



Monday, June 10, 2024

Chair Chris Moise and Members  
Toronto & East York Community Council  
Toronto City Hall  
100 Queen St. West  
Toronto, ON

*Sent electronically to teycc@toronto.ca*

Dear Chair Moise and Members of the Committee,

***Re: TE14.38, Avenue Road Study – Interim Update  
and Proposed Site-Specific Road Safety Improvements***

**We support** the pedestrian safety improvements recommended by Transportation Services for the 280-metre section of Avenue Road between Davenport Road and Dupont Street. We likewise supported the safety improvements recommended to city council at the May 28, 2024 meeting of the Infrastructure & Environment Committee (IEC), specifically the proposed cycle track. We also agree with other submissions that the retention of curbside parking spaces --- as recommended by city staff (though absent any road safety rationale) --- at the expense of a wider pedestrian area is inconsistent with the wider objectives of this project, and city plans and policies, to address long-standing dangers to vulnerable road users on Avenue Road.

We also believe that the piecemealing of safety improvements into three distinct sections on this two-kilometre stretch of Avenue Road offers an instructive case study on why the city's approach and process for remedying dangerous road conditions and meeting its climate goals continue to fall short.

***Background to Avenue Road dangers and subsequent push for safety improvements***

Avenue Road — which formerly constituted part of Highway 11A — was widened during the 1950s and early 1960s, an era when moving cars (quickly) was treated as the solution to most transportation problems. Fred Gardiner, the Chair of what was then known as Metro Toronto (now the City of Toronto), considered it advisable to move back utility poles, narrow sidewalks, and widen roads as a way to increase the speed and volume of motor traffic. The current configuration of Avenue Road was one of many “successful” initiatives by Mr. Gardiner. But

despite the investment of colossal amounts of public resources, his legacy is that of a failure to even solve the problem of motor traffic congestion, while leaving us with roads that are so dangerous that many city residents are killed or seriously injured each year. The current City of Toronto approach --- as reflected in city plans such as our Vision Zero Road Safety Plan --- is a clear rejection of the thinking of Gardiner who once said that: “It seems you are either going to be lucky and avoid an accident or you are not going to be lucky.”

The Avenue Road Safety Coalition was formed in 2017, after a city study had reviewed the dangers, including excess motor speeds, on Avenue Road but only recommended minor adjustments that prioritized the movement of cars and trucks over the safety of people. The Avenue Road coalition rejected this approach. (The undersigned was a founder of the coalition, comprised of residents’ associations, cycling and pedestrian advocacy groups, as well as education and social justice groups.) The demand of the coalition was concise and simple: to widen sidewalks and lower speeds – consistent with the safety benefits of lower speeds (induced by a narrower road) to all road users, and an appreciation of the ongoing political resistance to any changes to arterial roads that might reduce motor traffic capacity. The group even collaborated with Brown & Storey Architects which prepared (*pro bono*) [a visionary re-design of Avenue Road](#) that would convert this dangerous arterial to a linear park that preserved some motor vehicle passage while prioritizing safety and beauty befitting the road’s iconic place in the city.

Over the ensuing six years, the coalition managed only to secure minor changes that marginally improved safety. Then, in 2023, interim design measures for the entire two-kilometre stretch were finally proposed and made the subject of a [comprehensive public consultation and survey](#). The result was a 50-50 split in responses that pitted traditional views of motor traffic priority against modern concepts of road safety that advance city plans and policies. We note that thousands of people now call Avenue Road home, and a substantial list of new residential towers are either planned or under construction. (The 50-50 split likely underplayed, based on [an earlier Avenue Road survey](#), the desire for safer conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. At least some percentage of respondents did not support the improvements because they did not go far enough in improving safety.)

The proposed interim measures were slated to go to IEC on March 27, 2024, but for unknown reasons the matter was deferred to an unspecified future date. On April 30, 2024, a bicyclist was killed on the 700-metre segment between Bloor Street and Davenport Road – the third cyclist killed on this stretch in less than a decade. A cycle track proposal for this segment (previously included in the staff proposal) was suddenly back on the agenda for the May 28 IEC meeting. The installation, with the full support of the Avenue coalition --- as well as Community Bikeways, among many others --- was recommended by the IEC for installation, and is slated to go to City Council shortly. Meanwhile, the 280-metre segment of Avenue Road between Davenport and Dundas Street was then scheduled for TEYCC debate on June 11, 2024 with no date for the remaining, perilous section of Avenue Road between the CPR tracks and St. Clair Avenue West. (The section south of the CPR tracks is in the ward of Councillor Dianne Saxe, and the northern portion in the ward of Councillor Josh Matlow.)

## Road safety as a right

The Vision Zero Road Safety Plan makes clear that human safety is the priority in all transportation decision-making -- and yet this is far from how this matter is playing out. (We expressed [similar concerns in our letter to the IEC of May 27, 2024](#) relating to the slow pace of implementation of the cycling network plan.)

First, the April 30, 2024 tragedy that [claimed the life of Ali Sezgin Armagan](#) was the impetus for bringing the staff proposal to the IEC on May 28, 2024. At the time of this death, the status of the staff proposal, including a planned cycle track (which had been included in the public consultation and survey) was unknown. As noted, this stretch of roadway had claimed the lives of two other cyclists in less than a decade. **The city's Vision Zero plan is intended to prevent deaths, instead of simply reacting to deaths after they have occurred.** Vulnerable street users should not have to sacrifice their lives as a precondition for getting safe road infrastructure. The Armagan tragedy --- in the context of longstanding calls for safety improvements to Avenue Road --- can only be considered a sad failure of the city's road safety plan.

Second, debates about road safety improvements continue to be focused on trying to accommodate existing levels of motor traffic when the city's plans and policies are clearly aimed at reducing the use of motor vehicles. In addition, a key goal of the [TransformTO Net Zero Strategy](#) is to convert to walking, cycling, and transit 75% of all trips under five kilometres. This goal can only be achieved with significantly less car use, yet we seldom hear any political or bureaucratic representatives say that people must drive less — and too rarely do they actually make “concrete” design and policy decisions that result in our roads being significantly less conducive to driving. Today, the first priority of city policies is not to facilitate the historic privilege of motorists, but to implement the right of all city residents to be safe on public roads.

Third, if road safety is a right --- as city policies confirm --- then a new approach is needed to ensure the right is reflected in City Hall's decision-making approach. Decisions cannot be based on the superior influence of certain groups --- especially residents' associations that are often dominated by (wealthy, car-dependent) homeowners who represent a small percentage of local populations. This influence is often based on the greater proximity to power of these groups and their better understanding of how to engage in --- and their greater capacity to influence --- political outcomes. Ironically, but tellingly, the two-kilometre area of Avenue Road here in question is encompassed by three former wards where the proportion of walk, cycle, and transit already dominates the transportation mode share – at least in numbers.<sup>1</sup> We believe that once road safety decisions become political decisions, as appears to be the case here, those with superior influence generally prevail – or at least succeed in delaying action until more lives are lost. If road safety is treated as a right, then political influence cannot be the key determinant in decisions.

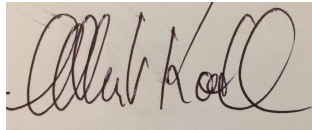
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<sup>1</sup> The 2023 [Transportation for Tomorrow Survey](#) results using current wards is not yet available.

We have on a [previous occasion written to both the mayor and Transportation Services](#), and supplemented our letter by articulating our position in an [opinion piece](#), urging a review of the current, excessively slow and cumbersome approach to achieving our road safety and related climate goals.

With this letter, we repeat our call to meet with senior Transportation Services officials to discuss how to expedite road safety decision-making, accelerate the installation of safe infrastructure, and speed up progress in meeting the city's important road safety and climate goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Albert Koehl", on a light-colored rectangular background.

Albert Koehl, Coordinator

cc. Barbara Gray, General Manager, Transportation Services  
Councillor Josh Matlow (Ward 12, Toronto - St. Paul's)  
Councillor Dianne Saxe (Ward 11, University-Rosedale)  
Avenue Road Safety Coalition  
Brown & Storey Architects

*Community Bikeways (est. May 2020) is a grassroots organization dedicated to holding City Hall to account for implementing its cycling network, Vision Zero Road Safety, and TransformTO climate plans. We also strive to amplify community voices, offer policy solutions, and host community events that highlight the joy, affordability, and convenience of cycling.*