaust may cause further problems.

13. PROBLEM - CURB CUTS & MEDIANS

Medians may or may not have a curb cut. Or a median may have a curb cut on only one side and not on the other. In a crowd this is difficult to see. Furthermore in a crowd it is almost impossible to backup to go around the median. However the wheelchair must leave the the safety of the crosswalk and pull out into the passing traffic in order to go around the median. Not only does this put the wheelchair person at risk from oncoming traffic, but it also takes extra time not permitted by the lights. Grace's scooter stopped in traffic after her scooter jumped off a median which was missing a curb cut on one side. The light changed and there she sat.

Futhermore cars sitting in a crosswalk may block access to the median curb cut & force the wheelchair out into oncomming traffic in order to cross the street. This happens regularly at Merivale & Carling & at the Carling entrance to Westgate.

RECOMMENDATION

All medians should have adequate curb cuts on both sides.
Why should medians used by pedestrians be elevated at all?

14. PROBLEM - LOCATION OF CROSSWALK LIGHT PUSH BUTTON

Sometimes crosswalk light push buttons are put on inaccessible median islands. An example of this can be seen on the northwest side of Merivale & Carling. It is impossible for a person in wheelchair to push it. If the median/island was made accessible it would be too small to accommodate a wheelchair.

RECOMMENDATION

Posts such as this one should have been located at the corner of the Monkey Joe's Restaurant parking lot.

15. PROBLEM - DURATION OF PEDESTRIAN CROSS LIGHT

Lights are often too short in duration, especially if one or more of the following conditions exist.

1. several lanes of traffic,
2. too steep a curb cut. Consequently the wheelchair must back off the curb in order to reduce the risk of tipping over. Then it must do a 180 degree turn and cross the street,
3. people who use canes or manual wheelchairs and are too weak to cross the street in the time the light permits.
4. for persons who can't walk fast. In the past Grace often found herself just half way across the street at the end of a light, even though she had started to cross the street the moment the walk light sign appeared. If there was no median she could take refuge on, it was very scary for her!

RECOMMEND LONGER LIGHTS

16. PROBLEM - COBBLESTONES

Cobblestone sidewalks are impossible to drive on in a wheelchair. Some widths of wheels get caught between the cobblestones, requiring extra effort to get over them. They are slippery when wet and ice forms between them in spring, fall, and winter making them very slippery under such conditions. People using walkers and manual wheelchairs require extra physical effort to get over them. Cobblestones can deplete the batteries of electric wheelchairs and scooters.

RECOMMENDATION

If used there should be adequate regular sidewalk available for wheelchairs and scooters. Furthermore posts with crosswalk light push buttons should not be placed in or near cobblestones.

=====

17. PROBLEM - STREET REPAIRS OR, NEW CONSTRUCTION

When new construction occurs it is assumed that months or years later when it is all finished it can be made accessible for the disabled. Until it is finished we disabled are to disappear. This happened on Merivale at Central Park.

During street repairs when the asphalt is stripped from a street for repaving the curb cuts becomes inaccessible. A few years ago when Carling and Merivale were dug up, we witnessed a woman fall into the path of oncoming traffic as her chair tipped over as she tried to climb up too sharp an incline to get onto the sidewalk. She appeared to have no use of her lower body. She was not strong enough to right the chair. Consequently with only the use of her hands, she was trying to pull/drag herself out of the way of the oncoming traffic. She was alone with no one to help her.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Therefore in the future regional work crews must construct some sort of solid ramping in order that intersections under construction/repair are still accessible to wheelchairs.
2. When repairs are finished formerly accessible intersections should still be accessible, & formerly inaccessible intersections should be made accessible. Random audits should be done.

18. PROBLEM - BROKEN GLASS & OIL

Because wheelchairs must use curb cuts, we have no choice about driving over glass. Very seldom after an accident is all the glass & oil cleaned away. Consequently those of us with tubed tires get flats. When we drive through oil, it gets over all our floors at home. TABS wearing boots can take off dirty boots at the door. People in wheelchairs can't take off their tires when they go home. Also oil is slippery & dangerous.

Getting a flat tire may mean missing one or more days of work, not being able to go to the doctor or school, etc. Plus there is the extra expense.

RECOMMENDATION

All glass and oil even the smallest must be picked up. Police and regional work crews must be more diligent, especially after accidents. Random audits should be done.

19. PROBLEM - JOINTS, CRACKS & BUCKLES IN SIDEWALKS

The mode of side walk construction causes pain for many disabled persons. The joints resulting from the forms during construction cause perpetual bumps and cause pain. So do cracks & buckles in the sidewalk. The vast majority of wheelchair users do not have shock absorbers in their wheelchairs. We have been informed such wheelchairs retail price starts at about \$16,000.00, far out of reach of most disabled persons. Reduced repairs caused we believe by budget cuts have:

1. increased pain and need for pain killers,
2. required greater effort by manual wheelchair users,
3. increased the number of tipped wheelchairs due to the buckle in the sidewalk
4. increased the number of injured persons
5. increased the number of wheelchair repairs especially the frequency of wheel repairs and or tire replacements.

RECOMMENDATION

We personally prefer asphalt sidewalks because they are less bumpy. We don't know how other disabled feel. Maybe the question could be asked in the next survey. What would the cost differential be? Sidewalk repair needs to have a higher priority. For a wheelchair/scooter a buckle in a sidewalk is equivalent to what a hole in pavement is to a car.

20. PROBLEM - HOLES IN PAVEMENT SURFACE

Often crosswalks have holes in the pavement. This causes problems see above. Example Carling & Merivale. Alone or combined with other conditions it may force the wheelchair out into oncoming traffic in order to cross the street.

21. PROBLEM - GARBAGE CANS ON GARBAGE PICK UP DAYS

One day a week every sidewalk becomes inaccessible to wheelchairs and scooters. After emptying blue boxes & garbage cans, garbage men throw them onto the sidewalk and therefore into the path of wheelchairs/scooters. Some disabled persons have sufficient strength and flexibility to move them. Many don't! Consequently on such days wheelchairs often must drive on the streets. This is dangerous!

RECOMMENDATION

The garbage men and homeowners must be educated to place all blue boxes & garbage cans on lawns.