

# **Issues in the Kingston Galloway Orton Park Neighbourhood**

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**Abstract (Summary):** The Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park (KGO) has been designated as one of the thirteen priority neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto, because it has shown to lack the resources that address diverse community needs (City of Toronto, 2010). With a fast growing population it is necessary to ensure that the neighbourhood is well equipped to attend people's needs whether they are seniors, youth or new immigrants to the area. In a neighbourhood where the basic needs of residents are the main priority, it is easy to disregard the fact that some may require special resources, such as those with disabilities; especially those with mobility issues. Therefore, this paper will attempt to determine the main problems individuals with mobility issues encounter in their daily commute in the KGO neighbourhood.

**Keywords:** Accessibility, Built Environment, Mobility, Safety

# **Issues in the Kingston Galloway Orton Park Neighborhood**

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## Mobility Issues in the KGO

In 2006 statistics Canada determined that 4.4 million Canadians living in households reported having an activity limitation yielding a disability rate of 14.3 %", which is an increase of 1.9% compared to the rate obtained in 2001( Statistics Canada, 2006: 9). Furthermore, it was determined that disabilities related to pain, mobility and agility are the most common" among the population ranging 15 years and older (See Figure 1, Appendix A) (Statistics Canada, 2006: 29). Further review of the above statistics, indicates that disabilities relating to mobility issues are in fact one of the most prevailing in Canadian society. Nevertheless, the study of disabilities in the geographical context has been rather limited (Imrie, 2007). For a long period of time, it was believed that disability was simply a "medical or physiological condition, purely related to body impairment" (Pain, 2001: 166). However, a more recent approach states that "disability does not just result from an individual's impairment, but importantly, stems from societal and/or attitudinal environmental restrictions placed upon people with physical and/or mental impairments" (Pain, 2001:168).

The Kingston Galloway Orton Park Neighbourhood (KGO) has been designated as one of the thirteen priority neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto, because it has shown to lack the resources that address diverse community needs (City of Toronto, 2010). With a fast growing population it is necessary to ensure that the neighbourhood is well equipped to attend people's needs whether they are seniors, youth or new immigrants to the area. In a neighbourhood where the basic needs of residents are the main priority, it is easy to disregard the fact that some may require special resources, such as those with disabilities; especially those with mobility issues. Therefore, this paper will attempt to determine the main problems individuals with mobility issues encounter in their daily commute in the KGO neighbourhood. Furthermore, emphasis will be

placed on the type of physical restrictions present in the environment, which prevents individuals with mobility issues from travelling efficiently around the KGO. The latter will be determined by completing a review/assessment of built the environment along three specific areas of study to be determined in the methodology.

Note, for the purpose of this project two specific terms will be defined:

Accessibility: Refers to ability to access. The ease by which one may reach a location

Individuals with mobility issues: A group that uses walking assistance devices for their daily commute.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To begin, the Community Based Participatory Research Approach (CBPR) was used to conduct research, as it "emphasizes the importance of collaboration, participation and social justice agendas "(Flicker, 2008: 107). Thus, this approach allows for community members to be involved in several steps of the research project. By allowing residents in the research, it is made sure that research methods and findings are relevant, as well reflective of the neighbourhood studied. Therefore, the first half of the project consists of a series of multi-level sequence of steps that heavily rely on information provided by interviewed residents of the area. The second half utilizes the information obtained from residents to execute an assessment of the built environment in three key study areas within the KGO. Detailed steps are outlined as followed:

### **A) Focus group and Community Partner Interview:**

To begin, contact was made with Dianne Edwards, health promoter for the West Hill Community Services, as she is one of the few individuals that makes direct contact with residents in the KGO. Her job position allows her to gain insight into the issues that matter the most to

residents. Hence, her collaboration in the project became crucial for the above mentioned reason. Because of the scope of the project, and the large focus on community participation, Dianne offered to set up a meeting with a group of residents who participate on a wellness group, which takes place at the East Scarborough Storefront. Questions to be discussed in the meeting were e-mailed to Dianne prior to meeting with the group in order to assess, and avoid any potential risk the questions may pose for the residents to be interviewed. Also, consent forms were provided to focus group prior to starting the meeting. (See Appendix B for sample form)

The Meeting took place on October 21, 2010 at the East Scarborough Storefront. The group was composed of nine members, from which three of them were inclusive of the category of individuals with mobility issues. The questions to be discussed were open ended, and were meant to encourage a conversation where focus group member's could share problems they encounter, in addition to their personal experiences of the neighbourhood. Answers to the following question later helped to further establish parameters.

1. What aspects of the built environment (eg, sidewalks, ramps, crossings and so on) in the neighbourhood are the main problems in your daily commute around the KGO?

- Poor quality of sidewalks and ramps:

Members of the focus group considered as having mobility issues, explained that uneven, cracked sidewalks make their community uncomfortable, extremely dangerous and unsafe as they may lose balance when walking.

- Lack of crosswalks that allow safe crossing:

Members of the focus group considered this as one of the greatest problems. There are not enough facilities that allow safe crossing of pedestrians in the KGO. Instead, many residents jaywalk to reach their destination, consequently endangering their own lives.

- Traffic light timing for pedestrians is too short:

The focus group agreed this issue affects everyone regardless of physical capability. They arrived at the conclusion that present time settings do not allow pedestrians to cross in a sensible amount of time, and some “could barely make it” to the other side of the road.

Many felt anxious when crossing, as they had to rush or run before the traffic light changed colour.

- Lack of snow removal on sidewalks during the winter time :

This problem appears to be the most problematic among individuals with mobility issues. To expand further, this issue prevents them from leaving their homes and running their usual errands as the snow constricts their pathway.

2. What areas within the KGO do you consider to be the most problematic and/or dangerous when trying to move around the neighbourhood?

- Three main areas were identified:

- a) Morningside Triangle: The area experiences a high concentration of automobile traffic and pedestrians due to the commercial area found in it. In addition, the area is surrounded by three major roads (Kingston Rd, Lawrence Ave and Morningside Ave)
- b) Lawrence Ave: The stretch from Kingston Rd to the bridge over Morningside Park. The area was identified because it lacks facilities for safe crossing.

- c) Rouge Valley Health Systems (Centenary Hospital): This area was of specific importance as it is the closest health care facility for residents of the KGO. Yet, residents recognized that the medical facility lacks proper infrastructure to accommodate individuals with mobility needs.

3. What kind of changes or initiatives would you like to see in the neighbourhood that would facilitate your mobility, while making your commute safer and more efficient?

- For this section, members of the focus group expressed that they would like to see infrastructure that allows safe crossing such as crosswalks or islands for crossing. Moreover, better snow removal during winter time.

#### **B) Study area specifications:**

From the information obtained in the focus group, it was determined the research project was to focus on the areas the residents perceived as the most dangerous (See answer to question 2). Therefore, the three areas to be studied were: Morningside Triangle (Appendix C, figure 1), Lawrence Avenue (Appendix C, figure 2) and Centenary Hospital (Appendix C, figure 3)

#### **C) Assessment of the built environment based on audits**

Once the above areas were selected, a walkability/accessibility audit was implemented. Essentially, audits are an unbiased examinations or evaluations of the walking environment, and they "assess the accessibility of pedestrian facilities for various users (e.g., older pedestrians, pedestrians who are blind, people who use wheelchairs, etc.)"(Walking info, 2010). Thus, audits provide an appropriate assessment of the built environment and help determine what aspects of

the same are in fact the most problematic. Because of the concurrent theme of problems outlined by the focus group, it was decided that specific audit parameters should be created to assess the area. In order to do so, a series of already existing walkability audits and the “Pedestrian Facilities Users Guide – Providing Safety and Mobility” were used to formulate the survey questions; in that way, the questions created become reflective of the concerns stipulated by the focus group. As a result, an eight question survey which addresses the abovementioned concerns was created (See appendix D for survey). The questions specified on the survey assess the quality of different aspects of the built environment such as sidewalks, surface quality and so on. A scale from 1-5 was used to provide a score; a score of 1 indicates poor quality where a 5 indicates good. The scores obtained from each question were tallied and a final score out of 40 points was given to each of the three areas of study. In the next section a breakdown of the area findings is outlined in more detail.

## **FINDINGS:**

The findings obtained from the audit will be explained in detail in their respective areas of study within the KGO.

### *Area 1: Rouge Valley Health Systems (Centenary Hospital):*

From the audit survey, this area received a total score of 20/40 possible points (See table1, Appendix E). Based from the questions and close observation of the area of study, it was determined that quality of sidewalks is extremely poor. To begin, sidewalks are not wide enough to accommodate more than one individual that needs a mobility device. It is said by the U.S Department of Transportation that “wider sidewalks should be installed near schools, at transit stops, in downtown areas, or anywhere high concentrations of pedestrians exist. (U.S Department



of Transportation, 2002: 43). However, the above has not been implemented in the area.

Furthermore, cracks and uneven sidewalks are well present, especially at the entrance of the hospital located to the West of Neilson Rd. Also, curve ramps are extremely uneven and cracked; especially those leading to the Hospital north parking lot (See Appendix D, Figure 3). On the other hand, this area provides a proper buffer zone, designated area that separates pedestrians from the street, thus creating a secure feeling in pedestrians when walking in the area.

#### Area 2: Morningside Triangle:

Out of the three study areas, this one received the highest rating at 23/40 (See table 2, Appendix E). Overall, the quality of sidewalks, ramps and sidewalk width were considered average or above average in the area. It was determined that sidewalks were in proper condition, ramps are available in all the areas where crossing is allowed, and are in proper condition. Sidewalks are wide enough to allow at least “two people to pass comfortably or to walk side-by-side” (U.S Department of Transportation, 2002: 43). It is important to note, that at the time of the study, road and sidewalk renovation was taking place along Lawrence Ave. between Morningside and Kingston Rd. In the latter it was found, quality of sidewalks and ramps to be good, and new design accommodates population with mobility issues as they are wider and leveled compared to others found in the area of study.

#### Area 3: Lawrence Avenue (Between Kinaston Rd and over Scarborough's Morningside Park)

Overall, this section of the neighbourhood received the lowest score out of the three study areas with 18/40 (See table 3, Appendix E). It was found, that quality of sidewalks in the area was average or below average. There is a high number of uneven surfaces and curb ramps that are not

properly maintained, cracks are highly present was well. Although sidewalk width was determined appropriate for most part, it was found that sidewalk width decreases as one approach the bridge when travelling East to West along Lawrence Avenue. Furthermore, it was also noticed that the area lacks facilities where safe crossing can be done. The only crosswalks found in the study area are located at the intersection of Kingston road and Lawrence Ave to the East, and at Galloway rd and Overture rd to the middle and West of the study area correspondently. During the first 15 minutes of the audit, about four individuals were seen jaywalking to cross Lawrence Avenue. This indicates that jaywalking is a common practice among members of the area.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

From the data obtained during the audit, it was concluded that there are a series of common problems that affect the individuals with mobility issues in the KGO. The first and foremost problem relates to the overall quality of sidewalks. It was determined that the areas along Lawrence Avenue and especially The Rough Valley Centenary Hospital, had the most uneven and cracked sidewalks. The poor quality increases the potential for tripping or falling especially among the individuals with mobility issues. Moreover, those who require canes or walkers may lose balance and also trip. The second main problem is associated to the poor quality and design of curve ramps. It was found that areas within the Morningside triangle, especially in the old plaza, have uneven, narrow, and very steep ramps. Instead of assisting individuals with mobility issues, the poor ramp design increases the difficulty of movement. Thus many individuals cannot maneuver their mobility devices in such a narrow space. The third issue encountered is the lack of crossing facilities along Lawrence Avenue. The inadequate provision of crossing facilities has forced many to jaywalk to reach their destination, thus, putting in danger the lives of many KGO

residents. In addition, crossing times at the main intersection of Lawrence Avenue and Kingston Rd are particularly short. This problem, like the one previously stated, also endangers the lives of those with mobility issues. Thus, individuals have to rush to cross the street; doing so may cause them to trip and fall.

From the numerical scores given to each study area, it is concluded that The Morningside Triangle area has the adequate facilities to accommodate those with mobility issues. However, the area could be improved, better and more ramps can be built to allow easy access for individuals with mobility issues. Lawrence Avenue East received the lowest score out of the three areas. However, it did so because it lacks the facilities to allow any crossing whatsoever along the stretch. The area could increase their score, by installing islands for crossing along the Avenue since installing traffic lights long the area may not be feasible, nor is efficient due to the high amount of automobile traffic in the area. Last but not least, The Rouge Valley Centenary Hospital received the middle score, yet it is the most problematic area in terms of quality of facilities to allow accessibility. As a hospital, it is perhaps expected to have the infrastructure to accommodate all sorts of mobility issues. However, the institution has disregarded that sector of the population and has not attempted to fix ramps leading to parking lots or those to reach its entrance, nor has provided wide enough sidewalks for the hospital users to walk comfortably. The above mentioned is one of the greatest issues observed in the research findings, which are in urgent need to be addressed.

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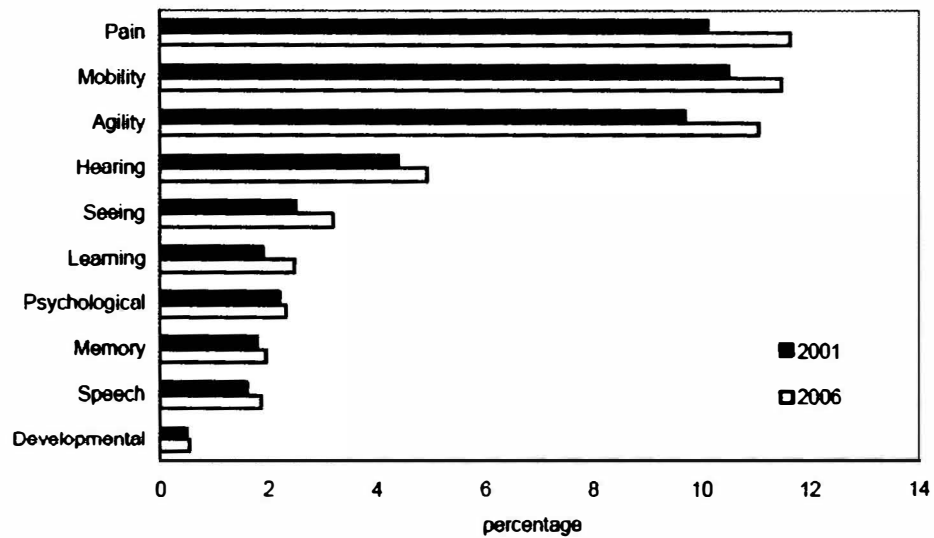
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## Appendix A

Disability rate for adults 15 years of age or older, by type of disability, Canada 2001 and 2006

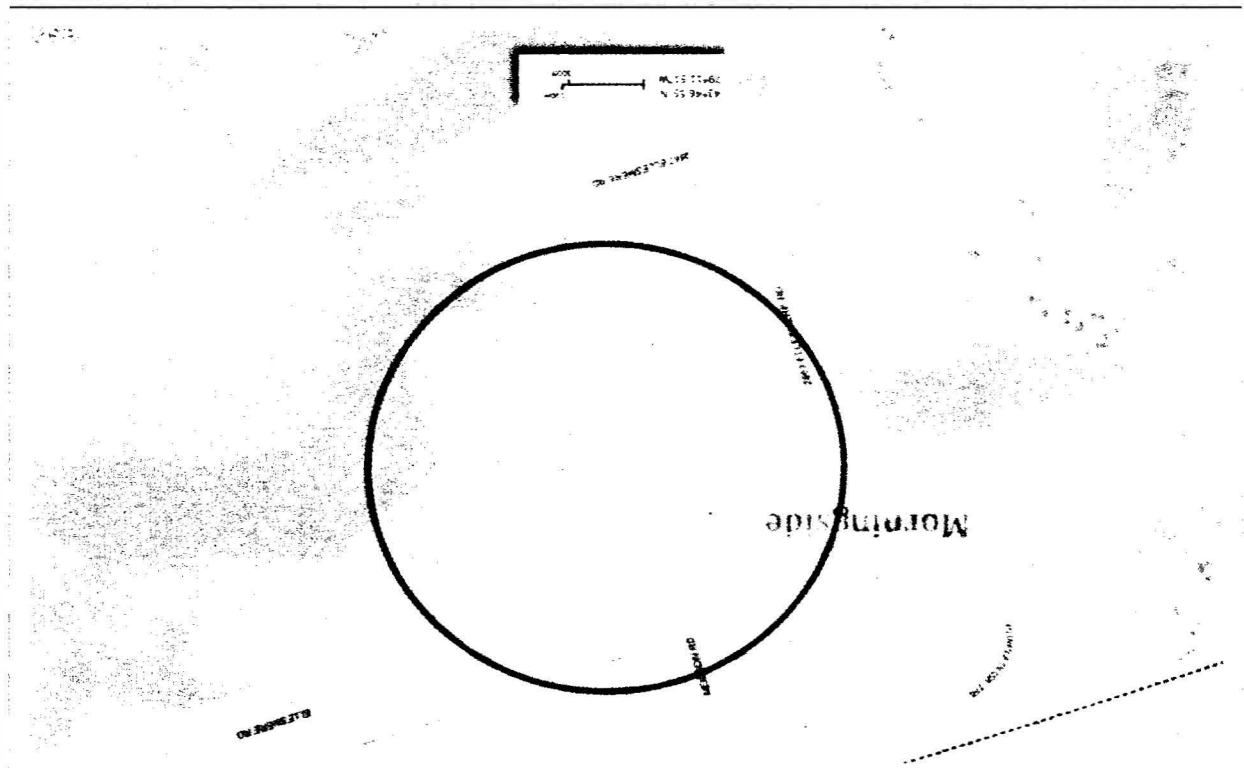


Source: Statistics Canada, Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2001 and 2006.





Figure 3 – Centenary Hospital





**Appendix D – Audit images**



**Figure 1 – (Above -Right) Uneven sidewalk on the East Side of Nielson Rd**

**Figure 2 – (Above - Left) cracker and uneven sidewalk on South East side of Nielson Rd**



**Figure 3 – Ramp in poor condition at the entrance of Rouge Valley Health Center**



**Figure 4 – Narrow sidewalk on the East side of Morningside**



**Figure 5 – Intersection of Lawrence Ave and Kingston Rd**



**Figure 6 – Cracked parking lot surface in the old plaza of Morningside Triangle**



Figure 8 – Bridge over Morningside Park on Lawrence Ave.



Figure 7 – Lawrence Avenue

**Appendix E – Completed Audit survey for each area of study**

Centenary Hospital					
	Poor		Average		Good
<b>Sidewalk Rating Scale:</b>					<b>12</b>
Sidewalk Wideness	1	<b>2</b>	3	4	5
Surface Quality (Bump/holes)	1	2	3	4	5
Buffer Zone	1	2	3	4	5
Curb Ramps (quality)	1	2	3	4	5
User conflict (Mixed use of bike and pedestrians)	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Crossing Rating Scale:</b>					<b>8</b>
Time to cross at traffic light	1	2	3	4	5
Crossing provision	1	2	3	4	5
Deviation from desire line	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Total Score:</b>					<b>20</b>

Table 1 . Audit Survey for The Rouge Valley Centenary Hospital

<b>Morningside Triangle</b>					
	Poor		Average		Good
<b>Sidewalk Rating Scale:</b>					<b>16</b>
Sidewalk Wideness	1	2	3	4	5
Surface Quality (Bump/holes)	1	2	3	4	5
Buffer Zone	1	2	3	4	5
Curb Ramps (Steepness)	1	2	3	4	5
User conflict (Mixed use of bike and pedestrians)	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Crossing Rating Scale:</b>					<b>7</b>
Time to cross at traffic light	1	2	3	4	5
Crossing provision	1	2	3	4	5
Deviation from desire line	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Total Score:</b>					<b>23</b>

Table 2 . Audit Survey for the Morningside Triangle.

Lawrence Avenue					
	Poor		Average		Good
<b>Sidewalk Rating Scale:</b>					<b>12</b>
Sidewalk Wideness	1	2	3	4	5
Surface Quality (Bump/holes)	1	2	3	4	5
Buffer Zone	1	2	3	4	5
Curb Ramps (Steepness)	1	2	3	4	5
User conflict (Mixed use of bike and pedestrians)	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Crossing Rating Scale:</b>					<b>6</b>
Time to cross at traffic light	1	2	3	4	5
Crossing provision	1	2	3	4	5
Deviation from desire line	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Total Score:</b>					<b>18</b>

Table 3 . Audit Survey for Lawrence Avenue East.