



tcat toronto centre for  
active transportation 



July 9th, 2013

HL23.7: Improving Safety for Bicycle Commuters in Toronto

Dear Chair Joe Mihevc and Members of the Board of Health Committee,

We are writing on behalf of the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT), a project of Clean Air Partnership, and Cycle Toronto. TCAT conducts research and education that supports a vision for cities that are safe, convenient, and enjoyable communities to walk and bike. Cycle Toronto is a diverse member-supported organization that advocates for a healthy, safe, cycling-friendly city for all and currently represents more than 2,300 Torontoians.

We would like to express support for the recommendations brought forward in the "Improving Safety for Bicycle Commuters in Toronto" report that is under consideration at the July 10, 2013 Board of Health Meeting.

Both TCAT and Cycle Toronto fully support the seven recommendations brought forward as they will collectively contribute to making commuter cycling in Toronto safer, more convenient, and more accessible for all cyclists.

In addition to these recommendations, TCAT and Cycle Toronto would like to bring forward the following recommendations:

- 1. Update existing bylaws, in coordination with Transportation Services and the Toronto Police Service, to ban storage of construction materials in bike lanes so that no part of any bicycle lane may be used for short-term or long-term storage.**

In summer 2012, the College Street westbound bike lane and Queens Quay East bike lanes were used to store streetcar tracks. As vulnerable road users, cyclists were forced along these busy cycling routes into the roadway, thus creating an unnecessary safety hazard.

These, plus many other examples which include storage bins placed in bicycle lanes on Annette Street and Shuter Street, demonstrate that the current policy and practices being followed by Transportation Service's Right-of-Way management group are substantially insufficient to protect vulnerable road users.

We urge the Board of Health to request the General Manager of Transportation Services address this right-of-way management problem, by expanding the existing bylaws in Chapter 886, so that blocking bicycle lanes for the purposes of storage be specifically articulated as an illegal act. It is not appropriate for permits to be issued by Right-of-Way management to legally allow storage in bicycle lanes under any circumstances. We further request that from the day that a notice is issued, the fine be a cumulative \$150/day fine, as a one time fine would be an insufficient deterrent.

**2. Make all bike lanes tow-away zones, in coordination with Transportation Services and the Toronto Police Service.**

With few exceptions, vehicles other than bicycles may not stand, stop or park in a bike lane. Blocking a bike lane endangers cyclists by suddenly forcing them to merge with traffic. However, enforcement of the bylaw by the Toronto Police Service is often limited to infrequent week long blitzes. Adding tow-away signage to all bike lanes sends a strong message.

**3. That the Toronto Police Service begin tracking “doorings” (when a cyclist is struck by a car door) by modifying collision reporting sheets to include dooring between a motorist and a cyclist as a type of collision.**

In 2003, the City of Toronto released its [Toronto Bicycle/Motor Vehicle Collision Study](#). It found that dooring results in more serious injuries than other types of collisions and ranked as downtown Toronto’s most frequently reported bicycle/motor vehicle collision. Of these:

- *77% of dooring crashes took place with the motorists in the curb lane with cyclists passing on the left ;*
- *15% took place with the motorist in the curb lane, and the cyclist passing on the right;*
- *8% took place with the motorist was in the centre lane, and the cyclist passing on the right.*

Considering the frequency and potential severity of dooring crashes, the Board of Health should recommend that the Toronto Police Service develop a strategy for reducing the number of dooring collisions, including ensuring that motorists are charged for opening their car doors into traffic. A first step in this strategy is to begin tracking dooring collisions.

**4. Work in collaboration with Transportation Services to ensure that all bicycle lanes in the City of Toronto are cleared of snow immediately after snowfall.**

According to the 2009 City of Toronto Cycling Study, only 10% of Toronto cyclists continue riding in the winter. When asked what the City could do to encourage individuals to ride in the winter, 29% of respondents said better clearance of bike lanes, paths and streets.



*While the College St bike lane was often snowed in 48 hours after snowfall, transit stops were fully serviced. High quality snow removal on College Street is possible.*

Cycle Toronto evaluated the incidence of cleared bike lanes after a particularly heavy February snowfall. Between February 7-8, 2013 25 cms of snow fell on downtown Toronto. On February 10, Cycle Toronto staff inspected the rates of snow clearance from painted bike lanes on Harbord Street, Hoskin Street, St. George Street, College Street and Wellesley Street and the cycle tracks on Sherbourne Street.

Disappointingly, Cycle Toronto found that even 48 hours after snowfall, snow clearance on all painted bike lanes was at best inconsistent and at worst incomplete.



*Sherbourne St cycle track mostly cleared of snow. Better snow clearing practices are possible for all bike lanes in Toronto.*

In many cases, it appears that snow plows used painted bike lanes as places to pile snow cleared from car travel lanes. By storing snow in bike lanes, the City sends the wrong message that winter cycling is not an activity they support. Poorly plowed bike lanes means cyclists must travel in traffic lanes, which increases tension between cyclists and motorists and increases risk to cyclists' safety. In all cases, snow should be removed from painted bike lanes and shared routes immediately after snowfall.

Streets with bike lanes and on-street parking pose a different challenge for snow clearing. Often, cars are parked in on-street parking spots during snowfall, which prevents effective clearing. In the short term, the City should coordinate plowing during no park hours. In the medium term, the City should investigate the reconfiguration of on-street parking on streets with bike lanes.

Considering the City of Toronto's incomplete bicycle network, the City should also identify and prioritize plowing residential streets that connect neighbourhoods to other bike lanes and paths.

In conclusion, we fully endorse the "Improving Safety for Bicycle Commuters in Toronto" report including the seven recommendations from the Medical Officer of Health. To further increase the safety of cyclists, we respectfully urge you to also consider the four recommendations we have outlined above.

Sincerely,



Jared Kolb  
Executive Director, Cycle Toronto  
jared.kolb@cycleto.ca



Nancy Smith Lea  
Director, TCAT  
nsmithlea@tcat.ca