

Bicycling in Toronto 2005

Report Card

July 2005

Following two decades of steadily improving conditions for Toronto cyclists, progress towards accessible and safe bicycling is stalled. The city's ambitious plan to double the number of Toronto cyclists over ten years has been derailed because of inadequate funding and insufficient political will to proceed with decisions that would encourage a more bicycle-friendly city. Councilors seem particularly unable to oppose merchants lobbying against bike infrastructure on arterial roads. Large parts of Toronto continue to be impractical for all but the most determined of riders. Residents of neighbourhoods outside of Old Toronto have few options but to depend on personal vehicles or an ever less efficient public transit system. The lack of a truly effective advocate for cyclists among both councilors and bureaucrats has limited the scope and scale of cycling initiatives to those simplest to achieve. Bureaucrats and politicians must recognize that greatly expanding the number of cyclists in Toronto requires pursuing measures that promote and encourage cycling and actively discourage car use. Restrictions on parking and the implementation of car-free areas - common in European cities - are necessary. "Until now," wrote John Pucher and Ralph Buehler of Rutgers University in a 2005 paper *Cycling Trends and Policies in Canadian Cities*, "only the politically 'easy' measures have been adopted." Pucher and Buehler recommend the city and other levels of government work to reduce urban sprawl, restrict car use and increase the cost of driving in the city as strategies to attract more cyclists to city streets. ARC calls on the city to renew their commitment to cyclists in Toronto. We ask councillors to fully fund the cycling plan and ensure roads are safe for all residents. ARC simply asks that politicians and bureaucrats follow through on their promises.

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Overall Cycling Conditions, former City of Toronto

Positives: City traffic counts suggest recent downtown bike lanes have increased cycling on key corridors. More commuters mean safer sharing of roads with motor vehicles. **C+ (→)**

Negatives: Poor condition of city streets - even in bicycle lanes and posted cycling routes - are a hazard for riders. St. Clair Ave. redesign doesn't include bike lanes. Air quality continues to worsen.

Overall Cycling Conditions, Outside of the former City of Toronto **D (→)**

Positives: Transportation Services is prioritizing the construction of infrastructure outside of the old city. Last year seven kilometers of bike lanes were added.

Negatives: Cycling infrastructure remains grossly inadequate and local councilors, such as Etobicoke-Lakeshore's Peter Milczyn, are often opposed to cycling infrastructure. High-speed, high-volume arterial roads are a threat to the safety of suburban cyclists.

Momentum and Leadership **C- (→)**

Positives: City remains committed to a core of bicycle initiatives and continues a modest number of infrastructure improvements - no small achievement during a period of on-going budget cuts and spending constraints. Toronto Cycling Committee has new membership - and new energy.

Negatives: Politicians continue to renege on promises to implement the Toronto Bike Plan. Its ten-year timetable has doubled. It's all talk, no action.

Key to Grades

- A: Bike heaven; the envy of cyclists' anywhere.
- B: A good reason to get on your bike in the morning.
- C: OK, but could look to other pro-bike cities for inspiration and ideas.
- D: As bike friendly as crossing wet streetcar tracks with a speeding car on your back wheel.
- F: Two flat tires.

Fatalities and Injuries:

City Effort : C (↔)
Reality for Cyclists : D (↔)

Positives: Even given recent deaths, fatalities remain at a historic low.

Negatives: Toronto recorded two cycling deaths in 2004 and fatalities and injuries remain preventable. City found negligent by courts in not providing safe road conditions in the wake of a collision on Queen Street West. City pays settlement and takes no action other than telling cyclists to ride elsewhere.

On-Road Bicycle Routes

City Effort : C (↔)
Reality for Cyclists : C+ (↔)

Positives: Lane network continues to grow, albeit at a snail's pace. Nifty new route system with on-street signs will help cyclists better negotiate the city.

Negatives: Shameful councilors cave on bike lane on rebuilt Royal York Rd. despite its presence on the Toronto Bike Plan. Lack of bike lanes on busiest downtown cycling roads makes them dangerous for riders. City behind planned construction of lanes due to lack of funds and available staff time. Sacrificing the safety of riders for parking by exposing them to car doorings and sideswipes continues to be the rule.

Off-Road Cycling & Greenways

City Effort : A (↔)
Reality for Cyclists : A- (↔)

Positives: City boasts extensive network of off-road cycling paths and is in the process of constructing lanes on hydro corridors on the outer edges of Toronto.

Negatives: Lack of winter maintenance for paths mean they are effective commuter routes only half the year.

Parking

City Effort : A (↔)
Reality for Cyclists : B (↔)

Positives: City generally responsive to requests for increased bike parking. Toronto has the most active bicycle parking program of any city in North America.

Negatives: Often slow response to requests for new parking. Still too many areas - particularly at private businesses - where it is a challenge to find parking.

Policing

City Effort : F (↔)
Reality for Cyclists : D (↔)

Positives: Police officers often ignore bicyclists.

Negatives: Many police officers don't understand traffic laws as they pertain to cyclists and the police in general seem uninterested in enforcing laws crucial to the safety of cyclists such as ticketing cars parked in bicycle lanes. "Safety enforcement" campaigns frequently seem like an exercise to unfairly ticket cyclists.

Cycling Support Services

City Effort : D (↔)
Reality for Cyclists : D (↔)

Positives: City continues to actively promote a broad range of popular cycling programs and initiatives including Bike Week, a useful web site and an excellent bicycle map.

Negatives: Emphasis on education can be used as an excuse for delaying crucial bicycle infrastructure work. Not enough support in crucial areas such as information on insurance and the rights of cyclists.

Transit

City Effort : D (↔)
Reality for Cyclists : F (↔)

Positives: Toronto Transit Commission initiates a pilot project to use bike racks on a number of suburban routes including those serving Bathurst St. and Dufferin St. with routes stretching from Lake Ontario to the city limits.

Negatives: Transit authorities still continue to lag other jurisdictions in integrating bikes with transit.

Provincial and Federal Efforts to Promote Cycling

Positives: No actions, no positives.

Provincial Effort : F (↔)
Federal Effort: F (↔)

Negatives: Ontario not very active in funding cycling initiatives or infrastructure. Feds Kyoto funding too focused on energy and gives short shrift to building sustainable transit, among other issues.

Implementation of Recommendations from Coroner's Report on Cycling Fatalities

City Effort : D (↔)
Reality for Cyclists : F (↔)
Federal Effort : F (↔)

Positives: Nothing to report.

Negatives: City fails to produce required progress report on initiatives related to Coroner's Report. Province continues to ignore recommendation to require large trucks to have side guards on wheels to reduce crushing injuries that can produce fatalities.

Key to Arrows

- ↗ : Better
- : No Change
- ↘ : Worse