



Friday, March 8, 2024

Mayor Olivia Chow  
Toronto City Hall  
100 Queen St. W.  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Mayor Chow,

***Re: Road safety --- on foot, bicycle, or transit --- is a right, not a matter of debate***

We believe that the safety of city residents on public roads must be accepted and treated as a right, not a matter to be constantly re-visited and debated under the guise of public consultation about project design, implementation, or review.

Toronto's Vision Zero Road Safety Plan states that ["human life should be prioritized over all other objectives within all aspects of the transportation system."](#) The [Complete Streets Guidelines](#) affirm that our streets "reflect the values of our city." The Guidelines, which integrate city policies, articulate measures to safely accommodate all road users. The Bike Plan accepts the place of bicycles in our transportation system, and the value of cycling to the quality of life in Toronto, while the [TransformTO Net Zero Strategy](#) sets a 2030 timeline to convert to walk, cycle and transit 75% of all trips under five kilometres – an objective that requires safe roads.

In the absence of clear direction from elected leaders – not only in plans and policies, but in practice --- about the right of city residents to be safe on public roads, the opponents of Complete Streets projects are enabled, often emboldened, to make light of the safety interests of their fellow residents, including those who walk, cycle, or take transit. The result is that many public debates and consultations about Complete Streets and cycling infrastructure are not about how to make a road safe, but about whether, if, or why a road should be made safe at all. The message that the current process suggests to some members of the public is both problematic and troubling, namely that road safety (regardless of the important precepts of city plans and policies) depends on where one lives in the city, the inclinations of the local councillor, or the ability and capacity of advocacy groups to mobilize community support.

This attitude is often on full display at public meetings, including at a public event on February 28, ostensibly held for the purpose of discussing new cycling infrastructure in Etobicoke Centre. We believe that the local councillor's objective was at least in part, if not largely, to revisit a

Complete Streets project on Bloor Street West that had not only been overwhelmingly approved by City Council in a 21-1 vote but fully installed. This project, in a ward adjacent to that of the councillor in question, provides a bike lane to protect cyclists, lowers motor speeds (by design), creates a safety buffer from cars and trucks for people on sidewalks, and implements safer intersections. (The project, which currently runs adjacent to affluent neighbourhoods, has already been approved for extension to Six Points at Kipling Avenue, a stretch along which there are many car-free households in dozens of residential towers.)

At the meeting, a staff presentation about cycling plans in the ward and the benefits of Complete Streets and cycling was mocked and jeered by many audience members. Some participants even cheered and laughed at the comment of one participant who told the staff panel that when he sees a group of cyclists on The Queensway who are taking the lane, he would like to ["run them over to get them out of my way."](#) This meeting was not an outlier, indeed cavalier, dismissive, even malevolent, attitudes to road safety are displayed at other meetings. Tragically, during the very same month of this meeting a number of city residents were killed, including two cyclists in Scarborough, or seriously injured on city roads.

Unfortunately, and not coincidentally, the city remains far short of its Vision Zero goal and continues to fall behind targets set out in its Bike Plan, despite the crucial role of cycling infrastructure to achieving our climate goals. In the almost quarter century since the adoption of Toronto's first bike plan in 2001, the city has only once come close to meeting its targets, specifically in 2020, because Toronto was in the grip of a global pandemic. Since then, the city has again consistently, and significantly, fallen short of targets in its bike plans.

In terms of the city bike plan, one way for city leaders to send a clear message that all residents have the right to be safe on our roads is to update the bike lane approval process. Under the current system, the bike plan itself, which is the product of extensive research, expert input, public consultation, and committee debate, is only approved by council "in principle." The result is that even minor bike lane installations or extensions must go back to committee and to council for (re)approval, usually after exhausting community mobilizations and staff work. In fact, even a half century after the start of the Bicycle Revival of the 1970s, Toronto still does not have a city-wide cycling network. If public roads had been planned in the same way (or road repairs undertaken in a comparable manner) we would still have a multitude of major gaps.

A superior approach, consistent with the message of safety as a right, would be a one-step plan approval process followed by delegation to staff – an approach that would be particularly suited to arterial bike lanes that are vital to a city-wide cycling network. In such a process, City Council would, as before, approve the bike plan --- after extensive study, public consultation, and council debate --- but then delegate the installation to city staff, without the need to go back to committee and council for another round of debate and voting. City staff would still consult the public about particular design elements, such as locating business loading zones, accommodating persons with disabilities, minimizing impacts on transit users, and preventing motor traffic infiltration onto local streets, but without having to go back to council.

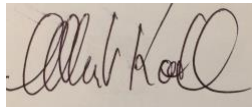
It can be no surprise, under the current regime, that only four per cent of public roads in Toronto have bike lanes of any kind, or that our city continues to suffer a high death and injury toll on its roads. Cities, including our neighbour, the City of Montreal, that have been more successful in installing cycling infrastructure, usually take a different approach to that of Toronto.

The message about the right to safe roads should be buttressed by public education campaigns about the vital importance of safe roads for all city residents, regardless of the traditional prioritization of motor vehicles and driving in the post-WWII period. Indeed, given that many city residents ride bicycles, and that all of us are at some point pedestrians, the person who is killed or grievously injured may not be a mere stranger, but a parent, child, sibling, or other loved one. Such an education campaign would save time and money relative to the current process where the same disproven arguments are endlessly repeated, often draining valuable staff resources. The savings of time would extend to tempering the resistance not only to road safety measures, but to transit projects such as busways.

We believe that safety cannot be a some-day, some-time, or some-place luxury for some people --- a perk granted or denied based on local circumstances --- but a right shared by all in our city regardless of geography, class status, or the local councillor.

We are happy to answer any questions you might have (by email or at 416-533-1231). We are eager to discuss this important matter with you in person.

Sincerely,



**Community Bikeways (TCBC)**



**Safe Parkside**



**Toronto East Cyclists**

**Najia Zewari**  
**Women's Cycling Network**

cc Barbara Gray, General Manager, Transportation Services