

Connecting Trails, Communities and the Brickworks in the Lower Don

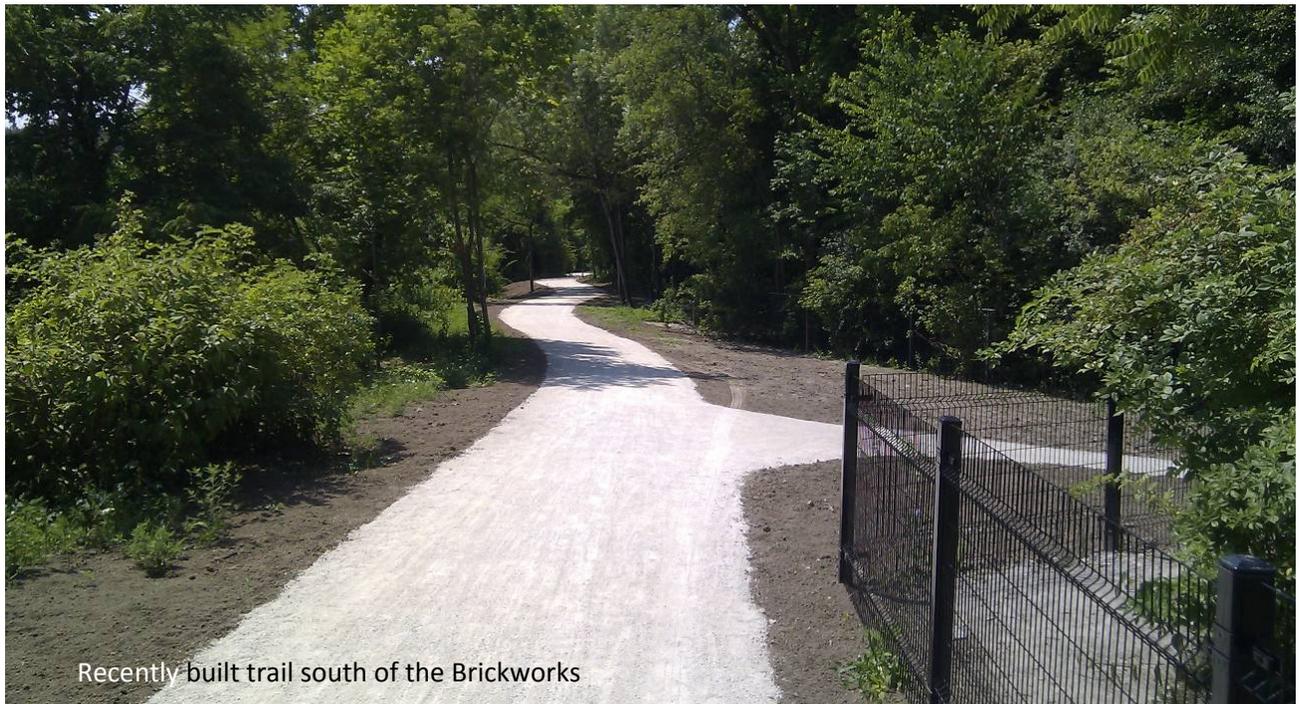
Summary Report of June 28, 2011 Workshop

Report by: Paul Young, [public space workshop](#),
With support from the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
July, 2011

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1. Executive Summary

The focus of the workshop that was held on June 28, 2011 was to improve connections between the Don Trail, the communities adjacent to the trail and to the Brick Works. The process and workshop were collaborative. There was an advisory group comprised of City staff, community and not-for-profit representatives. It was led by Paul Young of public space workshop and Shah Mohamed of Evergreen Brick Works. This workshop report is intended to be a first step towards the implementation of more connections along the Lower Don Trail.

The purpose of the workshop was three-fold:

- a) To exchange information about the work already in planning or construction stages to connect the communities, the Brickworks and the Don Trail (between Moore Ave. and Queen St. E.).
- b) To discuss and prioritize other possible connectors.
- c) To generate support for connection improvements.

Approximately 40 participants came from all directions surrounding the trail, east, west, north and south including Ward 29 Councillor, Mary Fragedakis. A show of hands indicated a balanced cross-section of walkers and cyclists. Many are already connected to community-based advocacy efforts to improve surrounding parks and trail connections.

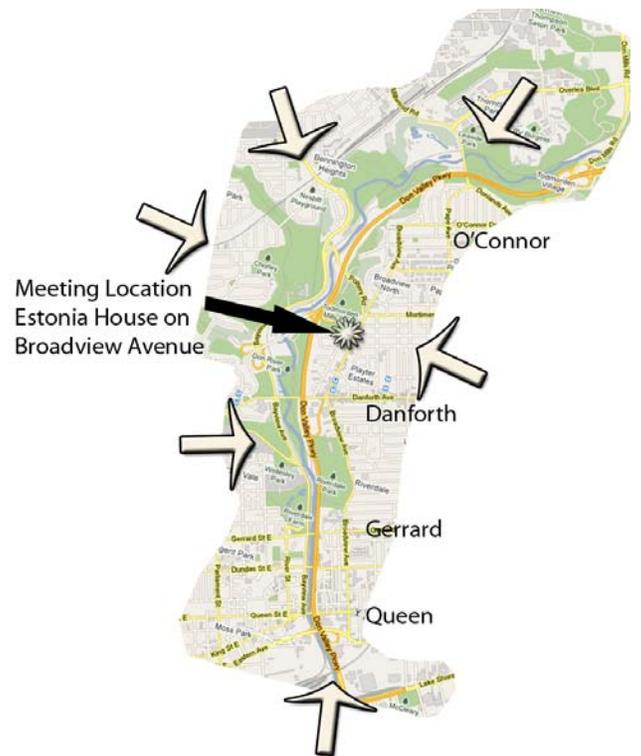
Paul reviewed recent studies to improve connections to the Lower Don Trail. He cited obstacles listed in the reports and touched on opportunities related to economic development, tourism, transportation and social equity.

City of Toronto Transportation and Parks staff identified several significant connection projects that will be implemented within the next year, including improvements for cycling and walking along Bayview Ave. near the Brickworks and improvements to adjacent parkland and ravine trails.

Community representatives then identified additional connection opportunities. These ranged from simple signage improvements to connections utilizing existing bridges and roads along the valley.

Participants reviewed all the opportunities and prioritized them in small working groups. While all of the connectors were said to be important, the following priority connectors were identified:

- Improve Castle Frank / Bayview / D.V.P. off-ramps to get safely from Bloor to Bayview.



- The “Redway / Gateway Greenbelt” plan to connect Flemingdon and Thorncliff Park communities to the Don Trail and ravine system parks.
- Connect Riverdale Park west to the community using River St. / Bayview and add a new trail through Riverdale Park west to connect Cabbage Town / Regent Park to the pedestrian bridge and Riverdale Park east.
- Park Drive Reservation Trail to David Balfour Park needs a safe crossing over Mount Pleasant.
- Improve connections for Flemingdon Park at the Don Mills & Overlea to connect to the Don Trail (separated for walkers and cyclists).
- Beechwood road needs signage to highlight the existing connector from O’Connor to the Don Trail
- Chester Hill / Rail Line connection presents a dramatic, exciting opportunity to utilize existing bridge infrastructure and connect the trail with the Brickworks and both sides of the valley.

The priority connectors were chosen because they:

- *were easy and direct, the road exists and should be available to all road users,*
- *connect with the TTC or could be a good Bixi bike Station,*
- *could serve an under-served population,*
- *could improve an exiting route that is currently very unsafe,*
- *are “cheap and easy”,*
- *have shallow grading into the valley,*
- *could be done in stages, and*
- *could be a great signature piece of connector infrastructure (i.e. the Humber cycling & pedestrian bridge) – a huge opportunity.*

What happens next?

Evaluations collected after the workshop indicate that most of the participants reported a significant increase in their level of understanding regarding connection projects underway and possible new connections. They also expressed an interest in continuing to meet in the fall to discuss a series of actions including an on-site review of the connections, clarifying a group mandate, engaging the media and broader public for support, and celebrating the new improvements on Pottery Road / Bayview Avenue.

Participants found the maps (prepared by the City and Paul) especially helpful in pulling together all the connections for analysis (see maps on following pages) .

Evergreen Brickworks has made a commitment to provide support to future stakeholder / community engagement efforts.



Pedestrian & bicycle bridge connecting east and west Riverdale Parks

2. Acknowledgements



Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
Coalition des communautés en santé de l'Ontario

Paul Young's time for the workshop and report was funded by the [Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition](#) (OHCC). The OHCC is an incorporated registered charity, whose mission is *"to create innovative solutions to meet community challenges and build strong, equitable and sustainable communities through education, engagement and collaboration"*. The OHCC was established in 1992 to support local and regional groups, coalitions and networks that are working on Healthy Community initiatives in Ontario.

In-kind mapping, food, room rental and organizational support were provided by:

City of Toronto Transportation Services
Evergreen Brick Works,
City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation.
Volunteers from 29 Bikes, Cycle 26, SODA Bikes (Ward 30) and the Don Task Force.

Special thanks to the organizing advisory group:

Daniel Egan, **City of Toronto Transportation Services**
Tom Flaherty, **29 Bikes**
Geoff Kettle, **Cycle 26**
Shah Mohamed, Arlene Stein, **Evergreen Brickworks**
Elsie Petch, **SODA Bikes (Ward 30)**
John Wilson, **Task Force to Bring Back the Don**

Image Credits

Table maps produced by Public Space Workshop, base map by City of Toronto
All other base maps provided by City of Toronto Transportation Services
Aerial Photos – Google Maps
Gateway Green Belt Map – 8-80 Cities and Louis Fliss
Graphic Recording: Charlotte Young
Photos: Paul Young except Chester Hill / Rail Bridge Connection by Luke Siragusa



Post-workshop rendezvous at Chester Hill looking out over the valley

3. Introduction and Background

This report summarizes a process that includes a workshop to explore ways to improve connections to the Don Valley Trail and Brickworks site. The outcomes include a renewed dialogue with various stakeholders on improving connections as well as directions stemming from the workshop to describe priority connection projects.

The workshop took place at Estonia House on Broadview Ave. between 6:30 and 9:00 P.M. on June 28, 2011.

The Workshop had four parts:

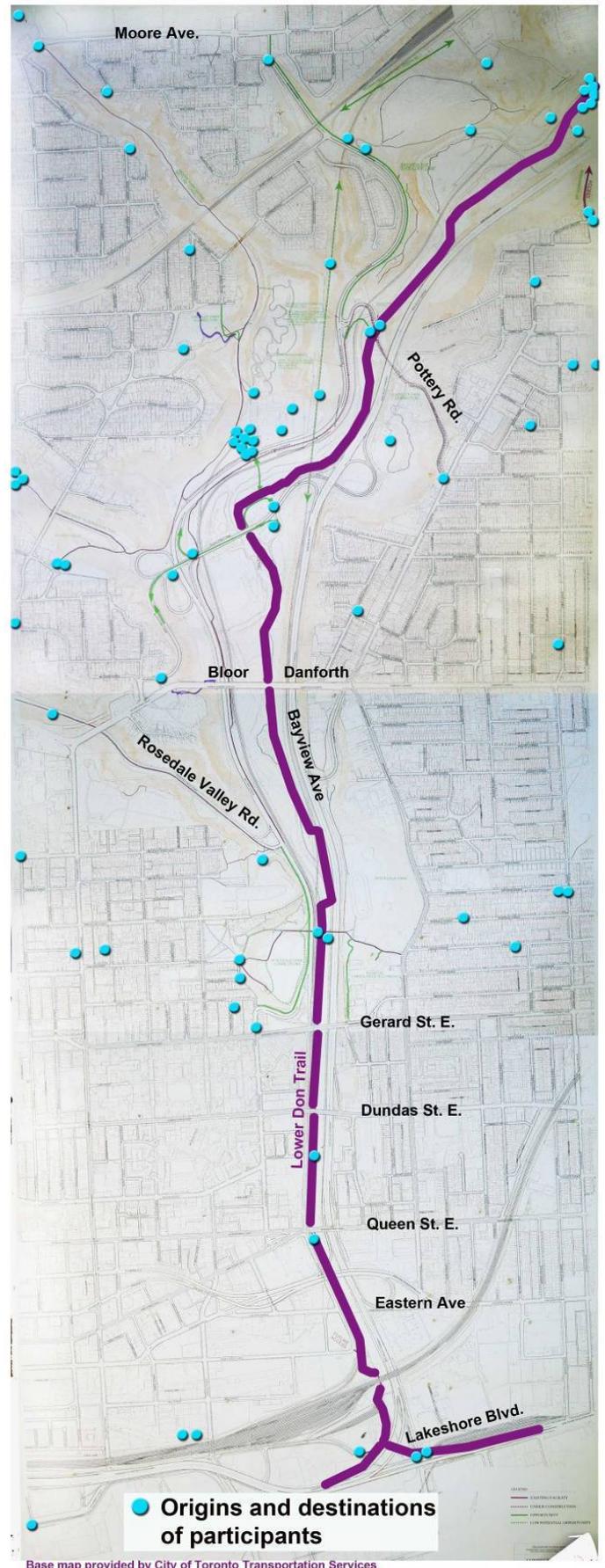
1. Open House
2. Information exchange
3. Setting Priorities in small groups
4. Identifying challenges, opportunities and next steps (including evaluation)

3.1 Open House

From 6:30 until 7:00 p.m. participants prepared for the workshop by reviewing display maps that outlined the various trail connections that are currently being planned or built as well as connections that have been identified by community groups as opportunities for discussion.

Participants were given blue dots to add their origin and destinations on the display map. They were asked to “Add dots where you enter the valley and on the places you like to go.”

From the placement of the dots and subsequent discussion, it appears that participants were dispersed all around the subject area. They attended from both sides of the valley and came from north and south ends. Several represented groups involved with cycling, walking or parks issues.



3.2 Welcome and introductions

Paul Young is a landscape architect, planner/facilitator with [public space workshop](#) and [the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition](#) (OHCC). He reviewed the agenda and purpose (see Executive Summary).

3.3 Considerations for prioritizing projects

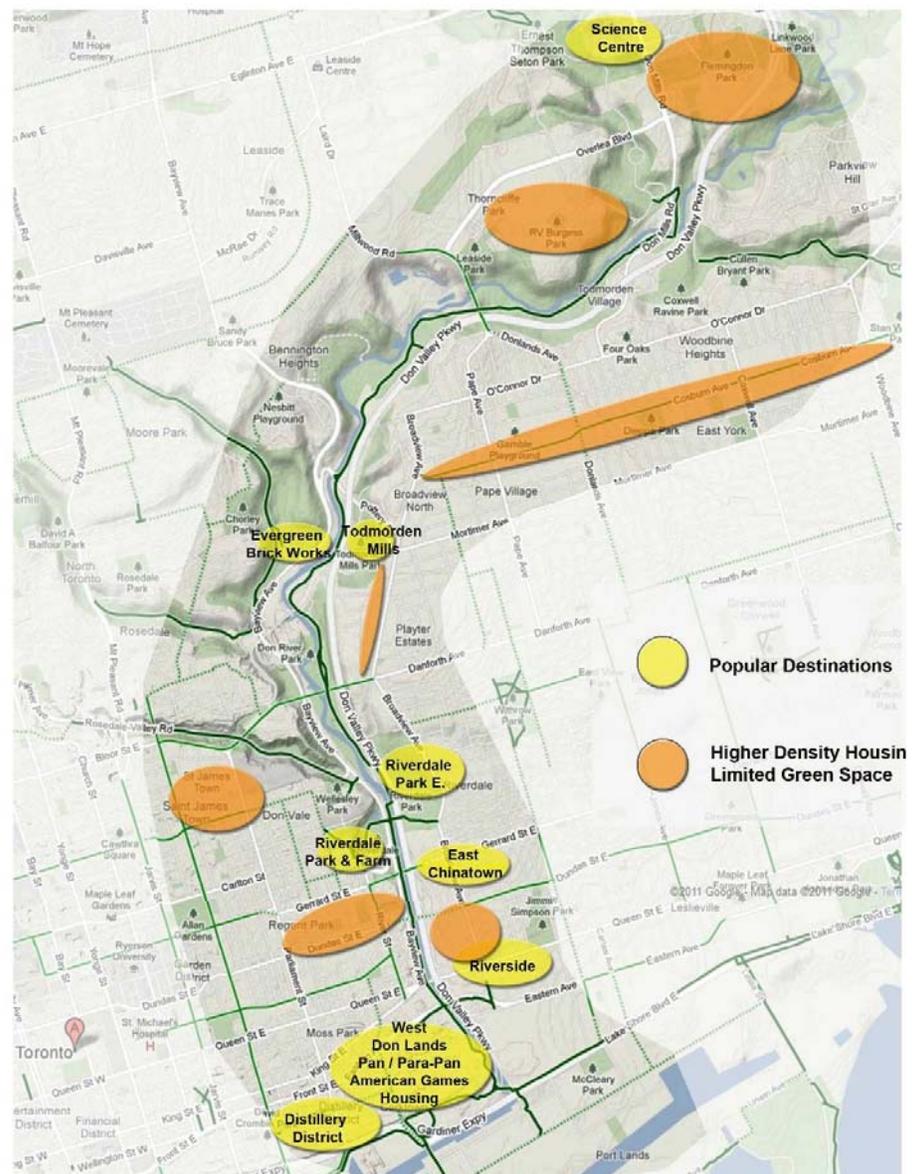
Paul identified the following criteria as possible considerations in determining priority connectors:

- Improving safety for existing users
- Providing access to the valley for potential users – consider need and availability of green space
- Completing or linking existing cycling / walking networks (for both everyday transportation and recreation)
- Feasibility and cost (consider width, grading, rail, road and river crossings)
- Road reconstructions (identify and capitalize on upcoming projects)
- Land ownership
- Economic development / tourism opportunities

Equity and Access

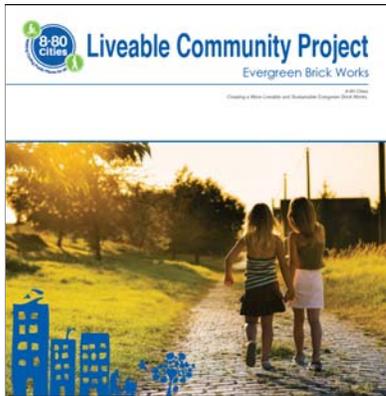
Paul showed a map of popular destinations as well as concentrations of high density neighbourhoods near the valley.

Many of the populations identified do not have easy access to the valley and associated destinations along the trail. Many are also apartment communities with no access to private green space.



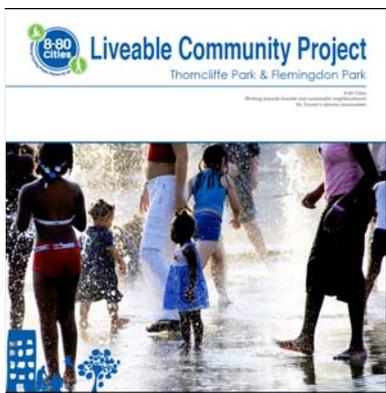
3.4 Recent studies

Paul then reviewed several relevant studies that highlight the need for better connections along the Don Trail.



8-80 Cities report at Thorncliffe & Flemingdon Park

- Establish a Cyclovia (temporarily open streets for walking and cycling) to celebrate walking and cycling (see report for route).
- Busy intersections need safety improvements for pedestrians and cyclists (i.e. Don Mills and Overlea Blvd..)
- The Gateway Greenbelt Initiative (see route in report) can connect community to the valley trails and destinations like the Brickworks.
- <http://www.8-80cities.org/Articles/Toronto%20-%20Thorncliffe%20&%20Flemingdon.pdf>

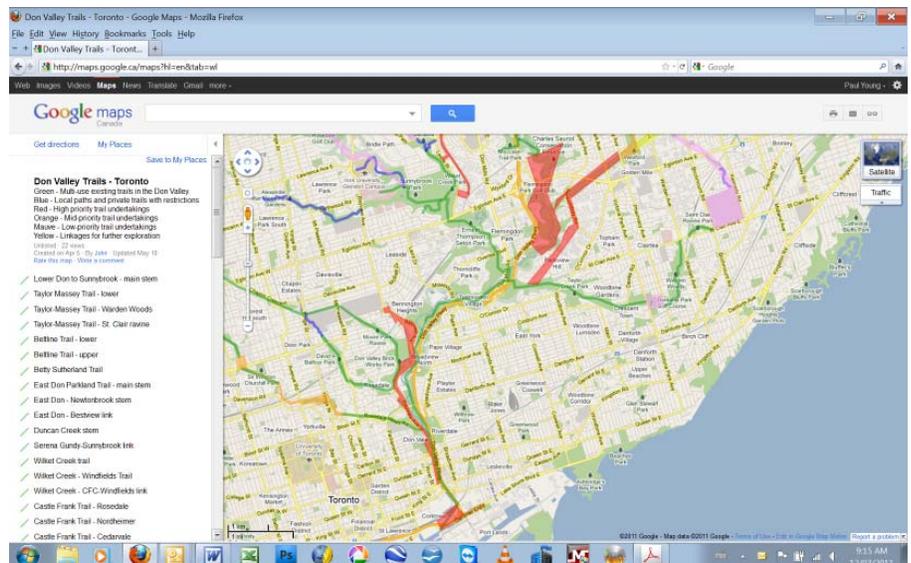


8-80 Cities report at Evergreen Brickworks

- Safety on Bayview Ave.
- Wayfinding / signage
- Lighting, benches
- Maintenance
- Partnerships required with the City
- <http://www.8-80cities.org/Articles/Evergreen%20Brick%20Works.pdf>

Task Force to Bring Back the Don, Don Valley Trail Workshop (draft report and map), Sept. 13, 2010.

- Stakeholders and officials identified missing links and trail improvement priorities for the Don Trail in its entirety (well beyond the limits of the June 2011 workshop).
- Priority projects are identified on a Google Map. See <http://tiny.cc/03e99>



4. Connection Projects

4.1 Projects planned or underway

Paul introduced a series of City staff and community representatives to share information about connection projects already underway (in construction or planning stages) as well as projects that have been discussed by various groups as good potential connectors. Each person had about 5 to 10 minutes to explain the connections.

Participants were asked to listen, identify any missed connection ideas and think about which projects they felt should be prioritized in the table-discussions part of the workshop.

The large map (to the right) illustrates trails, roads and topography (see Legend lower left)

The smaller “table maps” (following page) provide a simplified list of projects and their approximate location. Both show tie-ins to existing cycling / trail routes in and adjacent to the valley.

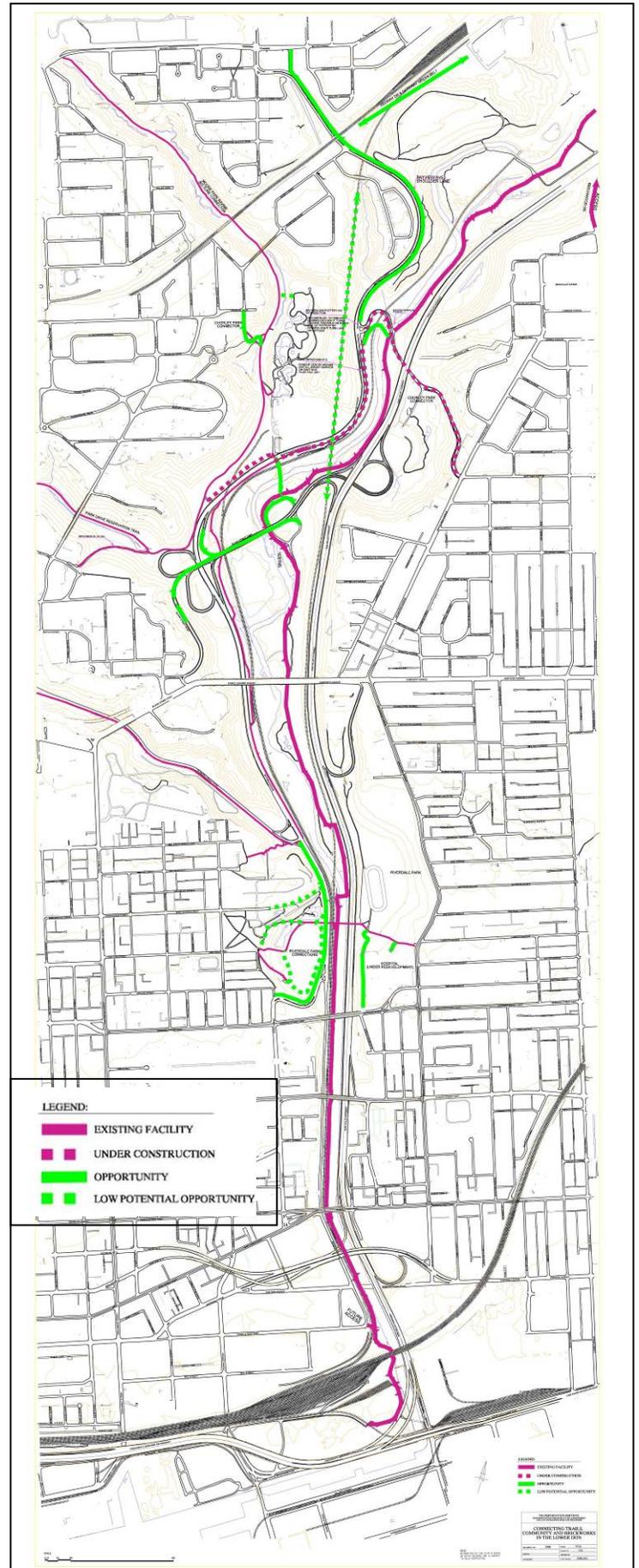


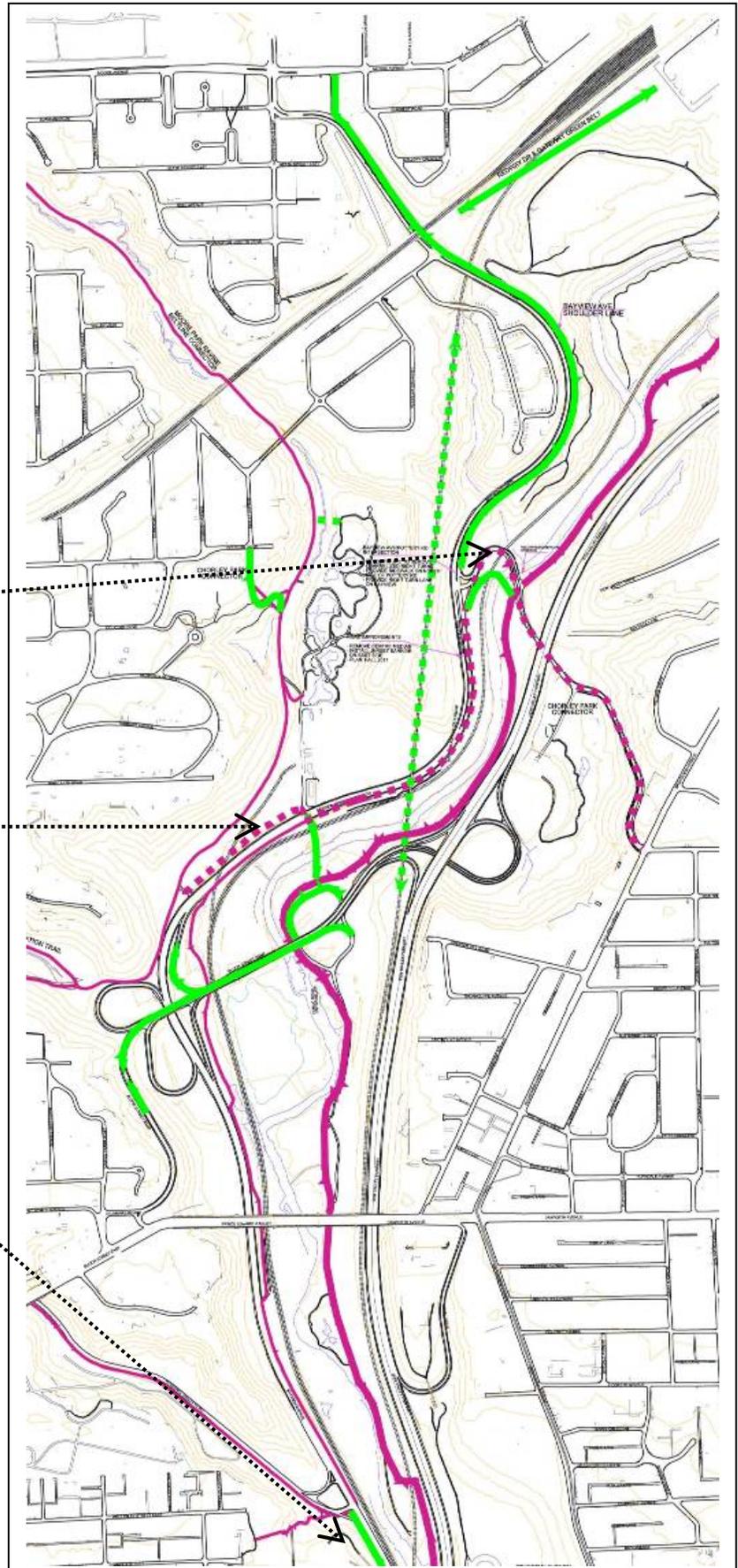


Table Map by public space workshop, base information (Toronto Bike Map) courtesy City of Toronto Transportation Services

Daniel Egan, from Toronto Transportation reviewed the following projects. (See map at right)

NOTE: Item numbers correspond with location number on Table Map (see page 9)

1. Pottery Rd. is under construction and will have an improved trail connection on the south side. A separate pedestrian / bicycle bridge over the Don River is being considered. The trail crossing over Pottery Rd. and the Bayview / Pottery intersection will be improved. A sidewalk will be added on lower north side of Pottery.
2. Bayview will have a separated (jersey barrier combined with existing off-road trail) connection from Moore Ave. south to Rosedale Valley Rd.
3. Riverdale Park east and west sides are under design review to look at trail connections through the west park playing fields. Another review is looking at a trail along River St. down to and along Bayview to Rosedale Valley Rd. (see next page)

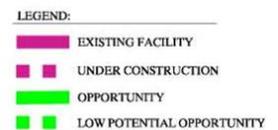
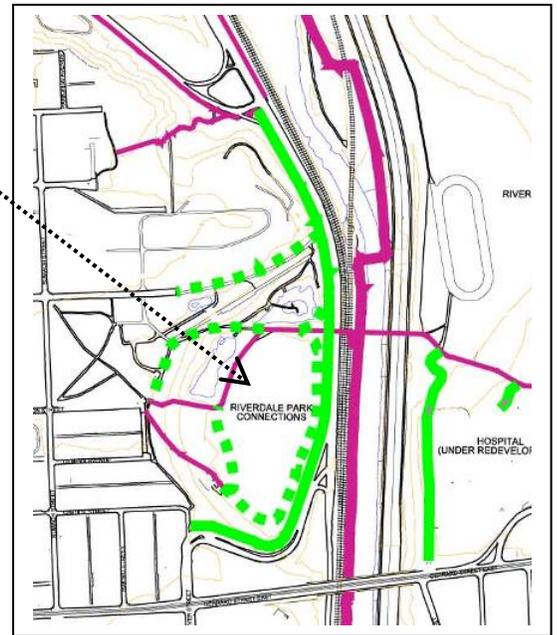


Alex Shevchuk – City of Toronto Parks Forestry and Recreation

Alex reviewed several recent connectors that are underway or completed. They are also doing a study to consider a Riverdale Park connector (west side) in conjunction with a larger park planning exercise. Winchester connections were possible for consideration as well. On the east side there will be a connector from the pedestrian bridge to the south along the west edge of the new Bridgepoint hospital site.

Other connections underway include:

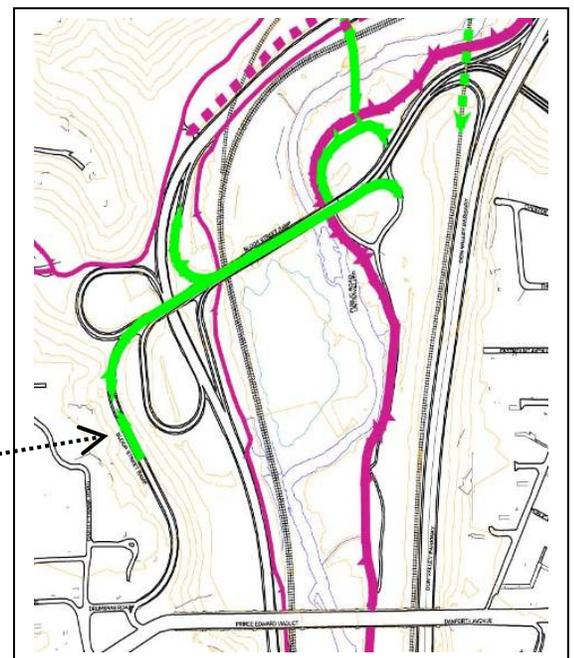
4. and 5. (see Table Map above) improvements to Milkman’s Lane (to resolve erosion problems) will go ahead this year and the beltline connector now extends to the off leash area at Brickworks.
6. The Chorley Park switchback which is currently undergoing a feasibility analysis with an engineering review and consultation targeted for later in the year.
7. Parks Forestry and Recreation is also involved with the Pottery Rd. trail crossing (Map point 7.)



4.2 Other Connection Opportunities

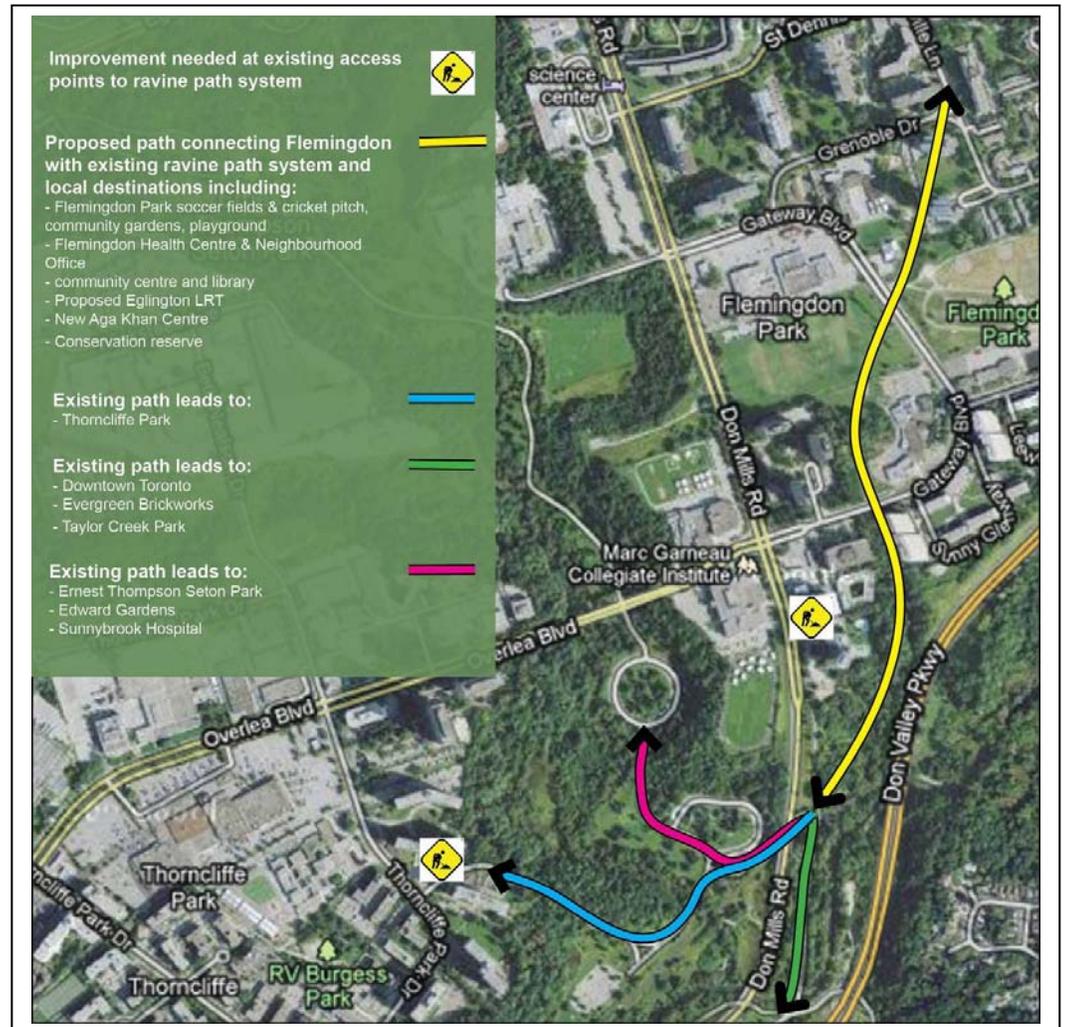
Tom Flaherty from community cycling group 29 Bikes and Ron Kluger Chair of Bike 25 outlined other connection opportunities.

8. Park Drive Reservation Trail requires a safe crossing point at Mount Pleasant.
9. Beechwood Drive (near O’Connor and Broadview) provides a great connection, but needs signage or markers to improve its visibility.
10. The Chester Hill Rail Bridge is an unused rail line which could become a landmark connector between the Don Trail, the Brick Works site and the east side of the valley at Chester Hill lookout. While it is likely that the line will be designated for future rail use there may be opportunities to use the support structure to “hang” a pedestrian/bike bridge over the Don River and adjacent active rail line.
11. Redway drive connector was highlighted as an ideal commuter route (note: it is also identified in Cycling Trail Opportunities in Rail and Hydro Corridors, 1998 report by Victor Ford and Assoc.)
12. Ron explained the opportunity to connect from Castle Frank subway Station to Bayview Ave. via the “off ramps”. He explained the history of the ramps and the fantastic opportunity they present as a fast connector. The road could be redesigned to include pedestrians and cyclists so that the community can access the ravines on foot and bicycle and not just by private cars. He cited “the Pitfield proposal” and a google map outlining details <http://tinyurl.com/6kzjvhq>



Louis Fliss – Flemington Community Health Centre

13. The Gateway Green Belt Initiative was outlined by Louis who provided an overview of the need for a network connection to two very dense communities with limited access to the Don Trail - Flemington Park and Thorncliffe Park (image courtesy of 8-80 Cities). Councillor John Parker has recently committed to looking at the Redway connector (see 11 above).



John Wilson - Task Force to Bring Back the Don

John reviewed the results of a strategic planning workshop held about a year ago with Parks and Recreation and the Conservation Authority to raise the image of the larger Don Trail. The vision is to connect from the lake up to Steeles Ave. and ultimately to the Oak Ridges Moraine. Within the workshop study area, John cited the need for stairs to the trail from Dundas St. E. (see map # 16). There is a Google Map See <http://tiny.cc/03e99> with notes outlining all the potential projects: Task Force to Bring Back the Don, Don Valley Trail Workshop (draft report and map), September 13, 2010 available through Toronto Parks or John.

5. Determining Priority Connections

After the information exchange in the first hour, participants worked into five small groups. “Connection Opportunities” maps were on each table. Paul guided participants with a series of questions.

Question 1. *“You have heard a number of connection opportunities – are there any ideas that are missing?”*

Participants identified additional connectors (now included on the map on page 9). These were:

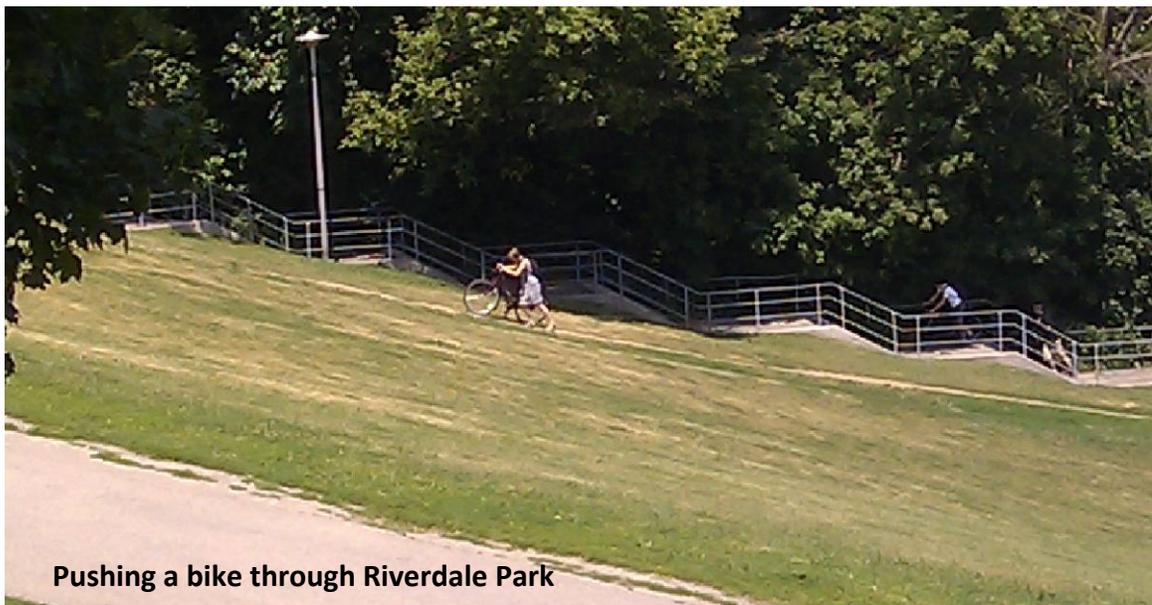
14. Eastern Avenue Ramps connecting bike lanes into downtown network and to the Don Trail.
15. River St. down to Bayview Ave. along south side of Riverdale Park west
16. Add stairs from Dundas St. East down to the Don Trail to provide access to commuters and tie in with the City’s Bike Plan.

Participants were then asked to take two sticky notes and two dots.

Question 2. *“On the maps, add 2 green dots on the top connection opportunities. On the sticky notes, write down two reasons why the connection is important (i.e. network connection, access to green space, need - disconnected community, fast and cheap, strategic, etc.) and place on the map.”*

Question 3. *“As a group, look for overlapping ideas and discuss the top 2 connection opportunities”.*

Participants then shared their group’s top 2 connection opportunities with the whole group and the reasons why they chose them.



Pushing a bike through Riverdale Park

5.1 Identified Priority Projects

Note: All the Table Maps except group # 1 are attached in Appendix 1. with the sticky notes transcribed.

The following priority connectors emerged:

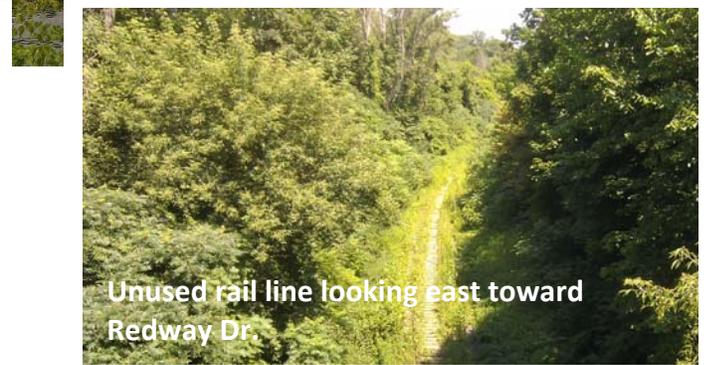
Group 1

- All of the connectors are important
- Castle Frank off-ramps to get safely from Bloor down to Bayview
- *Why? It is easy and direct, the road is there and should be available to all road users and it connects with the TTC.*



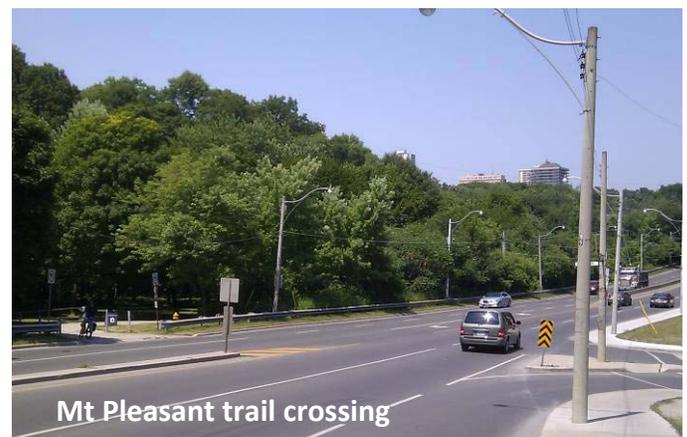
Group 2.

- Redway / Gateway Greenbelt idea (map # 13 and 11)
- *Why? Because they serve an under-served population*
- Riverdale Park – for the same reasons



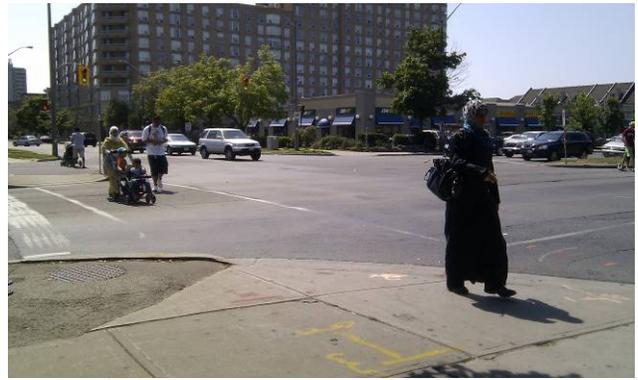
Group 3

- Need a safe crossing at Mount Pleasant
- *Why? Exiting route that is currently very unsafe and difficult to cross.*



Group 4

- Flemington Park at the Don Mills & Overlea access point. Note: this is already slated to be built but needs to extend up to the road (separated for walkers and cyclists)
- Beechwood road needs better signage to highlight the existing connector
- Castle Frank connector to Bayview
- *Why? These are connectors that are “cheap and easy”*



Unmarked Beechwood trail access

Group 5

- Chester Hill / Rail Line connection
- *Why? It can be done in stages. It could be a signature piece of infrastructure - could be called “The Don Valley Rail Path”. It is a good connector – a huge opportunity.*
- Castle Frank to Bayview
- *Why? It could be a good Bixi Station and it has shallow grading into the valley*



Photo: Luke Siragusa

6. Barriers, Opportunities and Next Steps

Barriers and Challenges

Paul then asked, “What are some of the challenges or barriers?”

- In general – getting from Brick Works to the subway is difficult, dangerous and time consuming.
- Getting political support could be a challenge
 - For some items
 - This group needs to get community support for the connection ideas
- The C.P.R. / Chester Hill / rail bridge line (map #10) is technically not abandoned, there are apparently longer term plans to use it for a Go Train. However, the structure could be used to support a connection.
- Re: Castle Frank connector, space appears to be tight along side the roadway, there was a crash barrier installed which takes up more room. Cars speed along the road because it looks like a freeway.

Opportunities

The discussion ended with a brief review of current opportunities.

- Signage for Park’s Discovery Walks program is currently being updated – build on that.
- The Pan Am Games – the West Don Lands site will be connected to the trail but could benefit further by connecting to related destinations on the trail (i.e. Brickworks).
- Reconstruction projects underway or planned (to piggy-back on):
 - Gerrard St. E. at River St. will be rebuilt for a water main
 - Bayview Ave and Pottery Road (as outlined in Daniel Egan’s presentation) is under reconstruction
 - Bayview planning study is in early stages and will look at Bayview as a connector.
- Tourism & economic development – the Trail connects to major destinations and is a destination in itself. Evergreen Brickworks has just completed a report which highlights this opportunity.
- The Toronto Cyclists’ Union representatives



Signage on South Dr. trail entry obscured by age and vegetation



Signage on Don Trail obscured by graffiti

should be utilized to tie in all the adjacent wards.

- Look at the example of the Hamilton to [Brantford Rail Trail](#) (note: City of Toronto is doing a rail trail at the moment).
- Utilize the existing Evergreen Brick Works Trail Studies (see section 3.4 above).
- Utilize Victor Ford Trail Opportunities report (# 36 and 15)
- A good model is the West Toronto Rail Path, a focussed effort with community engagement.
- There is a provincial election coming up. Candidates could be made aware of the connections and asked to support them.

General Comments

- Quoting planner/architect Daniel Burnham – “Make no little plans”.
- Major challenge to get through Riverdale Park (on a bicycle). Many in agreement, Parks Dept. is leading a design / park improvement exercise to look at pedestrian bridge connection through west park and at Bayview Ave. & River St. edges to improve access.
- How about “the Don Trail Blazers?” as a name.
- Participants would like the maps e-mailed.

Next Steps

- Need to create a group to consolidate the message and engage the media. Evergreen can provide some staff support.
- Need to meet again well before the election – to organize a ride to review connectors.
- Get more community involved - need more residents getting involved and speaking up
- Sponsor an all-candidates meeting for the fall provincial election
- Ask Metrolinx to partner with the City

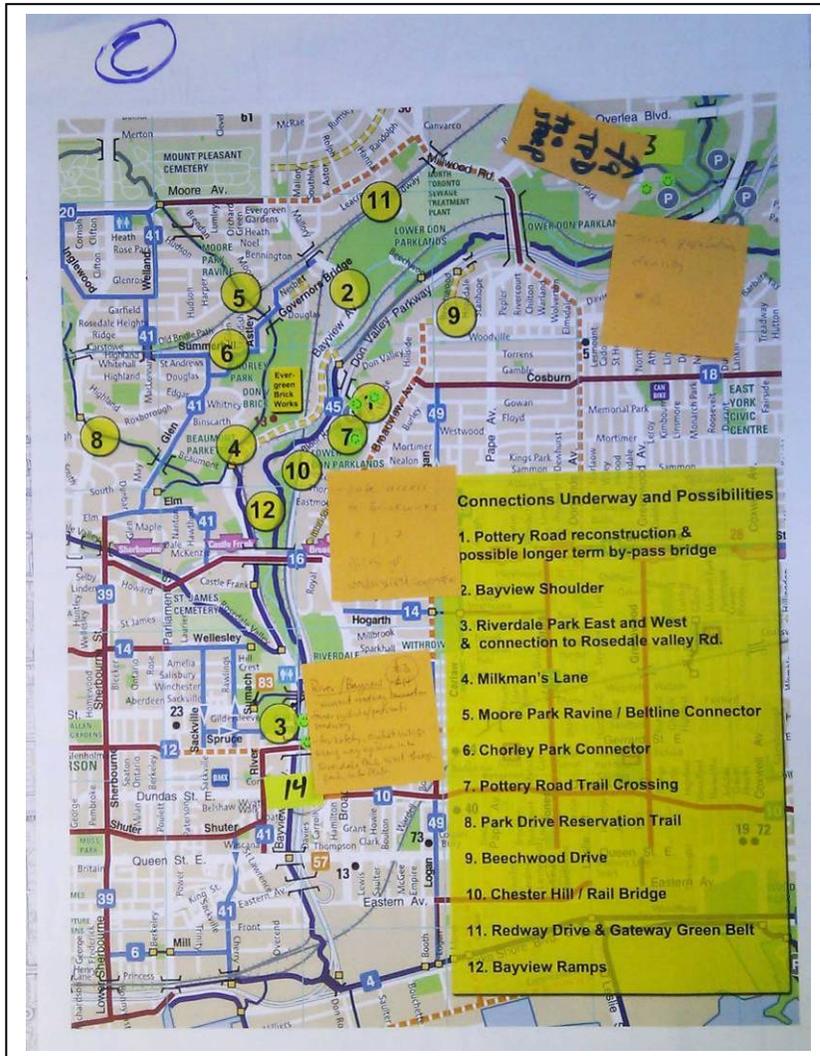


Images: Charlotte Young



Appendix 1. Breakout Group “Connection Priority” Maps with notes

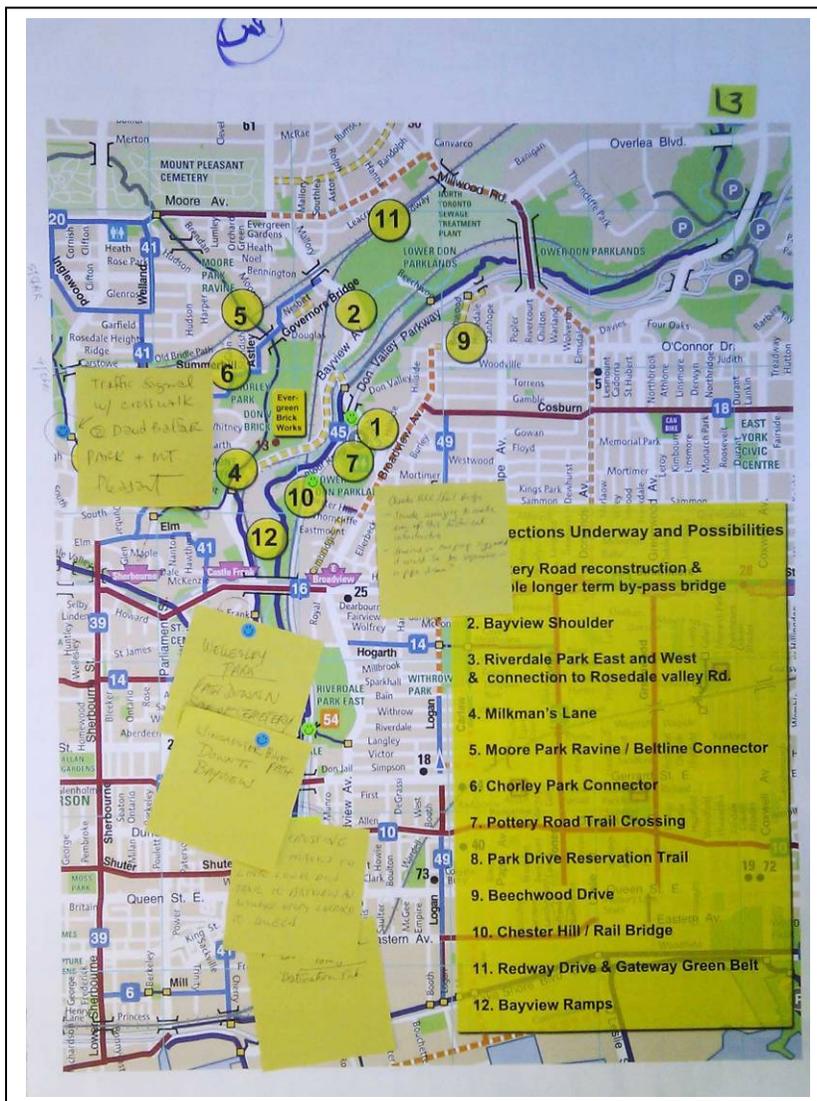
Group # 2. (note: group 1 map was unavailable but priorities were captured)



Sticky notes on map (from top to bottom of map)

- 79 Thornciff Park Drive too steep
- Serve population density (#13)
- Safe access to brickworks (# 1 and 7) Access for underserved communities
- River / Bayview (#3 and 14) current roadway connection forces cyclists / pedestrians onto roadway. For safety cyclists will go wrong way up River into Riverdale park west through park and onto flats.

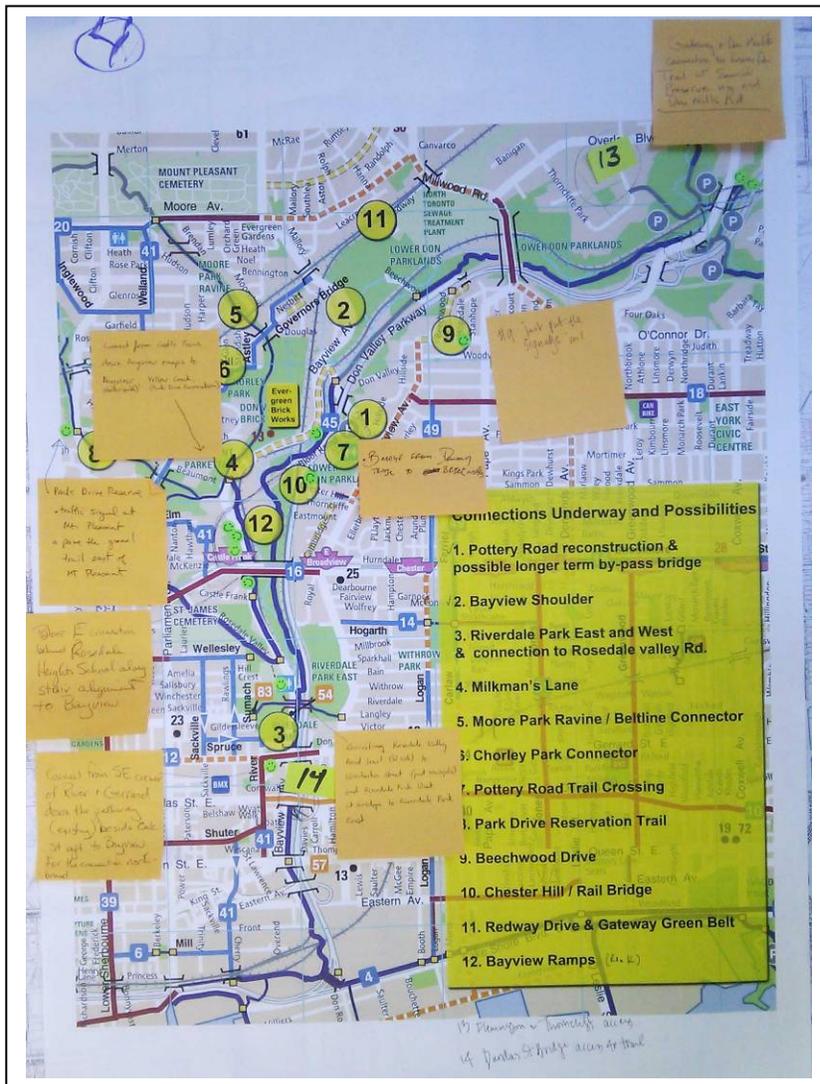
Group # 3



Sticky notes on map (from top to bottom of map)

- Traffic signal with crosswalk at David Balfour Park & Mt. Pleasant
- Chester Hill Rail Bridge sounds amazing to make use of this historical infrastructure. Someone in our group suggested it would be too expensive – a pipe dream.
- Wellesley Park – path down side of cemetery
- Winchester – bike down to Bayview path
- Level crossing across tracks to link lower don trail to Bayview Ave. anywhere from Gerrard to Queen.
- Eastern Ave. bridge – destination Pub.

Group # 4



Sticky notes on map (from top to bottom of map)

- Gateway and Don Mills connection to lower Don Trail at Sauriol Preserve via old Don Mills Rd.
- #9 just put the signage in!
- #12 Connect from Castle Frank down Bayview ramps to Bayview (north and South), Yellow Creek (Park Drive Reservation)
- Bridge from Don Valley Trail to Brickworks
- Park Drive Reserve (at #8)
- Traffic signal at Mt. Pleasant
- Pave the gravel trail east of Mt. Pleasant
- Bloor E. connection behind Rosedale Heights School along stair alignment to Bayview
- Connecting Rosedale Valley Rd. Trail (W side) to Winchester St. (past Necropolis) and Riverdale Park West at bridge to Riverdale Park east.
- Connect from South east corner of River and Gerrard down the pathway (existing) beside Oak St. Apt. to Bayview for the connection northbound

Group # 5

Sticky notes on map (from top to bottom of map)

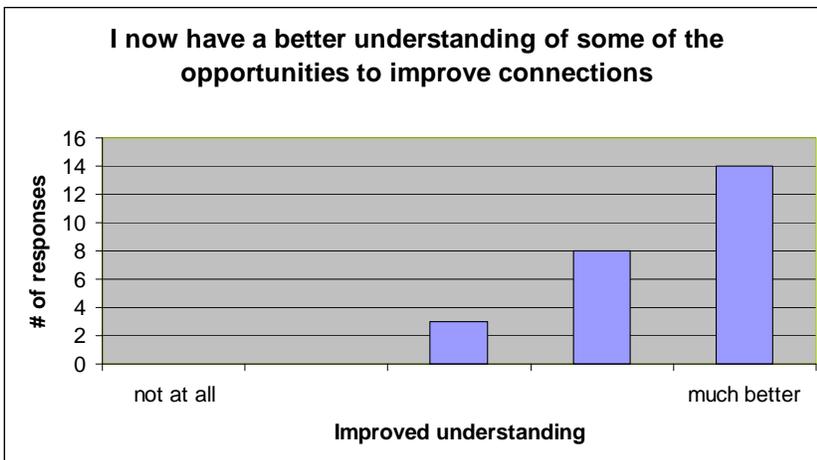
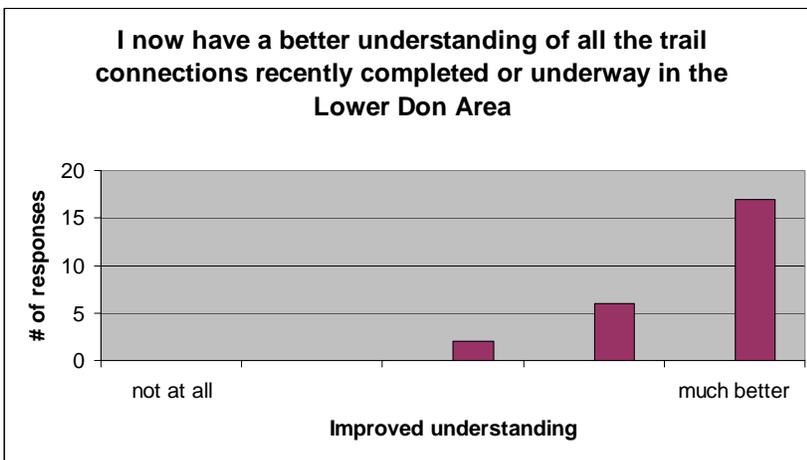


- Moore Park Beltline – currently in very poor condition at the top of the trail
- Beltline and Cedarvale Park form a perfect oval cycling route in the city
- #10 Chester Hill Rail Bridge opportunity for signature piece of infrastructure – rail trail would connect downtown, waterfront, Brickworks, Leaside, Rosedale, Flemingdon, Thorncliffe, . . .
- #10 CN trestle – connectivity can be executed in stages, onto Redway & Brickworks; DVP; MUP and eventually (pie in the sky) Chester Hill
- #4 Bayview Bloor ramp: direct hookup to Bloor and Castle Frank subway, possible synergy with Bixi station @ Castle Frank – only existing infrastructure that affords access to Bayview; Brickworks and Don Valley Trail – The most gentle grade into the valley – extensive reworking at Castle Frank required
- #3 Access through Riverdale Park west (dogs, baseball, farm)
- #9 Beechwood Ave. - all it needs is signs (low cost high impact) - family friendly access

Appendix 2. Graphic Record by Charlotte Young



Appendix 3. Participant Evaluation Summary (25 returned evaluation forms)



Next Steps / follow up ideas:

- Sat. group ride to review options with community (repeated 3 times)
- Meet again before prov. election
- Need speaker on municipal process
- Need implementation strategy (repeated x 2)
- Need more stakeholders & community (x3)
- More details needed to evaluate options for connectors (x3)
- Need more time for discussion (x 5)
- Need more frequent meetings
- Maps, photos and visuals were / are very helpful (x 6)
- Improve slide projector set-up for next meeting
- Use Facebook and web to spread the word
- Liked the update on what is happening (from staff & community)
- Need an action focus
- Need more councillors and decision makers in the conversation
- Need to clarify the evaluation criteria
- First time we have all gotten together to discuss Lower Don