

February 23, 2016

RE: PW11.7 -- Cycling Network Plan and Requesting Information to Consider Building a Minimum Grid

Chair Jaye Robinson and Members of Public Works and Infrastructure Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Cycle Toronto to request your support for consideration at Public Works and Infrastructure Committee (PWIC) of a broad range of budget options for the Ten Year Cycling Network Plan.

As you are aware, Councillor Layton and Councillor McMahon recently tabled a motion at Council requesting that City staff report on options for increasing the annual cycling budget to \$20 million and \$25 million in the context of the next report on the Cycling Network Plan to PWIC this spring. This motion was referred to the February 29, 2016 meeting of PWIC. It is Cycle Toronto's position that staff should indeed prepare budget options at these higher levels so that PWIC and Council may have an informed debate about the benefits and costs of a wider range of budgetary options when the Ten Year Cycling Network Plan comes forward this spring. Specifically, we would like to see options presented for \$20 million and \$25 million annual cycling infrastructure budgets.

The Status Quo

The City of Toronto has approximately 230 lane-kilometres of dedicated on-street bicycle infrastructure in a road network of over 15,500 lane-kilometres of roads. The 2015 capital budget for cycling infrastructure was \$9.46 million (not counting a small amount of funding for bike parking and bike share projects). While there has been some expansion of cycling facilities in recent years—notably with the installation of the protected bike lanes in the downtown core—the pace of progress has been slow compared to other North American cities. Suffice it to say that, at present, Toronto does not have a connected city-wide grid. The potential for growth is significant: almost three-quarters of Torontonians say that the lack of cycling infrastructure in this city is holding them back from riding more often. Our fragmented network does not give most residents a good enough reason to leave their cars at home.

The Ten Year Cycling Network Plan

The City of Toronto is developing a plan to “Connect, Grow, and Renew” our cycling network over the next 10 years. The proposed network plan includes 450 km of “new infrastructure,”



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including 150 kilometres of dedicated bike infrastructure on busy streets as well as an additional 100 kilometres of dedicated bike infrastructure on roads that will require “Major Corridor Studies.” The Plan will be presented to PWIC in spring.

The estimated cost of the Ten Year Cycling Network Plan is still to be determined. In the meantime, City staff have developed a short-term implementation plan costing \$13.6 million for 2016 (not including bike parking/bike share projects). Bikeway trails make up nearly 60% of the budget (\$8.1 million) whereas implementation of roughly 20.5 km of on-street bike lanes make up 14% (\$1.86 million).

To put these amounts in context, the extension of the West Toronto Railpath is anticipated to cost almost \$23 million--\$6 million alone in the first year. The Sherbourne protected lanes cost \$2.5 million and the Wellesley upgrade between Yonge and Parliament (conversion from unprotected bike lane) cost almost \$1 million. Much of the cycling infrastructure budget will be spent on the continued build-out of the City’s trails plan. While we’re strongly supportive of the 2012 Bikeway Trails Implementation Plan, we believe Toronto’s on-street network needs a significant boost in funding..

Furthermore, there is still no dedicated source of funding for the high-profile Eglinton Connects plan—a Council-approved but unfunded capital pressure. While only part of this pressure could be classified as cycling infrastructure, it will be important that a significant level of cycling infrastructure dollars be set aside for this project to ensure that the protected bike lanes open in the same year as the LRT begins operation. In our view, it would be prudent for staff to include up to \$5 million in annual funding (2017-2021) for the Eglinton protected bike lanes in the cycling infrastructure budget. Having an identified source of funding for some of the streetscape improvements could also help attract funds from other levels of government for “shovel-ready” sustainable transportation projects.

Toronto residents have had their expectations built by public consultations on the Bloor bike lanes project, by the potential for making Richmond-Adelaide a permanent installation with proper protection, and by the promise of bike lanes on Yonge Street, the Danforth, and many other corridors in our city that have been examined and found amenable to cycling infrastructure in the draft Ten Year Cycling Network Plan. In the context of these elevated expectations and a growing realization that cycling infrastructure pays for itself in terms of economic, environmental, health, and anti-congestion benefits, we feel it is only fitting for PWIC and Council to fully consider an ambitious budgetary program capable of meeting these expectations.

There is an appetite to build on the existing political will and bureaucratic commitment to build out Toronto’s bikeway network—in terms of on-street protected lanes, bike boulevards on traffic-calmed streets, and off-road trail extensions. It is only prudent to consider a corresponding level of costing options.



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The Commitment

During the 2014 municipal election campaign, Cycle Toronto asked City Council candidates to commit to building a Minimum Grid of 100 km (200 per lane km) of protected bike lanes on main streets and 100 km (200 per lane km) of new bicycle boulevards on side streets—by 2018.¹ Importantly, a majority (25) of elected councillors pledged their support for this plan.

City staff have indicated that they plan to present three budget options in the Ten Year Cycling Network Plan of \$8 million, \$12 million, and \$16 million. **However, considering funding pressure to complete the 2012 Bikeway Trails Implementation Plan, unfunded pressure for Eglinton Connects and funding pressure for the new Ten Year Cycling Network Plan, we do not believe these budget windows are sufficient.**

A January 18, 2016, briefing note to the City's Budget Committee prepared by City staff notes that the Minimum Grid commitment would cost approximately \$50 million to \$150 million over the next three years, or approximately \$16.7 million to \$50 million per year from 2016 to 2018 inclusive. The staff memo notes, however, that "the delivery of this level of infrastructure by 2018 would be beyond the current delivery capacity of Transportation Services' Cycling Infrastructure Group, and would require the provision of additional staff resources."

Fortunately the City's draft 2016 Operating Budget begins to provide for these much-needed additional staff in the City Cycling Unit. We submit that it is therefore feasible to achieve the Minimum Grid commitment on an accelerated timeline relative to the Ten Year Cycling Network Plan, and it is simply a matter of political will as to whether we see this commitment reflected in the Cycling Infrastructure budget.

With the 2016 budget now approved, only two years remain for this Council to live up to the commitment made by a majority of Councillors to build a Minimum Grid during the present term.

The Cost of Falling Behind

Torontonians no longer need to look to European cities for examples of how urban environments can be redesigned to favour sustainable transportation options like cycling, walking, and mass transit. Places like Chicago, Vancouver, Montreal, Minneapolis, New York, and even Boulder, Colorado, are pulling further and further ahead of us in providing a safe cycling network for their residents. Some of these cities were transformed in a matter of a single four-year term, while others have pursued incremental growth over decades.

¹ Note that the City of Toronto updated its methodology for counting cycling infrastructure so as to use lane-kilometres rather than (two-way) kilometres of road length. We have updated our Minimum Grid pledge language accordingly.



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In closing, I urge you to request staff to include options for funding \$20 million and \$25 million within the next Toronto Cycling Network plan to PWIC this spring. If we can afford to spend a billion dollars on the East Gardiner expressway plan, surely we can afford to financially support a rapid timeline for the implementation of Toronto's cycling network.

Sincerely,



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