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Big Ideas: Global experts offer their suggestions for a better Toronto

International planners and developers say Toronto needs more trees, fewer potholes, and data-based transportation design.

By: Gemma Karstens-Smith Staff Reporter, Published on Thu May 29 2014

The CN Tower, a medley of museums and a world-renowned film festival bring hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. But what would a visitor change about our fair city?

When the first-ever [Global Cities Summit](#) was recently in town, we wanted to find out. We asked some of the international planning and development experts what they would do to improve Toronto as part of our year-long [Big Ideas](#) series. They offered varied responses.

Toronto could benefit from creating communities that are more self-reliant for things such as food and energy, said Violeta Somera-Seva, who works for the city of Makati in the Philippines. “Come up with community markets where people can get their food so they don’t have to travel,” she suggested.

Abdul Shaba, general manager of an urban development board in Niger State, Nigeria, suggested that dealing with Toronto’s chronic congestion problem isn’t about stopping people from travelling.

While good public transportation will help, the key is planning infrastructure based on data predicting how density and population will change.

“All these things are part of the planning to decongest our cities,” said Shaba, who is visiting Toronto for the first time.

The city’s roads are at the heart of Mehmet Akif Demirtas and Bilal Aslan’s Big Idea. They noticed the plethora of potholes in Toronto’s streets and said that needs to change.

Demirtas and Aslan, who work for a natural gas company in Istanbul, Turkey, said they understand the challenges posed by our winters, but there must be a better way of dealing with all that snow than the use of salt and heavy machinery that contribute to the problem.

“Your roads and highways are spoiled because of this situation,” Demirtas said.

Nico Tillie, a landscape architect and researcher in Rotterdam, Netherlands, had a suggestion for warmer weather.

He wants to see a greener Toronto — literally. More trees integrated throughout the city’s landscape would give people a higher quality of life.

“I think the people in the city and the neighbourhoods in Toronto are brilliant. Every time I come here, it’s a surprise how lively and nice everything is,” he said. “And I think it would be really interesting to add this extra layer with more street trees everywhere.”