




» LONDON /// WALKING

Unofficial signs take first steps

 For pedestrians, London, Ontario is not a destination city. Lots of people feel that there's not much to walk to, and the neglected pedestrian infrastructure might deter them even if there was.

And so it was with some surprise and much glee that I noticed a series of wayfinding signs in downtown London, informing me that, for example, "It's eleven minutes by foot to Musuem London," or that "It's five minutes by foot to City Hall." Well, I knew those places were walkable from here, but I'm a devout pedestrian — now, sudden-

ly, because of these little signs, everybody can be in on the secret.

Walk London is a "guerilla wayfinding project" that places DIY signs around London's core, directing people to walking-distance sights and features. The signs are colourful and simple, and include QR codes that can be scanned to bring up more information about each spot. Each sign links to a map, and walkers can click through to more thorough explanations, including photos, hosted on the NeighbourGood Guide, which shares information about "little gems" hidden throughout the city.

Kevin Van Lierop is one of the founders of Walk London. I asked him about the particular challenge of foisting foot-traffic on a car-obsessed town. "London is continually playing 'catch-up' in terms of providing the necessary infrastructure" for non-vehicular travel, he says. "Sometimes all that is needed is for someone to point out in a creative way where a fault may lie for things to start to happen."

In some ways, London is uniquely hospitable to a project like this — for example, says Van Lierop, "for its size, London is still relatively small, which allows for many destinations to be within reasonable walking distances." At the same time, London can be a rotten host: the downtown core is a patchwork of parking lots; there are megastores cropping up like fungus at the city's outer edge; and there is a drive-thru for everything. "It is often too easy to simply get in your car and drive, even when your destination might only be a five-minute walk away," Van Lierop laments.

As it happens, London is currently going through its official plan review process. Van Lierop notes that the timing for his project couldn't be better, and with an initiative like this on the radar, he envisions the plan addressing pedestrian needs in a keener way. In the meantime, I imagine my fellow Londoners, en route to their minivans or sulking around their bus stops, seeing these signs and realizing that London might be a walkable city after all. †

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