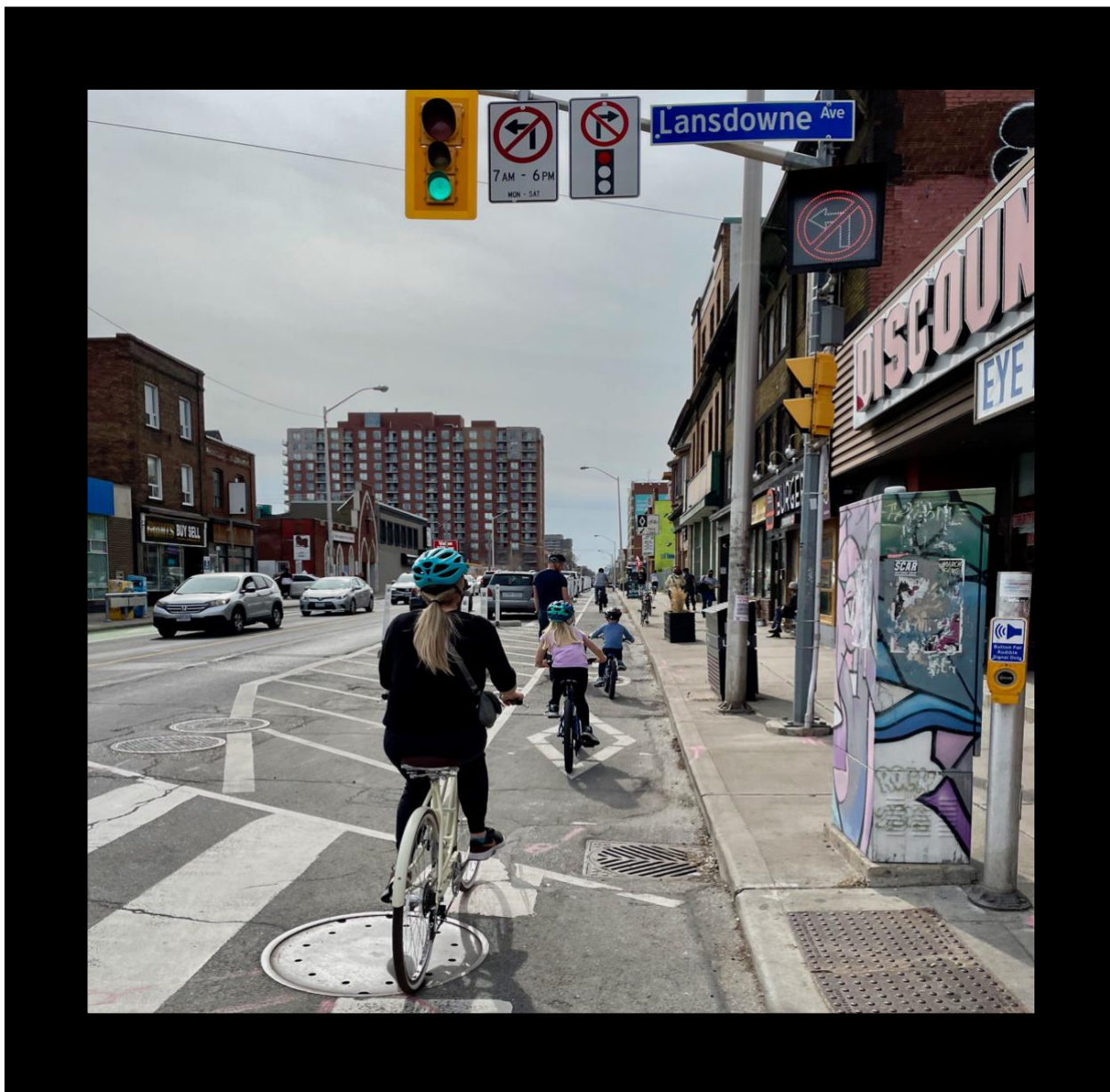


# REPORT CARD

## City of Toronto Cycling Infrastructure



November 22, 2021\*

## Acknowledgements

This Bikeway Report Card is the result of generous contributions of time and effort from 23 volunteers, experienced urban cyclists, over a seven-week period in October and November 2021. We are grateful to:

Michael Black, Jason Chau, Ingrid Buday, Marc Goldrub, Dave Edwards, Mark Fernandez, Mark Fernando, Gideon Forman, Bill Gaw, Steve Glassman, David Kamnitzer, Arthur Klimowicz, Brian MacLean, Jun Nogami, Mary Ann Neary, Lucy Perri, Phillip Piltch, Natasha Pirani, Janet Joy Wilson, and Douglas Yardley

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**\*This report is updated from a November 18, 2021 version to include results from one outstanding evaluation, to correct one calculation of length, and to make corresponding and other text adjustments. A [spreadsheet](#), with links to the individual evaluations, accompanies our report.**

Photos:

*Front cover: Bloor St W bike lane, April 10, 2021, looking west at Lansdowne Ave  
(courtesy Jun Nogami)*

*Back cover: St Dennis Dr bike lane, Flemingdon Park, November 13, 2021, looking west toward Don Mills Rd and Ontario Science Centre (Albert Koehl)*



## Introduction

Fifty years ago, Metro Toronto, now the City of Toronto, experienced a “Bicycle Boom” -- a wave that formed on the U.S. west coast then moved eastward across the continent reaching Toronto with full force in 1971. City residents were again embracing the bicycle for everyday travel. One thing, however, quickly became clear: there were few safe places to ride a bike. The local government, reluctantly at first, then with more energy in later decades, settled upon the idea of accommodating cyclists with on-street bikeways for utilitarian cycling. The first boulevard-level bike path was installed on Eglinton Avenue in 1972 and the first bike lane on Poplar Plains Road in 1979.

Now, for the first time in the half century since the Bicycle Boom, we offer a comprehensive, Toronto-wide evaluation of utilitarian cycling facilities. How does our cycling infrastructure rate in terms of quality, safety, connectivity, and utility? Where is the city doing well, and where is there room for improvement? These are the issues we addressed in evaluating every significant bike lane, cycle track, boulevard-level bike path,<sup>1</sup> and contra-flow bike lane in the city.

Evaluations were completed for 217 km of bikeways with 78 individual report cards, [which are linked on an accompanying spreadsheet](#).

### Report card summary (excluding contra-flow bike lanes)

<b>POOR</b> .....	<b>42.65 km</b>	(18 evaluations)	
<b>MEDIOCRE</b> .....	<b>74.12 km</b>	(30 evaluations)	TOTAL 116.77 km
<b>GOOD</b> .....	<b>40.0 km</b>	(12 evaluations)	
<b>VERY GOOD</b> ...	<b>51.5 km</b>	includes waterfront route of 22 km	(11 evaluations)

In sum, 56% of the city’s utilitarian bikeways scored “poor” or “mediocre,” or what essentially amounts to a failing grade.

### Evaluation criteria and methodology

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<sup>1</sup> Boulevard-level bike paths are sometimes known as sidewalk-level paths. The city’s count of bikeways usually reports these paths with off-road (recreational) trails. The location of these paths on the side of the road --- and therefore very much resembling cycle tracks --- convinced us to include them in our review. Boulevard-level paths are often separated from the road by grass medians instead of cement barriers – a difference of little practical significance.

Included among the 78 evaluations were 14 identified E-W or N-S continuous bikeway “routes,” comprised of 47 individual streets with bikeways.<sup>2</sup> We evaluated 8.68 km of contra-flow bike lanes in seven evaluations.<sup>3</sup>

We did not evaluate off-road or recreational cycling trails, which the city generally classifies as “multi-use trails.” These trails have limited utility for everyday cycling for a variety of reasons, including the fact that they are typically not lit at night, have relatively few access points, are often awkwardly (but legally) shared with people on foot, often involve meandering routes or steep inclines or descents at access and exit points, suffer from large gaps, and are not maintained year-round. (We leave the evaluation of recreational trails to a future date.)

In our evaluations, we nonetheless made a few exceptions where the recreational trail portions were integrated with (and connected directly to) on-road sections to form continuous E-W or N-S bikeways. The waterfront “route,” for example, is made up of large sections of recreational trails along the lake, connecting directly to boulevard-level bike paths on Lakeshore Blvd E and W, and Queen’s Quay. We note that the waterfront route, the product of at least 50 years of activism by community members and work by City Hall, was the longest bikeway or route evaluated and among only eleven assessed grades of “very good.”

Our report card criteria weighed quality and safety on one hand with utility and connectivity on the other. A bike lane may, for example, offer safe passage, but if it is hidden away in a location where no one will use it, its grade will suffer. In the same way, a bike lane that is along a popular route with attractive destinations but offers little protection to cyclists from heavy and fast-moving motor traffic, the grade for the bikeway will again suffer.

Among the factors considered in assessing bikeways were whether:

- bikeway markings are clear and the level of protection consistent with the speed of motor traffic;
- there are gaps in the bikeway, or the bikeway ends prior to intersections;
- cyclists are free of perils such as being “doored” by parked cars or face obstructions such parked cars that protrude into the bikeway from narrow parking lanes;
- the bikeway connects people to attractive everyday destinations including shopping areas, schools, or employment centres; and
- the bikeway connects to other bikeways, including recreational trails or to transit stations (allowing for combined bike-TTC trip).

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<sup>2</sup> We excluded from evaluation any bikeways that were less than 450 metres long, unless they were included in a “route” -- defined as a continuous E-W or N-S bikeway comprised of cycling infrastructure. Among bike lanes/cycle tracks/boulevard-level paths, 17 were less than 450m in length (100m to 440m), while seven contra-flow lanes were less than 450m (ranging from 100 to 410 metres in length). (Sharrows were not treated as cycling infrastructure, although mentioned when they serve a wayfinding purpose.)

<sup>3</sup> Among contra-flows, one was rated as poor (0.63 km); five were rated as good (5.35 km); and 1 was rated as very good (2.5 km). Some contra-flows were included in longer east-west and north-south routes and not included in separate evaluations.

The volunteers, chosen from among experienced urban cyclists, were instructed in advance on the evaluation criteria, then assigned to complete a report card on individual bikeways after riding the bikeway. The volunteers were instructed that in the case of doubt about a grade, the higher (better) grade was to be assigned. Once the evaluation was completed, a second volunteer reviewed the evaluation after visiting the bikeway.<sup>4</sup> In the case of differences in opinion about the grade, the two parties reviewed the matter to see if a consensus could be reached. Where disagreements could not be resolved, an adjudication committee member could be called upon to add a third voice to resolve the issue. The project took seven weeks to complete.

### **A note about road construction and the scope of this report**

The danger from road construction came up often in our report cards. Although we mention these concerns --- especially where little or no provision was made for cyclists' safety --- evaluators were instructed to give such problems limited weight. We appreciate the problem of such projects in compromising safety where no remedial measures are taken (a common and persistent problem in Toronto), however, since these road projects are temporary, we wanted to focus on underlying issues that will persist after the completion of road work. We did not want to divert attention from the underlying problems, nor to offer a ready-made excuse for inaction by the city once construction was terminated.

We can only evaluate what exists, but we recognize that a significant shortcoming of this report card process is that it undervalues the fact that many parts of the city have no infrastructure at all. For example, north of Eglinton Avenue there is an area the size of Guelph that has virtually no cycling facilities.

### **Conclusions**

This report offers a snapshot in time -- on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bicycle Boom.

The bikeway evaluation process that we developed establishes a benchmark against which progress can be measured in future years. The evaluations demonstrate that much of our cycling infrastructure is sub-standard: falling short at intersections, suffering unexplained gaps, or offering little protection from motor traffic --- thus suited only to the most confident riders while discouraging other potential riders such as youths, seniors and other vulnerable residents --- or located on streets with few appealing destinations.

We believe that this report card demonstrates a large backlog of bikeways in Toronto in need of significant upgrades. In fact, even bikeways rated as "good" or even "very good" had obvious identified safety deficiencies that should be addressed. Fortunately, these upgrades can be

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<sup>4</sup> In almost all cases the reviewer visited the evaluated bikeway, although in a small number of cases where the reviewer was familiar with the bikeway, the review could be conducted without a visit.

completed at a fraction of the cost for road and expressway infrastructure work, while offering a bigger payoff in terms of community benefits.

The number of bikeways that fail to meet a modern standard of quality or utility is substantial and requires special attention from City Hall. This upgrading should not be done at the expense of much-needed new cycling facilities. Toronto has already fallen significantly behind the City of Montreal and other leading cities around the world in cycling infrastructure, and risks falling further behind if time and resources available for new bike lanes are drained by upgrading old bike lanes, many of them 10, 20, and 30 or more years old.

***New, dedicated funding and resources are needed to bring outdated bikeways up to a modern standard.***

The COVID-19 pandemic reminded people of the value of bicycles for everyday transportation. In fact, the pandemic aside, there is a growing appreciation of the bicycle as a valuable component of an efficient urban transportation system that not only allows people to get to their destinations, but also addresses urgent problems of climate change, public health, equity, and road safety.

The City of Toronto's performance in creating a modern cycling network leaves much room for improvement. Serious investment in both updating old cycling infrastructure as well as building new infrastructure will greatly benefit city residents and raise the city's stature as a socially and environmentally responsible metropolis.





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