



Open Letter in Support of Prompt Snow Clearance on Priority Bikeways

May 13, 2014

To the City Clerk:

Please add these comments to the agenda for the May 14, 2014, Public Works and Infrastructure Committee meeting on item PW31.1 [Confirmation of Levels of Service for Winter Maintenance of Bikeways, Window Opening, Sidewalks and Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Compliance].

I understand that our comments and the personal information in this email will form part of the public record and that my name will be listed as a correspondent on agendas and minutes of City Council or its committees. Also, I understand that agendas and minutes are posted online and my name may be indexed by search engines like Google.

Comments:

Dear Public Works and Infrastructure Committee (PWIC) members,

I am writing on behalf of Cycle Toronto Ward 18 to express our support for winter maintenance of bikeways, including prompt (6 to 8 hours) clearance of priority routes identified by appropriate signage.

The state of Toronto bike commuting in winter

Our ward group devoted significant effort over the past winter—an admittedly tough winter for Toronto—to helping local cyclists demand better snow and ice clearance for on- and off-street cycle routes (including the West Toronto Railpath) via 311 Toronto and our Councillor's office. Our group was copied on many complaints from commuter cyclists who were forced to ride to work in patently unsafe conditions because of poor winter maintenance.

As for myself, I ride a solid utility bike with studded tires in the winter, and even I was frequently forced to take the TTC when large snow piles were left between the curb lane and the sidewalk, leaving me and other cyclists with the choice of taking the lane (guaranteed to incite road rage among Toronto drivers when done for any length of time) or abandoning our primary mode of transportation. [As Cycle Toronto has pointed out](#), only 10% of Toronto cyclists continue riding in the winter, but **29% of cyclists said they could be encouraged to keep riding in winter with better clearance of bike lanes, paths and streets—thereby keeping them out of their cars and off our over-crowded transit system.**

Cycling-related service standards

Broadly speaking, there are no customer service standards specifically associated with the maintenance of cycling infrastructure in Toronto, judging by the standards listed on the [City's website](#). In other words, the City does not currently report on its performance against specific cycling service standards at all. The

development of a service standard for winter maintenance of priority bike routes would be a welcome change to this state of affairs. We encourage further development of cycling service standards in future.

48 to 72 hours is too late

While we appreciate City staff's recommendation that the Martin Goodman Trail and cycle tracks should be cleared within 6 to 8 hours following the minimum accumulation levels, **it is concerning and perplexing to us that staff recommend a 48- to 72-hour window for achieving bare pavement on priority on-street bikeways**. If the City recognizes that these bikeways are a priority for commuter cyclists, these routes must be maintained to the same standard as cycle tracks and priority trails.

West Toronto Railpath

The map for priority bike routes in the City's proposal excludes Ward 18 despite it being one of the four wards with highest cycling modal share in the city. The obvious reason for this exclusion is the marked lack of cycling infrastructure in our ward. We do, however, have the West Toronto Railpath, which is well used by commuter cyclists, including in winter. We have had assurances from the City in the past that the City will maintain the Railpath (and its entry points) to a standard similar to the Martin Goodman Trail, but **we would like to see the Railpath included in the adopted winter maintenance plan**.

On-street motor vehicle parking

Many challenges associated with maintaining bike lanes in winter relate to overnight on-street motor vehicle parking on arterials. Other cities, including Ottawa, have solved this problem through on-street parking restrictions following significant snowfalls. As Cycle Toronto notes, the City of Toronto's protocol to activate a no-parking restriction on snow routes when more than 15 cm of snow falls is a good start. However, as vulnerable road users, cyclists are challenged by smaller snowfalls than this. The City of Ottawa's parking restrictions, for instance, are activated when the forecast calls for 7 cm or more—including a forecast snowfall of 5 to 10 cm. **We encourage the City of Toronto to learn from other cities to see how bikeway maintenance can be improved through changes to motor vehicle parking regulations**.

Contrary to popular opinion, it does not take a dare-devil to cycle in winter. Anyone who thinks winter cycling is a marginal activity would do well to look to the winter cycling cultures in places like Montreal, Copenhagen, Ottawa, and Winnipeg—the latter being the host of the recent 2014 Winter Cycling Congress. With proper winter maintenance and some warm clothes, winter cycling can be a safe, healthy, reliable, and environmentally-friendly alternative for Torontonians to get to work and school.

On behalf of Cycle Toronto Ward 18, I encourage the members of PWIC to support the proposal for predictable and timely winter maintenance of our priority on- and off-street bikeways.

Sincerely,
Liz Sutherland
(282A Brock Avenue)
Cycle Toronto Ward 18

c.c. Councillor Ana Bailão
Cycle Toronto