



Tuesday, November 30, 2021

Infrastructure & Environment Committee
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

submitted by email to iec@toronto.ca

Dear Chair Jennifer McKelvie and members of the committee,

Re: IEC 26.9 – 2021 Cycling Network Plan Update

We support the approval of the 2022-24 Near Term Implementation Program, as set out in the Cycling Network Plan Update. The key to success will be implementation. Too often in the past we have seen ambitious plans followed by inaction and disappointment. We believe that the public can helpfully contribute to the success of the current program with timely information about progress, which is especially important given the urgent timelines of action on climate change.

As phrases such as “heat dome” and “atmospheric river” have come into common usage in Canada, it is clear that the consequences of climate change are disturbingly real, as is the need for action to avert a catastrophe for humanity. Old ways of doing things must be reformed to deal with the new reality. The TransformTO plan, also before your committee for approval, makes clear that incremental change will no longer suffice in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The 2022-24 Near Term Program sets out a target of approximately 33km of new bikeways annually, thus going beyond the incremental pace of installations in Toronto over the last 20 years. In terms of on-street cycling infrastructure, the city has never wanted for plans, policies, and promises -- but it has consistently failed to implement its targets, averaging less than 10 km per year (even when including last year’s historic 31 km of new bikeways) on a road system that measures 5,600 km in length and a land surface of 630 square km. This plodding pace was interrupted only in the year 2020, a year in which action was motivated by a world-wide pandemic. Unfortunately, in 2021 there was a return toward the former pace. Climate change requires at least the urgency of action during the pandemic. It is the responsibility of this committee to ensure that the current program is achieved.

The implementation of cycling infrastructure is no longer (and never should have been) a matter that can be brushed aside as the concern of “cycling enthusiasts” or “avid cyclists.” Cycling is a key component of a healthy, efficient, equitable transportation system; an answer

to air pollution and GHG emissions from fossil-fueled cars; and an opportunity to improve affordability – and for all these reasons a matter of great importance to the community at large.

The three-year implementation segments of the Bike Plan, even though they came at the expense of the ten-year target set out in the 2016 Bike Plan, were an improvement in allowing the community to measure success within a more useful timeframe. Nonetheless, the community --- especially in view of the pressing timelines of climate action --- cannot be expected to wait three years to find out that targets will not be met but must instead be given an opportunity to push for adjustments before it is too late to change course to avoid failure. In 2018, a United Nations report warned that we have 12 years to reduce GHG emissions before ecological systems that sustain life begin to collapse. That figure now stands at nine years; at the end of this three-year period, it will be less than six years. Time is no longer on our side.

We urge you to issue brief, year-end progress reports to allow for meaningful engagement by the community on progress toward program implementation. These annual reports should include tallies for new bikeways (disaggregated by type), funding levels, sources, and actual spending, staffing numbers and vacancies, and action taken to improve road safety in the wake of deaths and serious injuries. City residents cannot be left on the sidelines, to be engaged only when plans are proposed or for project consultations. Indeed, such annual reports would be invaluable to members of the IEC in their oversight role for infrastructure implementation.

In recent years the task of assembling and disseminating key information about progress on the city's bike plans has often fallen to volunteer advocates. We note, for example, that annual reports about new bikeways, disaggregated as to type, was started in 2017 by volunteers -- and is now disseminated on the [Bike Lane Tracker](#). Similarly, our group has spent many hours attempting to untangle how promised budgets (including federal and provincial funding grants) for cycling capital projects have played out in terms of monies allocated and actually spent on cycling facilities. More recently we have completed a detailed [inventory and evaluation of the city's cycling facilities](#) to establish a benchmark for quality and safety, identifying 117 km of bikeways that do not meet the city's own standards.

A real cycling network, which has yet to be achieved in Toronto a half century after the so-called "Bicycle Boom," would allow far more people to get around by bicycle, thereby helping the city to meet its TransformTO goal of having 75% of all trips under 5 km travelled by bike, foot or transit. (Indeed, the increase in the popularity of pedal-assist electric bikes has further enhanced the importance of a city-wide cycling network.)

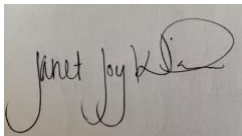
Since many of the bikeway initiatives outlined in the 2022-24 Program are "bundled" with other road construction projects, we know that many will not be completed because road projects are often delayed, sometimes for years. These delays should be treated as opportunities to move forward on other cycling facilities in areas of the city that have long been ignored, including the Weston and Mount Dennis neighbourhoods, as well as Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park where internal roads have bikeways, but dangerous, adjacent arterials do not. In Thorncliffe and Flemingdon, local residents have long called for safety improvements to the

Overlea Blvd bridge, which provides access to local schools. Cycling facilities of strategic importance should also be installed at locations such as Everden Road, which would benefit Little Jamaica and other racialized communities; along Yonge Street north to Steeles Ave to create a crucial north-south spine; and along Bloor Street, westward, in a single project, to the city border, instead of the ongoing piece-meal installations that at the current pace will be drawn out over yet another decade.

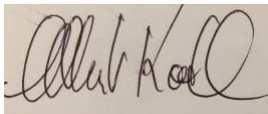
In creating bikeways that rededicate public space from cars, it is time to put aside outdated notions that any increase in motor travel times is bad for the city. The reality is that taking space from private cars --- responsible for most of the 36% of Toronto's GHG emissions from transportation --- may well be the most effective way to reduce driving and associated emissions. Traffic congestion is not the result of new bike lanes, wider sidewalks, or better transit; it is the result of too many cars on our roads. Councillors must do their part, not by obsequiously apologizing for every inconvenience to motorists, most of them in single-occupant cars, but by reminding all road users that each of us has a part to play in fighting climate change, even if it only means accepting the loss of a few parking spots or a turning lane, or a slower car commute. Indeed, slower commute times by car may finally convince some motorists to convert trips by car to trips on foot, bicycle, and transit – precisely the objective of TransformTO.

Toronto cannot solve the climate crisis on its own, but we can do our part, and in doing so be a model for other cities, including ones in developing countries that have been copying our destructive, outdated, car-dependent transportation model.

Sincerely,



Janet Joy Wilson



Albert Koehl



Mary Ann Neary