Engaged or Disinterested? Youth Political and Civic Participation in Canadian Transportation Planning

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In democratic societies, we have been conditioned to be passive citizens in our formal political activities; the act of voting is our main method of engagement. While we can also participate in formal planning processes, such as public advisories, meetings, and workshops, many people choose to work outside of these formal political processes. They become more active, insurgent citizens engaging in protests, petitions, and boycotts. These types of political and civic activities have a tremendous appeal for young people, who have different political priorities from adults and choose to participate in politics in different ways. This paper examines one area of youth involvement in political and civic activities, youth participation in Canadian transportation planning.

Introduction

Citizenship has recently become a topic of some interest to planners, particularly those interested in public participation and democracy (Amin and Thrift 2002; Friedmann 2002; Wolin 2004; Mouffe 2000). While there has been considerable interest in declining voting rates, particularly in the youth and young adults demographic (ages 18 to 30), some suggest that voting need not be not the sole measure of citizenship. A more inclusive definition of citizenship includes engagement in a variety of political and civic activities, both formal and insurgent. Using this definition, limited youth involvement in formal political processes need not be explained away by disinterest or lack of knowledge. Rather, it becomes clear that young people choose to participate in different ways and are drawn more to action than deliberation. They also have different political priorities from adults. Planners who are aware of these differences have a better chance of engaging youth in public participation around policy issues.

This paper examines Canadian youth participation in transportation planning as one area of youth involvement in political and civic activities. First, I give an overview of youth participation in Canada. I discuss examples of formal political, informal political and civic participation in the area of transportation planning. I conclude with recommendations on how planners can support youth in their efforts.

Theories of Participation, Democracy, and Citizenship

Political and civic participation have been on the decline in democratic countries such as Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom for some time (Pammett and Leduc 2003; O'Neill 2007). Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) famously chronicled declines in voting, membership in civic groups, and informal social activities in postwar America. These changes raise questions about what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society today. Do people still value the right to be involved in democratic processes? How do we measure political and civic participation?

Wolin (2004) criticizes a narrow definition of democracy: procedural guarantees such as the rights to speak, vote, have free elections, have accountable officials and have regularized judicial and administrative processes. He writes that in this conception of democracy, "the citizen is shrunk to the voter." Turner (1992) also criticizes this procedural model of citizenship on the grounds that it has never been very inclusive; at different points in history, women, the poor, and those who did not own land were not allowed to vote. He argues that formal measures such as voting are not true measures of citizenship; they create passive citizens, defined by the sole fact that they vote once every few years.

Some scholars (Friedmann 2002; Amin and Thrift 2002) advocate a more active citizenship, where involvement in civic groups and community forums can play a role in democratic decision making by putting pressure on the state and other institutions through informed discussion, debating alternatives, and developing the capacity to act and decide collectively. Amin and Thrift call this "a democracy from below." Mouffe (2000) calls for an even more radical approach, an "agonistic democracy" where there is constant struggle and dialogue between various groups in a pluralistic society without resolution.

O'Neill (2007) distinguishes between political participation (formal involvement in political parties, elections and interest groups) and civic participation (involvement in community activities, normally those designed to bring about some social good, as well as social organizations). Similarly, Friedmann (2002) conceptualizes citizenship as statist, cosmopolitan, and insurgent. Whereas statist citizenship involves political participation, insurgent citizenship entails civic participation to bring about social change. A statist citizen might choose to vote or belong to a political party, while an insurgent citizen might organize a protest or boycott products. Statist and insurgent citizens have the most impact at the local or regional scale, but can also affect national policy. The third category, cosmopolitan citizenship, can be seen in membership or involvement in national or international bodies or treaties with an overarching framework. Examples include the United Nations, the North American Free Trade Agreement, or at a smaller scale, the Canadian Youth Round Table on the Environment. Cosmopolitan citizens are usually involved in issues at a level beyond the state or nation, influencing international policy. While statist and cosmopolitan citizens work within political systems and decision-making bodies, insurgent citizens approach issues from the outside. A broader definition of citizenship, which includes informal political and civic participation, allows us to include a variety of activities. Signing petitions, engaging in consumer

boycotts and participating in political protests and demonstrations become as important as voting, since all impact our local communities and regions. This is helpful when studying a specific demographic group that does not participate at very high rates in formal political activities such as voting, but still has an impact on political issues (Stoneman 2002).

Different But Equal?

The youngest voter group in Canada, which the Canadian Election Survey categorizes as ages 18-30, is the least likely to vote in federal elections, to have been a member of a political party or to have been members of a political interest group (Turcotte 2007). The 2006 International Social Science Survey Programme (n=1068) found that young voters (aged 18-30) are the most likely demographic to think that they have no influence on what the government is doing, and believe the government doesn't care about what they think (ibid., 9). When asked to indicate their agreement/disagreement with the statement, "It is every citizen's duty to vote in federal elections," only 56 percent of young voters strongly agreed, compared to 82 percent of voters over 40. When asked whether they agreed/disagreed with the statement, "Someone who doesn't vote doesn't have the right to criticize the government," 29 percent of young voters agreed compared to 32 percent of those over 40 (ibid., 14). Clearly young Canadians show lower levels of interest and obligation to formal political participation than older people.

Many scholars have expressed concerned over the low levels of political participation among Canadian youth (Pammett and LeDuc 2004; Nevitte

1996; Sniderman et al. 1996). A common perception among researchers is that young people simply do not have the knowledge to participate in political activities because of their age and limited life experience. O'Neill (2007) writes that young people have had less exposure to politics in the media, conversation, and their daily lives. The political system is difficult for young Canadians to understand, in part because they receive little information on politics or civic engagement at school or in conversations at home. Young Canadians do not believe that they have the capacity to understand and influence decision making. The 2004 Canadian Election Study (n= 2800) showed that almost two-thirds of those aged 18-25 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Sometimes politics seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on." (ibid., 17) In a 2000 study on strengthening Canadian democracy (n=1200), less than one in ten young people were able to correctly answer three questions about political actors, compared to one third of those over age 46 (ibid., 13). They feel a personal responsibility to be informed about issues in order to be active, but they are not getting any support from the education system or other organizations (CPRN 2007). In 2000, the province of Ontario introduced a mandatory half-credit in Civics for Grade 10 students, but currently there are no comparable programs in other provinces. Young people read newspapers and check Internet news far less frequently than other age groups, decreasing their access to information on political parties and actors (O'Neill 2007). Yet despite their lack of knowledge about politics, young people are clearly interested in political issues.

Turcotte suggests that young Canadians have different expectations of government and priorities on the major political issues. Using data from the 2006 International Social Survey Programme (n=1068), he reveals that young Canadians aged 18-30 are more concerned about unemployment and taxes than older people (ibid., 10). They are much less likely to favor government regulation of business and more likely to support financing projects to create new jobs. Young people prioritized government spending on health care over arts and culture, law enforcement, and defense (ibid., 11). The 2003 General Social Survey (n=25,000) found that 18-29 year olds ranked health care, a hot topic around Canadian elections, as the issue that was most important to them (Milan 2005). They attach more importance to choosing environmentally friendly products and helping the less privileged in the world than older Canadians. When asked how much they respect institutions, young Canadians had less respect for the media, the federal government, the civil service, unions, the armed forces, organized religion, the Supreme Court, and the police than people over 40; they had more respect for public schools, the provincial government and big business (Turcotte 2007). As Turcotte (ibid., 16) notes, "Such differences lead young Canadians to interact differently with the political system that they consider largely irrelevant or, at least, not worth the trouble of voting."

Young people are very astute about the power dynamics of the political system. The Canadian Policy Research Network conducted a workshop on civic and political participation with young people aged 18-25 (n=144). It revealed that young people feel ignored by politicians and political parties because they don't carry the demographic weight of the baby boomers (CPRN 2007); 15-29 year olds represent 20 percent of Canada's population compared to the boomers' 32 percent (Census 2006). Young people feel that the media treats important public issues superficially and negatively, "not looking at the issues addressed in protests and rallies but reporting on the problems caused by a few protesters," for example in protests against highway expansion or globalization. They say party politics would be more interesting to them "if they focused more on policies and less on the electoral machine." (ibid., 4) As Turcotte (2007, 12) writes,

> As a result of their life experience based on access and control, young voters hold different expectations of government and are more likely to favour democratic reforms that increase citizen participation and control. Accordingly, people in general and young voters in particular are less likely to vote because political institutions have failed to react to the differing expectations of the electorate.

Young people also feel that participation should bring results, which may be why they are drawn to action-oriented political participation such as protests and boycotts, as well as project-oriented volunteer activities (O'Neill 2007). O'Neill suggests that rather than "dropping out" of politics, young people are switching to new and different forms of participation, in part because traditional forms of participation provide little in the way of direct impact on political outcomes. Other scholars have noted that the generation born after 1970 is less involved in formal political participation, choosing civic participation instead (Stoneman 2002; Youniss et al. 2002). O'Neill (2007: 11) cites youth involvement in non-traditional
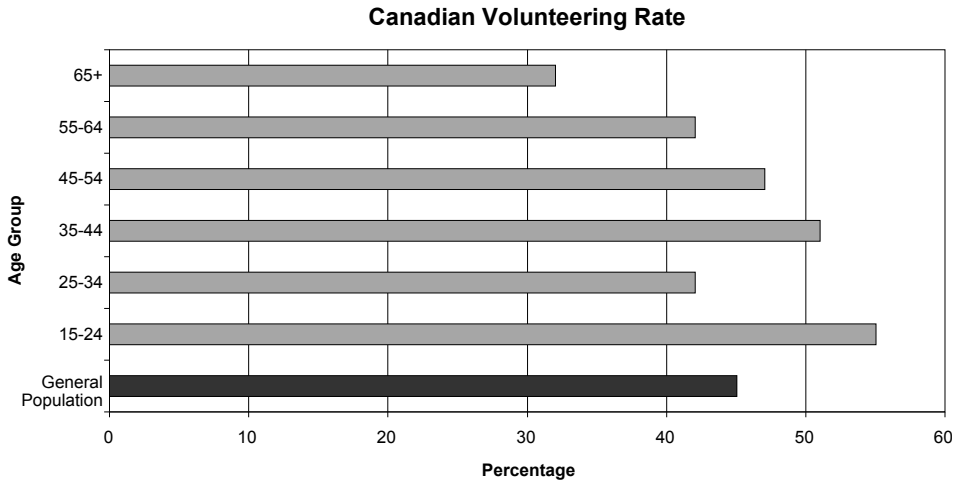
Canadian Volunteering Rate

Figure 1. Canadian volunteering rates are highest in the 15-24 age group.
Data Source: Statistics Canada 2006.

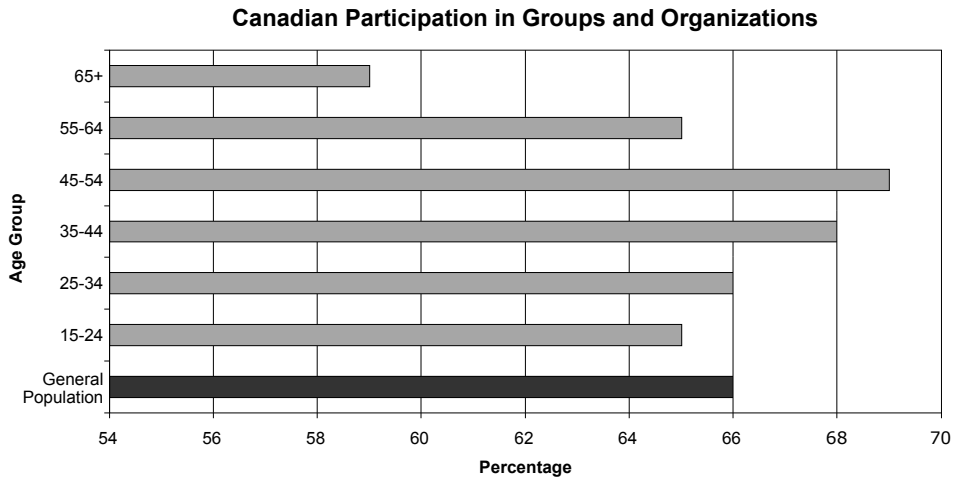## Canadian Participation in Groups and Organizations

Figure 2. Young people's participation in groups and organizations is comparable to the rate in the general population as well as other age groups. Data Source: Statistics Canada 2006.

Delayed transitions of young adults in Canada		
	1971 (%)	2001 (%)
Living in private households		
18-24	48	41
25-29	29	28
Highest level of education		
Trades or college certificate or diploma	16	28
University degree, certificate or diploma	9	20
Ever married or currently common-law union	61	45
Has children in same household	44	29
Note: The 2001 Census recorded 6.7 million Canadians between the ages of 18 and 34		

Figure 3. Young people in 1971 moved out on their own earlier, married, or lived in common-law unions earlier, and had children earlier than young people in 2001. The education data shows an increasing professionalization of the workforce, meaning that young people must spend longer in school. Data Source: Statistics Canada Censuses of Population, 2001.

While many adults believe that young people are capable of having political discussions, becoming involved in social causes, and working, many do not. Leading psychologists suggest that today's adults greatly underestimate young people, their skills and abilities, which has led to an infantilization of youth (Graham 2004, Epstein 2007). Today's youth and young adults have greater restrictions on their activities, such as starting a business or socializing in public places, than people of the same age a generation ago. Young people are taking longer to achieve the traditional markers of adulthood: a Statistics Canada study (2007) comparing census data from 1971 to 2001 revealed that the transition to adulthood took much longer for young people in 2001 (see Figure 3). This pattern of "delayed maturity" in Canadian youth due to changing economic, housing, and social conditions, has been linked to a delaying of civic involvement until later in life (O'Neill 2007).

Young people have often been at the forefront of political protest and organizing to achieve social change: civil rights protests, Vietnam War protests, anti-globalization protests, Chinese pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, the South African youth protest against apartheid (Youniss et al. 2002). Friedmann (1998) writes that civil society's major role has taken the form of protest and resistance to state and capital infrastructure such as highways

Clearly, young people are interested in political issues and social change, but they are not participating in the same ways as older people. Formal statist citizenship activities such as voting do not appeal to them, but insurgent participation allows them to advocate for change in a specific area. Participating in volunteer activities and insurgent political actions

political activities such as signing petitions, engaging in consumer boycotts and participating in political protests and demonstrations. While participation in formal political activities increases with age, participation in these insurgent political activities decreases with age. For example, 27 percent of those aged 15-21 in Canada signed a petition in the last year, compared to only 16 percent of those aged 65 and over (ibid.). Young people's participation in volunteering activities is higher than all other age groups (see Figure 1). In this sense, young people appear to be much more active citizens than older adults. Young people also show a high level of participation in groups and organizations, with 65 percent participating compared to 66 percent of the general population (see Figure 2).

exposes young people to the larger political and federal political processes. When I examined youth participation in the planning of public transit and the shaping of transportation policy, I found that young people are quickly becoming insurgent citizens. Transportation is an important issue for youth, particularly in our largest cities. Transportation, social and urban planners could build on existing youth civic and insurgent political participation in this area.

The Issue: Unique Transportation Needs

Young people are an important demographic in the provision of public transit in Canada. In our largest cities, car ownership is often postponed until the mid to late twenties for several reasons: affordability, environmental concerns, and the availability of efficient public transit services. The graduated licensing procedure, which has existed in British Columbia and Ontario for over a decade, means that young people are not allowed to drive on their own until they are almost nineteen. This means that there is often a significant amount of time, from the mid-teens until the late twenties, when young people rely on transit, cycling, walking, and getting rides from friends and family. Unlike adults, they are heavy users of the sustainable transportation modes, whether by choice or by default.

Young people account for one-third of transit ridership nationwide (CUTA 2004). These numbers are even higher in individual cites; in Red Deer, Alberta, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, and Cornwall, Ontario, youth make up over 65 percent of transit ridership. In Vancouver, 16-34 year olds represented 55 percent of all bus users, 52 percent of Skytrain users, and 45 percent of cyclists. TransLink (2003) identified the 16-34 year old group as the most likely to increase their transit use within the next year.

However, public transit service may not always fit the needs of young people, who tend to use transit for social purposes in the evening and at night. Infrequent service in most Canadian cities after 9pm is fairly standard, with Vancouver operating a few night buses and Toronto only a few 24-hour buses and streetcars. Transit services primarily reflect the needs of middle class commuters, with frequent peak hour service from 6-9am and 3-7pm. Young people who live in the suburbs depend upon relatively infrequent transit service to shops, services, and the mixed-use streets typically found in more central parts of the city.

Although young people make up a major demographic in the provision of public transit services, their unique travel needs are often not being researched and, consequently, not being met. This is in part a holdover from 1970s transportation planning that focused on the needs of the commuter (typically aged 30-65). There is room for improvement in terms of transit frequency, infrastructure and programs, and most of all funding from provincial and federal governments; consequently, there is considerable political and civic involvement in public transit provision.

The Action: Formal Political Participation in Transportation Planning

Although young people do not typically show high rates of participation in formal political processes, a

brief overview of public participation in transportation planning is useful to illustrate the difficulties citizens face in becoming formally involved in transportation planning. This overview also highlights the role youth advisory committees play in the context of top-down political processes.

Transportation planning is a complicated process, giving rise to a variety of ways to address political and civic participation. Many public and private actors are typically involved in the provision of public transit. While transit is generally the responsibility of municipalities, other actors are often involved: private rail or bus companies, regional planning authorities, and transit boards with both public and private appointees. Voting in provincial elections influences transportation decisions and funding, since money ultimately comes from the provincial government, but in an indirect fashion; the Minister of Transportation is appointed by the provincial Premier.

Transportation decision making is political in nature because there is constant conflict between those who want more funding for roads and highways, and those who want funding for transit, walking, and cycling infrastructure. Politicians and transit authorities are frequently in conflict over this issue. Municipalities, and neighborhoods within them, often compete for new transportation infrastructure, or protest against it. The appointment of the Minister of Transportation and funding decisions for municipalities have become increasingly politicized in the past decade as this conflict combines with air quality, climate change, and peak oil concerns.

In the Vancouver region, the South Coast British Columbia Transportation Authority (TransLink) is a regional body created by the provincial government. As a provincially created body, TransLink is vulnerable to the whims of the Premier and Minister of Transportation. As of October 2007, board members are private business people appointed by the province; municipal mayors also have a limited voice in the board's decisions. TransLink's mandate to manage road infrastructure, highways, bridges, and public transit makes it particularly political, and there is frequent conflict between members of the board and between the board and the provincial government. There is no place for citizens to get involved in formal decision making.

In contrast, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) is owned and operated by the City of Toronto, although it receives provincial capital funding. Its operational costs are generated by transit fares. The Chair of the TTC is a city councillor appointed by the mayor. This means that the commission functions as a city committee, with regular meetings that are open to the public. There is also considerable public consultation for proposed projects and funding. While the decision making process is still political, and there is constant opposition to major infrastructure projects, the TTC only handles public transit infrastructure and is not responsible for roads and highways. As a permanent Committee, there is less vulnerability for major restructuring or governance reviews.

These are just two examples of the complex transportation planning governance in Canada; other cities and regions have different structures. In most cases, the formal political process for youth to have a voice in transportation infrastructure or funding would require a considerable knowledge of governance, the format of public meetings, and the

details of the issues being discussed. In other words, the exact type of knowledge that young people have admitted they don't have, which prevents them from participating politically.

Youth Advisory Committees

Some municipalities have youth advisory committees, which allow young people to get involved in initiatives around racism, employment and civic pride, among other issues. While they still fall under formal political participation, youth advisory committees provide the opportunity for young people to learn about the larger political processes around transportation planning. In this way, they help fill in the gap between young people's desire to have more say in government, while providing an education on how to go about this.

The City of Windsor, Ontario has a Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee, which along with Transit Windsor, created a Transit Student Ambassador Programme. It was "created out of a desire from Windsor's youth to have a direct link with Transit Windsor to build a relationship that focuses on the needs of this passenger demographic" (City of Windsor website). The suggestion came from one of two Youth Town Hall meeting that Transit Windsor held in 2006, where 200 young people made suggestions for improved services, a youth transit pass, more involvement in transit decision making, and a new section on Transit Windsor's website focusing on youth issues and updates. A Transit Sub-Committee considered these suggestions, and in the fall of 2007, the Student Ambassador Programme was launched at all nine Windsor area high schools. Transit Windsor issued a call for applications in the first two weeks of

school, and students applied on the Transit Windsor website, which now has a special section for youth. The six Student Ambassadors volunteered at the Youth 4 UNESCO event in October 2007, providing information about transit to others, and helping to produce a videoblog on the benefits of public transportation for the Canadian Urban Transit Association. They serve as important liaisons between schools and the transit authority, promoting transit and suggesting service improvements. Transit Windsor also now has one youth representative on its board, although it is a non-voting position.

Similarly, in 2001 the City of Calgary, Alberta created a corporate youth strategy to "become a more youth friendly organization, realign programs, services and funding to receive the greatest benefit, and target high priority youth issues through direct service, partnerships and advocacy." (City of Calgary 2004, 4). The need for the strategy was identified through extensive consultations with community, youth-serving agencies, youth, and city staff. One of the five Youth Advisories created is the Youth Transit Advisory. With 10-15 members aged 15 to 24, the advisory helps young people understand how the city and Calgary Transit work and provides them with links to professionals in the industry. Members act as transit advocates, plan and implement their own ideas, and meet regularly to discuss transit issues. They provide input on Calgary Transit's communications, marketing, and service strategies, and channel feedback from other young people. They organized the Race Around Calgary Event, a city-wide scavenger hunt on transit, to help Calgary Transit understand youth transit needs, and to expose a large number of youth to transit (CUTA 2004). It is difficult to know if this group impacts policymaking, but Calgary

Transit started a universal transit pass program known as U-Pass for students in 2002, a year after adopting its youth strategy.[1]

Saskatchewan has a Provincial Youth Advisory Committee, which aims to engage youth in decision making and teach them about strategic planning and government policy processes. There are 25 members, aged 14-29, who meet with government officials to establish priorities and generate discussion on specific topics. The PYAC was founded in 2002 to replace the Youth Provincial Action Committee on the Economy (1998-2002). Members apply on the province's website, and are appointed to the committee, which brings in people from as many different backgrounds (ethnic, economic, geographic region, urban/rural) as possible. The committee has provided feedback on government policies and strategies related to youth. They also recommended the establishment of the Saskatchewan Youth Project Awards, monetary awards of up to $5,000 to young people aged 14-29 who are leading projects in their communities. These awards offer young people interested in cycling or walking infrastructure in their neighborhoods a funding source: among the 2006 award recipients were three grade nine students who are creating a mountain bike facility in their community.

At the national level, the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) hosts an International Youth Summit on Sustainable Urban Transportation. CUTA funds travel, accommodations and conference fees for 80 youth delegates from across Canada. The event enables Canadian youth to discuss and discover the role of transit, walking and cycling in fostering urban sustainability; learn about international best practices; initiate a mentor-assisted project or activity; and build a network of contacts in urban and transportation planning. Youth who have participated in the event have pursued degrees in transportation and urban planning, found internships in the sustainable transportation industry, organized U-Pass programs and International Car Free Days, and currently sit on municipal youth advisory committees. The summits provide an opportunity for youth to network with others who have similar interests, build leadership skills and create a foundation for careers in sustainable transportation.

Focus groups and community visioning

Many transit authorities conduct extensive public consultation when they create long-term transportation plans, reflecting the trend towards more community participation in planning since the 1970s. These planning exercises involve youth, adults, and seniors in discussions around transit services, station locations and transit safety. While these processes have occurred at the state and regional level in the US, there are only a few Canadian examples at the regional level. In Vancouver, TransLink made a special effort to include youth, likely because of the inception of the U-Pass program in 2003 and major student ridership increases.

In the Vancouver region, TransLink conducted 26 focus groups and two community vision workshops to get input into the South of Fraser Area Transit Plan. The focus groups included youth (age 14-16 and 17-21), adults, seniors, and transit operators. Participants were asked to draw their ideal transit routes on a map of the South of Fraser region, including the municipalities and townships of Delta,

Surrey, Langley, Cloverdale, and White Rock. Youth expressed concerns about evening and night service, transit fares, and harassment by transit officials; adults were more concerned about safety, transit frequency, and express bus services. The vision workshops involved about one hundred key stakeholders, who were asked to create both long-term and short-term maps of a future transit system. TransLink has also established an online public advisory board, which anyone can join, allowing participation in studies and surveys that the transportation authority conducts. They are also conducting a night bus study and investigating the use of integrated fare cards to address the youth issues.

Focus groups and community visioning allow more public participation than older top-down approaches to transportation planning. There is a significant opportunity for young people to be involved, although the transit authority has to take the initiative. They may not include young people in these processes unless they have a particular interest in their views, such as those with U-Pass or other discount pass programs for youth.

It is still too early to evaluate how effective youth advisory groups have been in influencing policy, and whether or not there have been conflicts between youth and the organizations involved. These avenues for formal participation in transportation planning reach some youth, but may not appeal to others, such as those who do not know much about politics, are not comfortable in formal settings, or have recently immigrated to Canada. In addition, these opportunities tend to be poorly advertised, and many young people may not even know they exist; the City of Calgary, the Province of Saskatchewan, and CUTA advertise only on their own websites, and only the City of Windsor recruited for its Transit Ambassador program at high schools. While some young people may have the ability and desire to influence transportation planning in these formal ways, there are many opportunities for young people to act as insurgent citizens.

The Action: Insurgent Political and Civic Participation in Transportation Planning

Civic groups and organizations

Organizations and advocacy groups that share a concern for public transit provision allow young people to get involved in specific actions or events, which seems to appeal to them more than long-term political processes (Stoneman 2002; O'Neill 2007). While these may be classified as civic groups, they do advocate change and often use insurgent political methods such as protests, petitions and boycotts. Young people may gravitate more to groups with the goal of social change, which often act in opposition to government and transit agencies. Advocacy groups also advertise their events in ways that appeal to young people, such as on websites, Facebook, podcasts, and video clips. They combine social events with political activities, such as parties to celebrate policy changes and costume or movie-themed rallies. This is a very successful tactic; Amin and Thrift's (2002) research on the successful Progressive Era civic groups shows that they operated in the same way. The reformers of the era devoted themselves to specific projects of social transformation that combined sociability and political activity, organizing around potluck dinners and coffee clubs. These projects were part of a wider

political project, so there was recognition of local issues with links to wider federal politics (Amin and Thrift 2002). Today's youth and young adults seem to be mobilizing in a similar manner.

Many cities have a Bus Riders Union that works to increase funding for inner city bus service, including Vancouver. In this region, the BRU has over a thousand members; most rely on transit as their main mode of transportation and are ethnic minorities. The BRU may have the most potential to attract working class youth, new immigrants, and women, and others who live or socialize in the inner city neighborhoods. The BRU has been very vocal on issues such as the "transit curfew" (bus services ending too early). They successfully advocated for an extension of night bus services on several routes in 2004 and the purchase of 500 new buses in 2007. This year, they have protested fare hikes and the reduction in democratic accountability of TransLink's proposed governance structure. The BRU has also produced several issue-based reports, such as *Women in Transit* (2005), the result of a participatory action project that trained women in research techniques and encouraged them to explore the unique challenges of transit-dependent women. Young people have several opportunities to get involved, including attending protests, signing petitions, helping to draft BRU advocacy materials, and planning events.

The Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC) is another Vancouver advocacy group with a broad spectrum of environmental concerns, including transportation. SPEC has been particularly active in the past three years, organizing include protests against the expansion of Highway 1, petitioning against the Provincial Gateway project, and holding a public design contest for the Arbutus rail corridor. Most recently they rallied to "Kill Bill 43," which limits public participation in a new governance structure, modeling their campaign on the popular *Kill Bill* movies. SPEC operates Clean Air Radio to help educate, activate and empower the public on issues of air quality and sustainable transportation; broadcasts are available on-line, on FM radio, or as podcasts. With major input from Eric Doherty, a Masters student at the School of Community and Regional Planning at the University of British Columbia, SPEC has also produced reports such as *Cooking the Books, Cooking the Planet* (2007), *Transportation Solutions for the Livable Region* (2006), and *Taken for a Ride* (2007). These reports challenge plans to expand highways and provide cost-benefit analyses showing that better transit infrastructure would be more effective. Young people can help with research, community outreach, and event planning; several of SPEC's staff and board members are under the age of 30, and the group has a strong youth membership. Doherty, who has been involved with SPEC for many years, is a lifelong activist.

In Toronto, Streetcars for Toronto is an advocacy group that formed in 1972 to fight the removal of streetcars from St. Clair Avenue and the eventual phasing out of streetcars by the year 1980. Its founding members included Steve Munro (then a young transit activist, now the city's pre-eminent transit advocate), university students, planners and journalists. The group has advocated for increased transit funding for operational costs, improved service quality, light rail transit, and the implementation of trolley buses on Bay Street in order to renew and expand the network. The Toronto Transit website, operated by a group of transit enthusiasts, offered the first

online information on transit history, infrastructure, and funding for the Toronto region. The website is unique in its content, which mixes information with political commentary and analysis of the transportation decisions; it provides an excellent resource for young people interested in transit advocacy in the Toronto region. They also provide links to Transit 2000, a national transit advocacy group. Rocket Riders is another advocacy group with a diverse membership, including students. They advocated a transit ridership recovery program, which was adopted by the Toronto Transit Commission as their Ridership Growth Strategy. The group also writes publications on transit issues, such as *Smog City or Transit City* and *Transit's Lost Decade*.

Facebook, the online social networking site, gives young people a massive potential to organize themselves into issue-based groups, plan events and notify group members instantaneously. This represents a very different type of civic engagement because young people make up the majority of the millions of users on the website. They create and join groups like "Keep Transit Open Later," where members discuss how late they would want buses to run; "Vancouver Public Transit," which keeps members informed of new services and infrastructure; and "The Art Institute of Vancouver Wants in on the U-Pass," a Facebook petition set up by students who want their school to have the same universal transit pass as the two universities in the region. Some of these groups are large, with thousands of members; the smallest have a few hundred. Members have taken advantage of group discussion boards, the "wall" where members can post messages, and the ability to plan events, notifying all members. This makes event planning particularly spontaneous. While there are many other Facebook groups that serve no political purpose other than ranting ("I Hate TransLink," for example), the site allows youth to network with other people of their own age, keep informed on the issues while staying in touch with their friends, and mobilize if they choose to do so. One group mobilized to protest the passing of a bill to privatize the regional transit board; another to protest highway expansion. Similar groups exist for the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) and the Société de Transport de Montreal (STM). A group of four master's students in Geography, Planning and Environment at Concordia University even created a Facebook group to conduct a survey of public transportation in Montreal.

Young people are more than capable of organizing themselves to achieve social change. A group of students worked tirelessly to get the U-Pass program approved at the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University in 2003; across Canada, other university students are mobilizing to get the U-Pass at their schools. Transit use in Vancouver has increased dramatically among youth since the introduction of the U-Pass at UBC and SFU: 53 percent and 39 percent respectively in the first year alone. Transit now accounts for 41 percent of the mode share at UBC (UBC 2007). In 2007, UBC students mobilized to gather signatures for a petition against the underground bus terminal being proposed on campus, on the grounds that an at-grade facility would be less expensive. Students often face challenges to getting U-Pass programs started, because most programs involve subsidized passes sold at a lower rate to encourage student use. Transit authorities can perceive them as a loss of income, and large systems with already high ridership can be overwhelmed by thousands of extra riders.

Civic groups and organizations may appeal more to young people because of their ability to act outside of the formal political system. They address transportation issues in a way that encourages action, rather than endless deliberation. As a result, they can bring unwanted attention to issues, which in turn informs policy change at a faster pace than government agency-led processes. Civic groups and organizations may also provide a less intimidating and more empowering dynamic, informing youth about larger political processes in a variety of ways. Their use of alternative media, technology and language (such as SPEC's "Gateway Sucks" campaign) makes them much more accessible to youth. And young people do get involved, particularly in the insurgent political events such as protests. As Turcotte (2007, 2) writes, "Anyone below the age of 30 has experienced more control over more aspects of their lives than any previous generation…and they embrace this new empowerment with all the speed new technology allows it to be delivered." Above all, these civic groups and organizations address issues that matter to young people, and allow them to advocate social change in a much less formal atmosphere.

Education and Participatory Action Projects

Education is essential to the development of engaged citizens (O'Neill 2007). Educating young people is crucial to their participation: it provides the skills and knowledge that allow them to navigate complex political processes, access the social networks that anchor them in the political system, and develop interest in engaging political issues. CPRN's youth workshop on civic and political participation revealed a desire for early civics education, integrated throughout the curriculum (CPRN 2007).

Several participatory action research (PAR) projects have addressed youth and transportation. Generally, these projects have the goal of educating young people on sustainable transportation and the larger planning process, but their secondary goal is empowerment. They teach young people research skills and encourage them to inform and motivate their peers. Again, these cannot be classed as either civic or insurgent political participation, since they contain elements of both. While only one of these examples is Canadian, the others illustrate the possibilities of combining education and action-oriented participation.

The St. Lucie Transportation Planning Organization in Florida conducted a PAR project that aimed to involve youth in the transportation planning process by "bringing them to the transportation-planning table, and giving them tools to intelligently participate in the process." (Bonet 2004, no page number available). The goals were to give youth the tools to understand and make recommendations for their transportation future, and to develop a sustainable transportation plan for their community. The students researched transportation systems on the Internet, brought guest speakers into the classroom, and interviewed experts outside of the classroom. They job shadowed staff in transportation careers, participated in two leadership conferences, and ended up producing a transportation survey and eight videos on different transportation issues. They presented their long-range transportation plan to the county commissioners, Florida DOT officials, school board members and legislative delegates in June of 2002.

As a result of their efforts, the commissioners and city council eventually agreed to create a Municipal Service Taxing Unit to fund long-term transit costs.

"Catching Them Young," a project undertaken in Manchester, UK, was a one-year attempt to influence young people's modal choice through a short-term intensive educational intervention (Pilling et al. 1999). The target age range was 12-23 years old. Phase One involved gathering travel data from young people across Greater Manchester on current travel behavior and attitudes towards different travel modes. Phase Two was the development of educational/awareness-raising materials, drawing on thoughts and ideas from the youth themselves, with local youth workers and a university visual arts department. Phase Three measured their response to the materials. Ninety percent of the young people changed their attitudes about cost and image; 95 percent said that the environment had increased in importance as a factor in their travel decisions. Ninety-five percent perceived the car more negatively, 90-95 percent perceived all of the alternative modes more positively. Because the intervention involved lifestyle changes, the integration of the participants into the creation of the materials was instrumental. The authors recommend that this type of educational intervention be used in tandem with increased youth participation in transportation planning.

offramp is a Canadian youth-led initiative that encourages youth to change attitudes and circumstances so that high school students increasingly walk, cycle, take transit, skateboard, rollerblade and carpool to school (Orsini 2003). Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST), a federal charity that promotes sustainable transportation alternatives,

started the program in 1991. High school student leaders in *offramp* are encouraged to investigate the barriers and incentives to alternative modes of travel and create projects that can raise awareness, reward good behavior and generate opportunities to use alternative travel modes. Between 1991 and 2001, fifteen British Columbia schools piloted the student-led transportation demand management program. Student leaders select from an ever-growing list of activities to run at their school: bike fashion/bike trick shows, the creation of videos, and a "how slow can you go?" bike race where the slowest bike wins. Each student leader is also asked to lead a longer-term initiative, like fundraising for a bike rack or petitioning for a bus shelter in front of their school.

These examples show that educating young people about the political processes associated with transportation can change their perceptions and encourage action-oriented civic participation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Canadian youth are not as aware about politics, political actors, and complex political processes as adults. Schools are not doing a good enough job at teaching political processes, and young people are unable, or unwilling, to educate themselves using the media or other sources. They also see through political power dynamics, feel ignored by politicians and have different priorities than the baby boom generation. They want results in exchange for their political participation. They are drawn to insurgent political processes such as protests, petitions and boycotts. They also tend to prefer civic participation over formal political participation. Young people are just

as involved in civic activities as older Canadians, and volunteer more often than adults. They seem more interested in action-oriented participation, where they can be involved in a project for a specific amount of time and see the results. They tend to be active, insurgent citizens rather than passive, statist citizens. These specific characteristics mean planners need to change the way we approach youth participation in planning processes.

In the area of transportation planning, it is clear that Canadian youth are already involved: they participate in a variety of civic groups and organizations available to them. They organize themselves around specific transportation issues using Facebook and their own social networks, creating petitions, planning protests, and generating research for non-profit or advocacy groups. There is little for planners to do in this area, except work with these groups to achieve change, within their capacities to do so: no small task. Many civic groups need to position themselves as adversaries to municipalities or transit authorities in order to effectively criticize current policies and advocate policy change. For planners working for the state, this can make working with civic groups an exercise in conflict mediation and negotiation, skills that most planners can and should use on a regular basis. As Amin (2006, 1018) writes, "The ultimate test of the good city is whether the urban public culture can withstand pluralism and dissent." Transportation planners need to be more flexible when meeting with civic groups and listening to their demands, particularly since involvement with these groups is one of the only ways that young people can be included in decision making.

Planners can encourage insurgent political and civic participation. Planners working for transit authorities or municipalities could:

- Include youth in research and in public consultations on long-term transportation plans

- Host youth planning or visioning events, implementing a couple of suggestions within a few months to demonstrate the benefits of participation

- Create online transit advisory boards to develop new services

- Work with school boards to develop participatory action projects or educational modules that teach young people about the larger transportation planning processes

- Use Facebook, podcasts, video clips, and other methods to encourage youth participation; at the very minimum, provide youth portals on websites

Social planners who work with marginalized youth could:

- Get more involved in transit advocacy, since many youth services and employment centers need to be located near major transit routes

- Continue to advocate for affordable housing on or near major transit routes, since many of the tenants cannot afford cars

- Support youth initiatives to campaign for bus passes for those who cannot afford them

- Work with interested youth, civic groups like the Bus Riders Union, and transportation planners to implement programs

Canadian youth already participate in civic groups and insurgent political activities around sustainable transportation. Planners need to build on these strengths. The integration of youth perspectives, as one of many voices in pluralist democracies, can help change existing policies and foster more positive attitudes towards youth. Integrating young people's perspectives into transportation policy development, marketing and communications can play a role in youth education and help develop new services. Involving youth in decision making creates links between an important transit demographic and those working both inside and outside the state. Greater knowledge of transportation decision-making processes will enable young people to advocate for better services for themselves and other marginalized groups, continue to make good transportation choices, and provide them with skills for a career in transportation planning if they so choose. With more education on political processes, an introduction to a network of transportation professionals, and their own civic initiatives, young people could be part of a more active citizenry.

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Lead Photograph

Vancouver youth and young adults assemble at the Vancouver Art Gallery for a Critical Mass bike ride in June 2007. Photo courtesy of Andrew Curran.

Notes

[1] The U-Pass provides students with unlimited transit access for a monthly fee included in their tuition. The university and the transportation authority typically agree on the program fees and structure.

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