

6. Putting children and youth first

Guideline 1. In transport and land-use planning, the needs of children and youth should receive as much priority as the needs of people of other ages and the requirements of business.

This is the framework guideline that sets the scene for the guidelines to follow and for the implementation of the guidelines discussed in Part III. Putting children and youth first means that their needs—as set out in Section 4—are considered at every stage of transport and land use planning processes. Transport systems are designed so that their needs can be met. Land uses are developed to support such transport systems.

The needs of children and youth point towards implementation of ‘softer’, less threatening, less intrusive, more inclusive, and more collective transport systems. At first sight, such systems may not meet ideals based only on conventional transport objectives. For example, they may involve slower movement of traffic and thus appear to reduce the level of transport service. However, implementation of all requirements for children and youth could reduce journey times. Motorized road traffic may be slower, but distances may be shorter, and rapid transit may be more available to move people quickly from one place to another.

In Box 2 on the next page, Enrique Peñalosa, former mayor of Bogotá, Colombia, draws a direct link between planning for children and making transport more sustainable.

An essential feature of putting children and youth first is that transport and land-use planning issues are seen from perspectives of children and youth. This requires the participation of children and youth in planning processes, or, for the youngest children, the participation of those responsible for them. How this can be achieved is set out in Part III of this document.

Guideline 2. Within each municipality, designate a staff member or council member, or both, as responsible for bringing the perspectives of young people to consideration of transport and land-use planning issues.

Implementation of this guideline may be an essential requirement for application of all or most of the other guidelines. How this guideline is implemented will depend on how the municipality is structured, and also on its size. The role of a staff member, however, could be the same in all municipalities, similar in nature to that of the fire chief who checks each plan for consistency with fire codes and access requirements for emergency vehicles.

Box 2. Planning for children and transforming transport⁷⁵**Former Bogotá mayor Enrique Peñalosa interviewed by Susan Ives (U.S.A.)****If you could wave a magic wand and create the perfect city, what would that city be like?**

We really have to admit that over the past hundred years we have been building cities much more for mobility than for people's well-being. Every year thousands of children are killed by cars. Isn't it time we build cities that are more child-friendly? Over the last 30 years, we've been able to magnify environmental consciousness all over the world. As a result, we know a lot about the ideal environment for a happy whale or a happy mountain gorilla. We're far less clear about what constitutes an ideal environment for a happy human being. ***One common measure for how clean a mountain stream is to look for trout. If you find the trout, the habitat is healthy. It's the same way with children in a city. Children are a kind of indicator species. If we can build a successful city for children we will have a successful city for all people.*** [emphasis added]

Given the rapid growth of Third World cities, is this possible?

Many Third World cities today are really only half built. Many are still surrounded by undeveloped land that will be overtaken by the city very soon. We still have the opportunity to learn from the successes and mistakes of other cities around the world. We need to think about how to create cities that produce more convivial, creative, and happy human beings. Where is the urban expert who decided that cities had to be structured around cars? Why not begin to think differently? Why not dream of a city where half the streets would be for pedestrians, where the heart of the city would be a giant avenue lined with benches and trees, a meeting place for the community, where people go to jog, ride bicycles, talk, kiss, eat in cafes? A city doesn't have to be a bunch of roads for cars with some buildings around them.

As mayor, you made it your platform to transform the city's transportation system.

When I got to city hall, I was handed a transportation study that said the most important thing the city could do was to build an elevated highway at a cost of \$600 million. Instead, we installed a bus system that carries 700,000 people a day at a cost of \$300 million. We created hundreds of pedestrian-only streets, parks, plazas, and bike paths, planted trees, and got rid of cluttering commercial signs. We constructed the longest pedestrian-only street in the world. It may seem crazy, because this street goes through some of the poorest neighborhoods in Bogotá, and many of the surrounding streets aren't even paved. But we chose not to improve the streets for the sake of cars, but instead to have wonderful spaces for pedestrians. All this pedestrian infrastructure shows respect for human dignity. We're telling people, "You are important--not because you're rich or because you have a Ph.D., but because you are human." If people are treated as special, as sacred even, they behave that way. This creates a different kind of society.

How was your idea of putting pedestrians needs ahead of cars received?

I was nearly impeached when I said that cars shouldn't be allowed to park on the sidewalks. My opponents were business owners who said there was enough space on the sidewalks for cars to park and for people to still walk by. In Bogotá only 25 to 30 percent of the households have cars. Yet we use public money to build roads for the cars that so few people can afford, while the majority walk or use public transit. Democracy isn't just about casting a vote. It's about public good over private. If we can ban cars, isn't the majority better off?

What steps were you able to take?

We began to experiment by instituting a car-free day on a weekday. In a city of about 7 million people, just about everybody managed to get to work by walking, bicycling, bus, even on horseback--and everybody was better off. There was less air pollution, less time sitting in traffic, more time for people to be productive and enjoy themselves. Every Sunday we close 120 kilometers of roads to motor vehicles for seven hours. A million and a half people of all ages and incomes come out to ride bicycles, jog, and simply gather with others in community. We took a vote, and 83 percent of the public told us they wanted to have car-free days more often. Getting people out of their cars is a means of social integration. You have the upper-income person sitting next to the cleaning lady on the bus. This may be something you take for granted in your country. But in the Third World, society isn't so integrated. This is extremely powerful and revolutionary.

The responsible staff member would review all plans and proposals and have clear authority to advise as to their acceptance or rejection according to their compatibility with these guidelines and similar principles supporting the needs of children and youth. A further responsibility could include working with school officials to encourage use of active transport for the trips to and from school.

This official could also have authority to examine existing arrangements and recommend greater compatibility with the needs of children and youth. A key part of the work of this staff member would involve working with the forums for young people that could be established as a result of implementation of Guideline 3.

A council member responsible for bringing the perspectives of young people to consideration of transport and land-use planning issues would, of course, act through the council and its committees and in the community. Such a council member might take a special interest in establishing and working with the municipality's forum for young people.

Figure 2. Burlington, Ontario, Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee (MYAC)⁷⁶

GET INVOLVED	HOW TO JOIN	RECENT PROJECTS
<p>Want to make a difference in your community? Bring your strengths to the Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee (MYAC).</p> <p>Working closely with the Mayor, MYAC is a group of students from all over Burlington who advise the mayor on issues that are important to youth. Members are between the ages of 14 and 19 and meet on a monthly basis to discuss ideas and plan events.</p>	<p>New committee members are selected every September. In order to be reflective of the city's youth we try to maintain a balance of members from all schools throughout our community.</p> <p>To join, send a copy of your resume and a brief cover letter explaining why you are interested in joining MYAC to the address below. Interested applicants should apply by the final week of August at the absolute latest. Selected candidates will be contacted in early September for an interview.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Friendly Award application • City Transit Advertising campaign • Youthfest • MYAC Art Show • International Youth Leadership Conference
<h3>MYAC MANDATE</h3>		
<p>To provide an important voice for young people in the Burlington community.</p> <p>To provide a youth perspective on municipal and other issues to be considered by the mayor and council as they carry out their civic responsibilities.</p> <p>To provide input or advice to the Mayor, Council, and city staff as.</p> <p>To involve and inform the young people of Burlington on issues, events and activities in the community.</p>  		

Guideline 3. As may be appropriate, establish or adapt one or more forums for children and youth to ensure that their perspectives are considered by land-use and transport planners.

In the case of youth—i.e., about 12 years and older—this guideline might literally involve establishing a youth advisory committee or other such group, charged with reviewing and bringing forward plans and proposals. Some municipalities already have such a group, e.g., the Mayor’s Youth Advisory Committee in Burlington, Ontario (see Figure 2 on the previous page). In such cases, the mandate of the existing group could be expanded.

Another approach is that of the Rural Municipality of Gimli, whose council appoints a youth representative to serve as a member of the council with voice but no vote.⁷⁷ Since 2006, Gimli has had a particularly active Youth Community Partnership that is somewhat apart from the formal municipal structure but has already concerned itself with municipal issues, including the quality of public transit in the community.

Yet another approach is that of the Village of Breton, Alberta (population 550). There, the Council comprising the mayor and four councillors also has two “youth advisors” as participants in meetings as well as two “seniors advisors.”⁷⁸

There is more on involving children and youth in Section 13 of this document (Page 60).