

Residential On-Street Parking for Cargo Bikes

Date: November 13, 2024

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Transportation Services

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report responds to a request from the Infrastructure and Environment Committee for the General Manager, Transportation Services to explore options for cargo bike parking in permit parking areas, by examining two options requested by IEC. The first is to exempt cargo bike owners from being required to purchase a permit to park on-street, and the other option is to offer a voluntary program for cargo bike owners to display a unique licence plate which would allow cargo bike owners to purchase a permit parking permit.

Both options were explored and are discussed in greater detail as to why neither option is considered a viable solution. Transportation Services recognizes the increasing demand for safer, more convenient cargo bike parking options and that it is important to ensure that the growing number of residents can meet their transportation needs without a personal automobile. To support cargo bike owners, an alternative option that can be implemented as part of an existing program and under existing authorities is being suggested, through the deployment of bike corrals in neighbourhoods where there is an obvious need for cargo bike parking.

Bike corrals are an appropriate scaled solution for cargo bike parking because they provide additional security for cargo bikes users when parking their vehicles in the curbside and clears up any ambiguity surrounding the allowance of parking cargo bikes on-street in the same locations as motor vehicles. The use of bike corrals is the more practical solution rather than having to undertake an overhaul of a complex City-wide process, such as Toronto's permit parking program to accommodate cargo bike parking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Transportation Services, recommends that:

1. This report be received for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

The Infrastructure and Environment Committee, at its meeting of October 25, 2023, through Member Motion IE7.7, directed the General Manager, Transportation Services, to report back in the first quarter of 2024, on how to facilitate and manage parking of cargo bicycles in portions of the public right way where personal automobiles are permitted to be parked.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.IE7.7>

At its meeting on December 15, 2021, City Council adopted, as amended, Item IE26.11 which amended by-laws to further opt-in to a provincial pilot that runs until March 1, 2026 to allow cargo e-bikes weighing over 120kg unladen to operate on roads, bike lanes and cycle tracks, and to be able to be left on a highway provided that they cause the last possible obstruction to pedestrian or vehicular traffic. Item IE26.11 also amended by-laws to allow for cargo bikes and to be able to park like other commercial vehicles, including in designated on-street commercial loading zones and delivery vehicle parking zones.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.IE26.11>

At its meeting on June 8-9, 2021, City Council adopted Item IE22.15 Regulatory Clarity for Cargo E-bikes that opted-in partially to the Province's pilot project to allow cargo ebikes, weighing not more than 120 kg unladen, to be recognized as a vehicle that can travel on streets, bike lanes and cycle tracks, and to be able to be left on a highway provided that they cause the last possible obstruction to pedestrian or vehicular traffic. Transportation Services was requested to report back on a micromobility strategy on all e-bike types and a pilot project for larger cargo e-bikes (over 120 kg unladen) for the fourth quarter of 2021.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.IE22.15>

COMMENTS

Background on Cargo Bike History and Uptake in Toronto

A cargo bike, which is sometimes referred to as 'cargo power-assisted bicycle', 'pedal-assist cargo e-bike' or 'cargo e-bike', is a relatively new micromobility vehicle that is permitted to operate on the streets of Toronto. Cargo bikes are a type of modified

bicycle that are intended to carry various types of cargo, including goods and people. While these vehicles are propelled primarily by pedaling (human-generated-power) they also have an integrated electric motor which provides a supplementary 'boost' of power.

In 2021, the City of Toronto opted into a five-year (5) [cargo e-bike pilot program](#), which was organized by the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO) to allow municipalities to choose whether to participate in the program. Regulations dictating where, when, and by whom these vehicles could be operated were established at both the provincial and municipal levels. The pilot is due to conclude on March 1, 2026. Information and insights gathered during the pilot period will be used to determine if and how cargo bikes will be allowed to operate permanently in Ontario in the future.

Cargo bikes can be utilized for a wide variety of reasons by a wide range of people. One of the key user groups for these vehicles are residents living in urban areas. Cargo bikes are particularly popular with families, who use them when running errands, such as picking up their grocery shopping or transporting their children to and from school or daycare. Below are images of various types of cargo bikes in use.





Photo Credit: Hackney Council



Photo Credit: Bonjour Bruxelles



Photo Credit: Madsen Cycles



Photo Credit: Ferla Family Bikes

These small, multi-functional vehicles can be seen as a sustainable alternative to car-ownership. In line with City's TransformTO, Congestion Management and Vision Zero aims - to reduce emissions and congestion and to increase road safety - it is highly desirable that a growing number of households meet their transportation needs without a personal automobile. Increased uptake and use of cargo bikes by residents in Toronto could help the City to achieve these aims.

Transportation Services does not have information on the exact number of cargo bikes owned by city residents. Reported sales from local suppliers of these vehicles estimate that around one hundred (100) cargo bikes have been sold to residents in the Toronto area each year since the pilot program began, and that sales are increasing year-over-year. Despite this, the percentage of modal share in Toronto that is conducted by cargo bikes remains significantly lower than other vehicle types, including lower than many other micromobility types.

Current Regulations for Accommodating On-Street Parking for Cargo Bikes

Allowing for a new vehicle type to operate in the city requires consideration around how best to allocate space for that vehicles' parking needs. When the City of Toronto opted into the provincial cargo bike pilot program, amendments were made to the City of Toronto's Municipal Codes in order to include cargo bikes (also known as cargo power-assisted bicycles) in the definition of a 'vehicle' and to delineate space within the right-of-way that they could legally occupy. Below are the most prominent rules around parking cargo bikes in the City of Toronto's public right-of-way:

- Cargo bikes are recognized as a 'vehicle' in the City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 950, Traffic and Parking and have been granted permission to be left in the public right-of way in the same manner as other vehicles are, provided that they comply with the parking regulations that apply to all vehicles (e.g., the city-wide 3-hour unsigned parking rule).
- Section 950-201 B of Chapter 950 further clarifies that cargo bikes are permitted to be left in the public right-of-way in such a manner (including curbside space and boulevards) as to cause the least possible obstruction to pedestrians and other vehicular traffic.
- Although they are recognized as a vehicle type in Chapter 950, cargo bikes are not a vehicle type that is eligible to participate in the city's permit parking program. This means that the City of Toronto does not permit cargo bikes to park in permit parking areas overnight.

Options for Cargo Bike Parking

The General Manager, Transportation Services was requested by the Infrastructure and Environment Committee to consider further amending the Municipal Code Chapter 925, Permit Parking in order to relax restrictions that limit cargo bike's ability to park in permit parking areas. Motion IE7.7 identified a number of reasons for requesting expanding the parking allowances for cargo bikes in permit parking spaces, including that the current rules unfairly favour motor vehicle users and that this is preventing some constituents from purchasing cargo bikes. Two options were suggested that might alleviate this current obstacle, which included amendments to the appropriate Municipal Code Chapters to:

1. Permit owners of cargo bikes to voluntarily apply for and display a unique licence plate, and allow those who do so to purchase a parking permit; or
2. Permit cargo bikes to park in the same places on the public right of way where a private automobile may park, as if they had a parking permit, without requiring them to purchase a permit.

Licensing Cargo Bikes

Transportation Services staff do not recommend adopting a licensing process as a strategy to manage cargo bike use in Toronto, including implementing it as a method of providing cargo bike users with parking permits.

The formal licensing of cargo bikes is not viable because the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario, the governing body which oversees the licensing of vehicles in the province, has rejected incorporating bicycles into its licensing operations.

The option of using an alternative licensing process for cargo bikes that would be operated by the City of Toronto outside of the MTO's management, is not a feasible option. It would require the City's permit parking team to create a specialized and entirely separate permit process just for cargo bikes; a process that would be time and resource intensive to establish and manage. The City of Toronto has a long-standing position against the licensing of bicycles, dealt with at great length over the years and therefore Transportation Services does not recommend proceeding with the adoption of any option that incorporates licensing of cargo bikes.

Exempting Cargo Bikes from Permit Parking Restrictions

Transportation Services staff have considered the option of exempting cargo bikes to allow them to be parked in permit parking areas without a permit. However, this option is also not considered a practical solution as it would pose other problems such as, susceptibility to theft or damage by mischief or by adjacent vehicles. A jurisdictional scan of Canadian cities showed that other cities are not considering this type of exemption for the same reasons mentioned.

Allowing cargo bike riders to park their vehicle without a permit and without a fee might be viewed resentfully by residents who go through the process of applying, and paying, for permits for their permitted vehicles to access permit parking areas. Permit parking needs have been a long-standing issue for many residents, and providing free cargo bike parking, despite its environmental benefits would likely not be well viewed.

Installing Bike Corrals that Accommodate Cargo Bikes in Permit Parking Areas

Transportation Services recommends that its existing City process - the installation of bike corrals - may serve as an appropriate and partial solution to convenient cargo bike parking. Below are images of a typical bike corral.



Photo Credit: City of Toronto



Photo Credit: City of Toronto

Bike Corrals

Bike corrals are a public bicycle parking solution that are installed in the curb lane, and which typically provide parking facilities for fourteen (14) standard sized bikes in the same space where one motor vehicle would normally be parked. Currently, the City has deployed thirty-two (32) bike corrals across the city. They can be installed on a seasonal basis or year-round, depending on need. The cost of single bike corral is approximately \$4,750 (includes installation cost; net of HST). Locations are determined through a Councillor-led request process and there are existing examples of these corrals being utilized in permit parking areas in Toronto. While the City of Toronto does not currently provide specific spaces for cargo bikes within bike corrals, it is possible to reconfigure the corrals and their security racks to accommodate these larger bikes.

Benefits of Bike Corrals

There are several benefits of employing bike corrals in permit parking areas to accommodate the overnight parking needs of cargo bike users:

- Bike corrals are an appropriately scaled solution for cargo bike parking. Due to the limited number of cargo bikes currently owned by Toronto households, it makes sense to address these requests for accommodation on a localized scale and as they arise.
- Utilizing an existing program to accommodate the needs of a vehicle still within a provincial pilot period is a prudent option. As cargo bikes are still operating within this context and have not yet been established as a permanently permitted vehicle by the MTO or the City of Toronto, Transportation Services staff recommend that it would be more practical to focus on solutions that may already exist within existing policies and infrastructure offerings rather than undertaking large structural changes to our existing programs, such as permit parking operations.
- Bike corrals help provide additional security for cargo bikes users when parking their vehicles in the curbside. Parking cargo bikes 'free standing' (not locked to a stationary object) on the curbside for extended periods of time comes with a certain degree of risk. Also, bike corrals normally have bookend barriers which can prevent cars from mistakenly running into, and damaging, the parked cargo bikes.
- Bike corrals help to clear up ambiguity surrounding the allowance of parking cargo bikes on-street in the same locations as motor vehicles. Currently, there appears to be a lack of public understanding of if or where cargo bikes are allowed to park. There is also concern that motor vehicle drivers, who are looking to utilize the same in-demand curb space, may try to 'reposition' or remove a parked cargo bike from the curbside to park their own vehicle. Having cargo bike parking situated in a delineated space (i.e., bike corrals) will provide a clear indication of the permitted use of the space.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Recognizing the increasing demand for safer, more convenient cargo bike parking options is important to ensure that the growing number of residents can meet their transportation needs without a personal automobile. The deployment of bike corrals in neighbourhoods where there is an obvious demand for cargo bike parking can be accommodated through this program and with the assistance of the local councillors who are most aware of their community's needs.

The Division will work with Councillors to identify locations for the roll-out of a limited number of adapted bike corrals and set up criteria to determine their take-up and efficacy.

Transportation Services will continue to monitor the growth of cargo bike uptake and usage in the city, including investigating the needs of users, and actions undertaken by of other municipalities in support of cargo bikes.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

None.