



To: Mayor Tory and members of Toronto Council
From: Walk Toronto (Steering Committee)
Date: Dec. 13, 2022
Re: MM2.14 — Improving Safety on Bloor Street Bike Lanes during Construction

Walk Toronto is a grassroots pedestrian advocacy group that works with various levels of government, community groups and citizens to improve walking conditions and safety in Toronto.

Walk Toronto supports the Member's Motion to improve safety on the Bloor Street bike lanes during periods of construction.

Of course, construction projects that impinge on bike lanes and sidewalks are common throughout the city, not just on Bloor St. Walk Toronto believes that it would be beneficial if an amendment were made to the Member's Motion that would expand the scope of the study being undertaken by staff to include bike lanes in other areas subject to high levels of building activity. Adelaide St. and College St. are good candidates for consideration.

We are pleased that people who get around in wheelchairs are recognized as legitimate users of 'bike' lanes — which do in fact serve many types of road users, not just cyclists. This is indicative of a wider trend towards transportation mode fluidity. Many wheelchair users, though legally classified as pedestrians, can benefit from access to cycling infrastructure, as do people who may cover one part of a journey on foot, and the other by Bike Share rentals. Bloor St. is provided with many Bike Share stations, offering pedestrians plentiful opportunities to achieve a modal shift. Likewise, people who ride their own bicycles on the Bloor bike lanes to the many destinations that line the street technically become pedestrians and sidewalk users after they dismount. Therefore, it is essential that both the sidewalks and the bike lanes on Bloor St. be kept safe at construction locations.

Unfortunately, this is often not the case: poorly planned construction areas can sever bike lanes, creating gaps in safe infrastructure. The result is that less confident cyclists who are fearful of sharing a through lane with vehicles may instead ride on the sidewalk, or even through a tight, temporary walkway surrounded by hoarding. This not only endangers pedestrians who are using the walkway, it can even result in people evasively walking onto the roadway in order to avoid a bike that is monopolizing the walkway.

We are also concerned about construction projects that result in the temporary removal of pedestrian infrastructure. While Walk Toronto most definitely approves of the goals of the TTC's Easier Access program to improve the accessibility of subway stations, we deplore the poor planning associated with the particular project at the Castle Frank station. A segment of the sidewalk on the north side of Bloor Street has been closed for much too long a time, compelling pedestrians to cross to the south sidewalk at Parliament Street and Castle Frank Road. This has horrible implications for sidewalk accessibility, which should not have to be sacrificed for a long period in order to achieve subway station accessibility. The entire intersection should be re-designed to improve walkability (with the needs of other road users also needing attention).

Another unfortunate example is the closure of the the walking bypass route near the Glen Road bridge reconstruction site. Matters have been made worse by the unpredictable status of the bike lanes in the vicinity of the bridge project, which appear and disappear according to the season.

A disruptive condo construction project is located not far away, at the southwest corner of Sherbourne St. and Bloor St. E. Negotiating this intersection in a wheelchair or on a bike is not for the faint of heart.

In order to avoid the mixing of modes and the incursions of bikes into areas designated for exclusive pedestrian use, we recommend that planners of building and road projects preserve existing active transportation infrastructure to the greatest extent possible when accommodating construction activity. If temporary changes cannot be avoided, then safe routes should be established which keep pedestrians properly separated from cyclists, and in turn keep all active transportation users separated from vehicular traffic.

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