

» TRANSIT Broken leg exposes broken system



In January, I suffered a serious cycling injury while commuting to work, which shattered my kneecap; the injury restricted my mobility for the next three months.

My temporary disability gave me first-hand experience of how Wheel-Trans, the para-transit division of the Toronto Transit Commission, operates. It also familiarized me with some of the challenges of navigating the regular transit system in a wheelchair and on crutches.

While I have long been supportive to the need for complete transit accessibility, I had not fully appreciated its importance until my injury. My office is right in front of a subway station, but the lack of elevators precluded using it. Toronto Western Hospital, where I was treated and continue to go for follow-ups, is at the junction of two streetcar lines, but neither are accessible. So I was dependent on Wheel-Trans for these trips.

Eligibility for Wheel-Trans is determined primarily through a short, 15 minute interview with a Wheel-Trans representative. Ironically, most interviews are held at Metro Hall, which is distant from accessible transit, and so a ride has to be arranged to attend. The TTC headquarters at Davisville Station (which is accessible) or City Hall would be far more logical locations. After ten days, a package arrives with a registration card and instruc-



tions on how to use the service. Trips are booked by phone or online. Regular travel such as scheduled medical appointments or commuting to and from work is arranged in advance, but irregular trips have to be booked the day before.

For all other casual trips, I have been using the conventional transit system, partly because it is more convenient to use and so I could come and go when I wanted. The bus fleet is now 100 percent accessible, and 30 of the TTC's 69 subway stations are now equipped with elevators. But new, fully accessible streetcars won't begin to replace the older ones until 2014; the subway will not be fully accessible until 2025.

The modern, low floor buses proved easy to board using a wheelchair, and one learns to appreciate the kneeling feature while using crutches.

Some subway stations are easier

to navigate in a wheelchair than others. The closest stations to where I am staying are Downsview and Sheppard-Yonge. Downsview, opened in 1996, has a single elevator that serves the bus terminal, the mezzanine, and the subway platforms, so it is very easy to navigate. Sheppard-Yonge is much more difficult. Built in 1973 and retrofitted to accommodate the Sheppard Subway that opened in 2002, three different elevators are required to pass from the bus terminal to the Yonge Subway. A fourth elevator is needed if going between the Sheppard West bus and the eastbound Sheppard Subway.

I will soon be able to return to my normal activities. But passengers with permanent disabilities or chronic illness will always need Wheel-Trans, even when the TTC finally becomes fully wheelchair accessible. ♣

SEAN MARSHALL

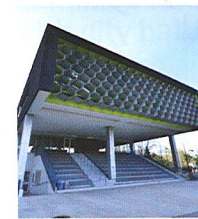
photo by Dan Iggers



ON THE LOOKOUT

Five public schools designed to inspire

Architectural gems from the Toronto District School Board



Claude Watson S.A.

WHERE: YONGE + SHEPPARD

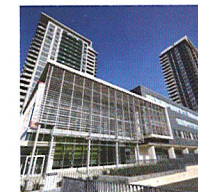
Opened in 2006, this North York elementary and middle school for the arts was designed by Kohn Shnier Architects and features an outdoor theatre space with a striking honeycomb overhang.



Lord Lansdowne P.S.

WHERE: SPADINA + COLLEGE

Completed in 1961, this downtown school is best known for its circular classroom building, ringed by eighteen tapered steel columns and whimsical candy cane smoke stack.



North Toronto C.I.

WHERE: YONGE + EGLINTON

This recently rebuilt school includes a three-storey theatre lobby, central garden courtyard, and green roof. It also incorporates components from the original 1912 building.



Glen Park P.S.

WHERE: GLENCAIRN + ALLEN RD.

This midtown school, completed in 2000, features a garden courtyard lined with multi-coloured glazed masonry, hallways of maple paneling, and a series of cascading planters in the library.



Bellmere Junior P.S.

WHERE: ELLESMERE + MARKHAM

Peaked roofs are the defining feature of this school, designed by John Andrews and opened in 1965. Four classrooms and the library were destroyed during a fire in the 1970s.

COMPILED BY MAIRIN PICCININ