



OPEN STREETS TORONTO TO BRING BACK CITY'S LARGEST FREE RECREATION PROGRAM

2015 program dates will build on a successful 2014 pilot program, using existing public assets - Toronto's iconic streets - to promote the importance of physical activity, social connectivity and accessibility

TORONTO, June 24, 2015 – Open Streets TO is proud to announce that the 2015 Open Streets platform, a world-class recreation program unlike any other in Canada, will take place between 9:00 am and 1:00 pm on Sunday, August 16 and Sunday, September 6, 2015. The 5.0 kilometre route will comprise Bloor Street (between Spadina and Parliament) and Yonge Street (between Bloor and Queen), connecting some of Toronto's most diverse neighbourhoods. Crossing points will be included at numerous major intersections, where cars will be permitted to pass through as normal.

"We are excited to bring back the Open Streets program to Canada's largest city," said Emily Munroe, Board Member, Open Streets Toronto and Executive Director, 8-80 Cities, a catalyst for the international Open Streets movement. "We would like to thank the numerous City of Toronto stakeholders for their support in making this a reality and we would like to invite every citizen in Toronto to participate in this free recreational program."

Open Streets are programs that open a city's streets to people and close them to cars. People traffic replaces car traffic, and the streets become "paved parks" where people of all ages, abilities, and social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds can come out and improve their health. In 2014, Open Streets drew more than 20,000 participants per program date, including runners, cyclists, skateboarders, roller bladers and walkers, among many others, who interacted with their city and other people in unique ways never before experienced in Toronto.

"Iconic cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Paris and Mexico City all promote a variety of the Open Streets concept," said Toronto City Councillor, Kristyn Wong-Tam. "I am proud that Toronto put itself on this map of great cities in 2014 by creating our own distinct program and am looking forward to this summer's exciting program."

In addition to these open streets, parks and public spaces along the route, or "hubs", will be programmed with activities organized by members of the community, providing a window into what each neighbourhood has to offer. Community organizations, businesses, and individuals from across the city are encouraged to pitch an activity idea (or ideas) for the 2015 program. Activity leader applications are now being accepted - more info can be found at www.openstreetsto.org.

Local businesses are also encouraged to get involved and to take advantage of this unique opportunity. Open Streets TO is designed to showcase the local community and businesses along the route – no outside vendors are permitted. Merchants in other Open Streets cities, such as Los Angeles, have not only seen an increase in business during and after their program days, but have also had the opportunity to reach out to new customers from other parts of their city.

"Open Streets is in keeping with the work that we are doing on an ongoing basis to create vibrant and unique experiences in Downtown Yonge," said Mark Garner, Executive Director, Downtown Yonge BIA. "We are especially committed to bringing together both the wider community and the public realm in new and creative ways – and Open Streets does exactly that."

Ryerson University will once again be partnering with Open Streets to provide program evaluation support research, designed to learn from, and improve upon, the overall platform offering. Topics such as "Social Inclusion and Diversity", "Youth Engagement" and the "Importance of Physical Activity" will be studied to ensure that Open Streets program development can be tailored to address Toronto's pressing needs.

Open Streets is proud to announce that current sponsors include City, Downtown Yonge BIA, 8 80 Cities, Tricon Capital Group, Toronto Parking Authority, Bike Share Toronto, Ryerson University, The 519 and Bennett Jones LLP.

The Open Streets TO program cannot happen without the generous support of volunteers. In 2014, the pilot program was supported by more than 300 community members. Volunteer opportunities for the 2015 program are now open, and the application process is available on the Open Streets TO website.

For more information about Open Streets TO, visit: www.openstreetsto.org, follow us on Twitter (@OpenStreetsTO) or like us on Facebook (Open Streets TO).

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