

BMX Facilities in Toronto

Date:	September 25, 2008
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report responds to a direction from Community Development and Recreation Committee (CD&RC) to develop a strategy and policy for BMX facilities. The report provides an overview of BMX cycling, information on existing BMX facilities in and around Toronto and potential directions for BMX facilities in Toronto.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of June 9, 2008, the CD&RC directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) to initiate an in-house study to develop a strategy and policy for BMX facilities.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/cd/minutes/2008-06-09-cd16-mn.pdf>

The Committee's direction was based on a communication from the Toronto Cycling Advisory Committee.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2008/agendas/committees/cy/cy080512/cydd.pdf>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

At present, there are two City locations with facilities for BMX cycling, both of which were developed following amalgamation.

Proposals for additional BMX facilities have been advanced in recent years by cyclists and community members, but these have not proceeded (including a race track proposed

for Marilyn Bell Park). The request from the Toronto Cycling Advisory Committee (TCAC) for the City to develop a strategy for BMX facilities indicates a continuing interest in BMX cycling as a sport and recreational activity.

COMMENTS

This section of the report provides an overview of BMX cycling, facility requirements, a brief description of the City of Toronto's existing facilities (at Bayview Arena and Wallace-Emerson Park) and a brief discussion on potential facility directions.

Information used in this report was collected from various publications and websites on BMX cycling and discussion with City staff involved with BMX cycling and facilities. As well, in early September, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division staff met with a representative of the Toronto Cycling Advisory Committee and the Executive Director of the Ontario Cycling Association (OCA) to share information on BMX cycling and initial discussion of the study and strategy requested by the Community Development and Recreation Committee.

Origins and Types of BMX Cycling

The origins of bicycle motocross (or BMX for short) are commonly traced to California in the late 1960's as an activity that mimicked off-road motorcycle motocross.

BMX cycling involves bicycles with smaller sized wheels (20"-24" in diameter) and can be divided into two main categories:

1. **racing** on dedicated tracks with features such as jumps and banked turns; and
2. **freestyle** riding, which includes several sub-disciplines based on terrains and surfaces, with a focus on skills.

Its popularity has endured and grown and BMX cycling itself has become more diversified. Some forms of BMX are among alternative or "extreme" sports often shown on television as part of ESPN's Summer X Games. BMX made its debut as an Olympic sport at the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing.

BMX Racing

BMX Racing is a competitive race discipline. The sport is regulated by the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) with races typically organized and monitored by a competitive sports association. In Ontario, the governing body is the Ontario Cycling Association (OCA). The sports association will generally hold organized races throughout the racing season with top riders advancing to the World Cup or International Championships. The emphasis in BMX racing is on speed and competition.

Canada's current top-ranked BMX racer, Samantha Cools from Alberta, placed 7th in the 2008 Beijing Olympic event. Canada has hosted the UCI BMX World Championships twice, both times in the west: Saskatoon in 1997 and Victoria in 2007.

The OCA indicates there were 632 single license BMX racers in Ontario in 2008.

BMX Freestyle

BMX freestyle includes any form of BMX cycling that is not racing. BMX freestyle riders use a diverse range of bikes and facilities with the common emphasis being on ability to perform tricks or achieve height in jumps. It is leisure-focused and the disciplines are not regulated by a sports association. Although BMX free-style disciplines are not race-oriented, elite riders may have professional sponsorship and may compete at events such as the X Games. Freestyle BMX includes the following types:

- **Park/Vert** riders use a series of obstacles such as quarter-pipes, flat banks and boxes that are similar to skateboard parks. Park riders include Vert, where riders ride in large half-pipes that are typically 3 metres (10 feet) high or greater and perform tricks while in the air.
- **Street** riders are similar to Park riders, except they prefer to ride within the urban environment. They seek out unique obstacles found in parks or business areas. The emphasis is on creatively using their surroundings.
- **Flatland** riders practice on flat concrete or asphalt surfaces. They have specifically-built bikes that have metal pegs on the front and back wheels and special handle bars that can spin a full 360 degrees. They will perform complicated balancing and spinning movements while traveling or staying stationary. The emphasis is on style and difficulty of tricks.
- **Dirt** riders use jumps which are typically a series of dirt mounds that act as launch and landing ramps. The emphasis is typically on achieving height and performing tricks while in the air. A Pump Track is a hybrid between a race track and dirt jumps, consisting of a smaller loop track with mounds and banked turns.

The following table, based on information taken from several industry sources, summarizes the types of BMX and the basic facility features and requirements for each.

BMX Types and Requirements	
Type of BMX Cycling	Basic Facility Features and Requirements
Racing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300-400m long dirt track • Jumps & banked corners • Requires 3 acres (approx.)
Park including Vert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparable to skateboard parks with similar elements • Made from wood, metal or concrete • Series of obstacles (dirt)
Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses urban features (ledges, furnishings, etc.)
Flatland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smooth, flat concrete or asphalt (ice pad in summer, parking lot, school yard)

BMX Types and Requirements	
Dirt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Series of dirt mounds in lines where riders jump

In terms of location requirements, facilities should be located to reduce potential negative impacts on other surrounding uses and to support access to BMX facilities. Location and siting factors that need to be considered include:

- appropriate size land area to accommodate facility
- surrounding land uses re: potential impacts (e.g. sound systems during events)
- accessibility by public transit and appropriate parking
- site visibility and emergency access
- safe and secure fencing as may be deemed necessary
- location of existing BMX facilities
- location of other recreation facilities and features that may be used by BMX (e.g. skateboard parks)
- water supply for maintenance
- other basic amenities (e.g. washrooms)

Existing City BMX Facilities

The attached map shows the two BMX locations in Toronto at Bayview Arena and Wallace-Emerson Park.

The text and table below highlight some of the key information about the facilities at each location.

Wallace-Emerson Park

This park has two BMX facilities, the original dirt track built in the park's west end and the newer wooden freestyle ramps erected seasonally on an outdoor ice skating rink at the east end of the park.

The park is located in a dense neighbourhood and the facilities are well used, with the number of participants having increased from approximately 450 in 2007 to approximately 1,000 in 2008. The ramps, which are loaned to the City, were also used at the BMX Jam as part of the Toronto International Bicycle Show in 2007 and 2008 and regularly receive exposure on YouTube and in newspapers and magazines, such as Spacing. As well as BMX riders, the ramps also attract in-line skaters and skateboarders.

The ramps are in place from approximately mid-March to the end of October. Part-time PFR staff maintain the facility, including making 20 city-owned bicycles and helmets available to riders as needed. Heavy use of the ramps by riders, exposure of the untreated wood to the elements, lack of drainage of the skating rink foundation and occasional acts of vandalism are resulting in their premature deterioration. Seasonal dismantling and outdoor storage (offsite at Ontario Place) further compromises the integrity of the wood components.

The maintenance of the dirt track relies on PFR staff and volunteers from the start of April to the end of October. There are, however, limitations on the amount and types of work volunteers can do, particularly if machinery is involved.

Bayview Arena

The Bayview Arena BMX facility is located to the rear of the existing arena, north of Finch Avenue East. The facility was initiated to reduce conflict with skateboard users at the nearby Cummer Skateboard Park by providing a BMX facility in the vicinity.

The facility is primarily a dirt track with 183 metres (600 feet) of track around the perimeter and a 91 metre (300 feet) track in the central area. The facility has jumps and other features. Culverts allow for water drainage. Parks field staff indicate that approximately 30 people (mostly males) use the track regularly. Remote control car operators also use the facility with tournaments on the site several times a year. Other users are dog walkers.

The facility is fenced from surrounding parkland and adjacent hydro corridor. Limited maintenance is provided approximately once a month by parks staff to ensure that the facility area is free of litter, weeds and rocks. Concerns include the need for additional maintenance of the site and enforcement of dog issues (e.g., some dog owners or walkers use the area as an off-leash area, resulting in dog wastes making the area unpleasant for BMX users).

City of Toronto - Existing BMX Facilities			
Facility	Bayview Arena	Wallace-Emerson Park	
District	North	South	
Ward	24	18	
Type	Dirt track	Dirt track	Freestyle park
Year Constructed	2003	2006	2007
Material	55 loads of dirt	30 loads of dirt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wooden ramps erected on concrete pad (skating rink)
Days to Construct	1	2	1 (assembly of sections)
Maintenance	PFR grass crew (landscape only, not the track itself)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PFR Staff Volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part-time PFR staff
Programming	None	Yes	Yes
Support Amenities	None	Adjacent to community centre: video surveillance, washrooms, storage, water, maintenance equipment, first aid, staff support	
Site Fencing	Yes	No	No

City of Toronto - Existing BMX Facilities			
Facility	Bayview Arena	Wallace-Emerson Park	
Other Facility Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote control car operators • Dog walkers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog walkers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skateboarders • Inline skaters • Police and Ambulance service community events (bike and road safety, legal graffiti campaigns)
Construction Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$7,000 (fence) • Dirt (donation) • City staff/backhoe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dirt (donation) • City staff/backhoe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$40,000 worth of privately owned material on 5-year loan to City
Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-5/weekday • 25-35/weekend • 8:2 (male: female) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20-40/day • 9:1 (male: female) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20-40/day • 9:1 (male: female)
Reported Issues with Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No programming • Limited amenities • Proximity to neighbours • Dog walkers using site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to neighbours • Dog walkers using site • Limits on use of volunteers to maintain the facility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security • Some vandalism • Wood damage • Staffing skill set • Off-season storage

Other Locations

The City has a number of skateboard facilities, some of which are temporary in nature (with moveable features) and some of which are permanent with concrete bowls and plazas. BMX riders have been known to use skateboard parks in the City, but most sites prohibit them, as indicated by signage and monitoring of facilities by PFR staff and volunteers.

There are also many locations in Toronto's parks and open spaces where cyclists (both BMX and mountain bike users) have created dirt tracks and courses on an informal basis. These areas tend to present concerns with respect to the impacts of track development and use on the natural environment and the inherent difficulties of access for emergency services in case of injuries.

BMX Provision by Other Municipalities

Several Ontario municipalities have BMX racing, usually operated in conjunction with local BMX clubs affiliated with the Ontario Cycling Association. A number of skateboard facilities provided by other municipalities in the Toronto area are used for

different types of BMX. The following identifies some of the better known BMX facility locations in Southern Ontario and the GTA.

BMX Racing

Milton (Track 2000)
Port Elgin (Saugeen Shores)
Chatham
Kingston

BMX Freestyle

Mississauga (Hershey Centre)
Oakville (Shell Park)
Pickering
Richmond Hill
Markham

Discussion

BMX supports both the City's and the Division's objectives and strategies for increasing physical activity and participation, particularly among children and youth. BMX also has the potential to support sport development and tourism (e.g. special events). BMX facilities are relatively inexpensive to develop and operate and can be developed as temporary or transitional uses.

To date, the City of Toronto provides limited BMX facilities and typically with reliance on donated resources. Interest in increasing and augmenting BMX facilities in Toronto has taken the form of specific facility proposals and initiatives in recent years, with the newest facility at Wallace-Emerson providing a rare sole-purpose facility for freestyle BMX riding.

Toronto's existing BMX facilities provide a limited number and range of opportunities for BMX cycling. Preliminary review of BMX activities and facilities in Toronto with PFR staff, members of the TCAC and OCA, indicates that a track suitable for an introductory/intermediate BMX racing would be a likely priority for additional BMX facilities in Toronto. Other facilities, such as dirt tracks, would also help in addressing the proliferation of informal track construction that is occurring in several city ravines and large parks, negatively impacting the natural environment and often creating conflict among other users of City parks.

The three pillars of the Division's Strategic Plan document, "*Our Common Grounds*," are environmental stewardship, child and youth development, and lifelong active living. Providing meaningful recreational opportunities such as BMX cycling in a more sustainable manner will help the Division achieve the goals of "*Our Common Grounds*."

Next Steps

The direction from CD&RC to undertake a strategy for BMX facilities is in progress.

Dialogue with members of the cycling community will continue, including an anticipated presentation on BMX involving the Ontario Cycling Association and members of the Toronto cycling community at the November, 2008 meeting of the TCAC.

City staff will continue to work on a BMX strategy with stakeholder groups and report back to CD&R Committee on the strategy and funding options.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - BMX Biking Locations