

Living near multi-use paths brings heart health boost, study says

STEVE LAMBERT

CITIES that build safe and easy-to-access paths for walking, running and cycling can improve the heart health of residents who live nearby, a study led by the University of Manitoba suggests.

The study looked at four multi-use paths that were built in Winnipeg between 2010 and 2012 in neighbourhoods that were already largely established. It examined provincial health data covering several years before and after, and found that after the trails were built, people who lived within 400 metres of the paths had lower rates of risks to cardiovascular health such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

In essence, one of the study's authors said, people are more likely to go for a walk, run or bike ride — and maybe ditch the car for a commute — if you give them dedicated space away from vehicle traffic to do so.

"More and more people are living in urban centres, and we're really interested in understanding which aspects of the environments that we build in these centres have health-promoting potential," said Jon McGavock, a professor of pediatrics and child health at the university who is also an investigator with the Children's Hospital Research Institute of Manitoba.

The study relied on the city's elec-

tronic counters along the paths and found that the busier the path, the greater the reduction in cardiovascular risk factors.

Overall, areas within 400 metres of the paths saw an eight per cent reduction in those factors. Near the Bishop Grandin Greenway — the busiest of the four paths — the reduction was close to 15 per cent.

The paths that connect residential areas to schools and shopping centres saw the most use. The Bishop Grandin Greenway links high-density neighbourhoods and sprawling suburbs to the University of Manitoba, the football stadium where the Canadian Football League Winnipeg Blue Bombers play, and a large shopping centre.

"Because they're so connected to other things, people use them to go to work, go to school, go do groceries, that sort of thing," McGavock said.

"That would be the... thing that we would try to promote to other cities is, take a look at — when you're doing your next build — what are the destination points that people are going to (go to)."

The study was funded by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and done in conjunction with the City of Winnipeg and the non-profit Winnipeg Trails Association.

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