



June 12, 2023

Acting Mayor Jennifer McKelvie,  
City Councillors  
100 Queen Street West  
City Hall, Second Floor  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

*Sent electronically to The Clerk at councilmeeting@toronto.ca*

Dear Acting Mayor McKelvie and city councillors,

***Re: IE4.3 – A BIA perspective re Bloor West Complete Street Extension,  
included in Cycling Network Plan – 2023 Update (June 14-16 council session)***

This letter offers my insights from the Bloor Annex BIA about the impact on business of bike lanes, and related safety benefits, based on our experience --- and research ---relating to the Bloor bike lane (Avenue Road to Shaw Street) installed as a pilot in 2016. Significantly, we found that with the introduction of a bike lane our sales went *up* on average, as documented by point-of-sale terminal data.

I am the General Manager of the Bloor Annex BIA and have been a part of the board for the BIA for 25 years. Bloor Annex is a mid-size main street BIA representing 237 members that offer a wide range of products and services. Bloor Annex is home to a venerable business matrix that is in a constant struggle to keep brick and mortar enterprises alive with the rise of conglomerates like Amazon. Increasing foot traffic and getting people to explore and engage with their neighbourhood and its businesses is the only way to protect the members of the BIA.

In 2015, when the city proposed a pilot bike lane on Bloor, the attitude in Bloor Annex was that it was just another nail in the coffin. Many merchants predicted that “the sky will fall” with the installation of the bike lane. BIAs across the city had widely varying views about the desirability of installing bike lanes on main streets, Bloor Annex being no different. Many feel that their

prime demographic is customers who arrive by car and that bike lanes would deprive motorists of space needed for car parking.

What BIAs across the city had in common when it comes to bike lanes, however, is that none of us knew with any precision how our customers get to our shops, restaurants, and theatres. It was mostly anecdotal evidence which informed widely disparate, yet passionately held views. While it is not wrong to worry about how changes in the neighbourhood will impact business, what is crucial is trying to get a empirical understanding of their impact.

For this reason the Bloor Annex BIA, working with the Korea Town BIA (and with the financial support of the Metcalf Foundation), commissioned a study. The study consisted of a survey of patrons and merchants to determine how customers got to our district, and what merchants perceived about their customers' needs in terms of car parking versus bike lanes.

The Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT), with researchers based at the University of Toronto, sent a team into the Annex and Korea Town in October of 2015. They conducted 3,000 interviews with customers and merchants *before* the pilot, as well as *during* the Bloor bike lane pilot installation from 2016 to 2017, using a control site on The Danforth where there were no bike lanes at the time.

The BIA needed to determine whether it would be the final nail in the coffin for our members, or if it was actually good for business.

The economic data derived from this research helped our BIAs to make an informed choice about the desirability of permanent bike lanes for Bloor. For us, this is not an ideological question -- the pilot was a necessary step in testing a model for a city that works better, which includes our businesses.

The study was essential in providing us with the following information:

- The number of businesses that reported 100 customers or more per day increased in the study area. That increase was similar on the Danforth;
- Vacancy rates held steady at 6% in Bloor Annex and Korea Town. On The Danforth, they declined from 10% to 7%;
- The majority of merchants believed that at least 1/2 of their customers are driving to Bloor; however fewer than 10% of customers actually reported arriving by car;
- For their part, merchants on Bloor Street preferred to drive (49%), a number that did not change with the bike lane installation. At the same time, however, the study showed that for customers, cars were the least preferred travel choice (7%) of their customers. During the pilot that percentage increased perhaps inexplicably (9%).

- After the installation of the bike lane, the proportion of visitors who perceived Bloor Street as safe for cycling more than tripled, and doubled among merchants, while perceptions of safety on The Danforth dropped (22% to 10%);
- With the installation of the bike lane, the percentage of women who reported now feeling safe cycling on Bloor increased significantly more than for men, from 12% to 58%.
- With the city's help we increased bike parking by 30% making it easier for cyclists to stop and shop or dine.
- Finally, the City invested in a further unassailable research tool: Moneris point of sale data to compare sales in the area where the pilot bike lanes was established and in areas where they were not in place. Sales, on average increased on Bloor by 3% relative to the control site and relative to the area immediately outside the pilot.

While there may not have been gains that allow for our businesses to overthrow Amazon, there is no doubt that the bike lane had a positive effect not only on the safety of our streets, but also the health and growth of our businesses. The sky did not in fact fall.

We appreciate that customers are more likely to engage with our businesses when they have safe and reliable means of transportation such as bike lanes. We need to ensure our roads are not only safe to be on but also welcoming to cyclists to receive their support of our businesses and to create a vibrant community and business environment.

Based on our experience, City Council would do well to move forward on installing bike lanes on Bloor from Runnymede Road to Resurrection Road to not only create a safer, more inviting and vibrant community but also to support the many businesses along the way.

Sincerely,

*Brian Burchell*

Brian Burchell

General Manager

Bloor Annex BIA