

**Memo to cyclists: Don't get bowled over**

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**Abstract (Summary)**

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**Full Text** (653 words)

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Former Winnipeg mayor Glen Murray has some advice for a new group of Toronto activists planning to press for bike lanes and trails: make like lawn bowlers.

Mr. Murray, speaking at a news conference held by the Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation, said the only way to get municipal politicians to follow through on their promises is, essentially, to make their lives hell.

That's why the city of Winnipeg under his tenure never dreamed of touching its 22 public lawn-bowling facilities: The lawn bowlers, no matter how much the popularity of their sport dwindled, were simply the loudest, most organized group of "curmudgeons" the city had ever seen.

"Every single city councillor lives in fear of these people," Mr. Murray said. The very smell of any impending budget cut brought them out, in their finest lawn-bowling duds, to make their case.

While there are dozens of pro-cycling groups and pedestrian organizations in the city, they haven't been "like a dog with a bone" on the councillors -- Case Ootes, in Toronto-Danforth, among them -- who often oppose the installation of bike lanes, scuppering the city's plans to build a network, Mr. Murray said.

A well-organized group of upset cyclists, dressed in lycra and wearing brightly coloured helmets, who made their case at committee hearings again and again might just make the difference, he suggested. "You have to make it more difficult [for politicians] not to do these things."

To that end, the new coalition, TCAT for short, has sent out a pre-election survey to all candidates running for mayor and council, asking them if they support the coalition's detailed plans to build bike lanes and trails and make the city more walkable.

Most of the responses are supportive or cautiously supportive -- so much so that it sometimes seems less than clear what real purpose the exercise serves. More than 100 candidates have responded, and the results are posted at [www.torontocat.ca](http://www.torontocat.ca).

Certainly, even by the city's own measures, its performance on bike lanes has been abysmal. In 2005, more than 16 kilometres of bike lanes were proposed in the bike plan.

But the city managed to build one measly kilometre, because of bureaucratic delays and roadblocks thrown up by reluctant councillors.

Mr. Murray, who supports the initiative in his role as chairman of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, said that armed with the surveys, activists will be able to hammer councillors who go back on their word.

"They're now on the record," Mr. Murray said. "And they're not on the record in a vague sort of way." He pointed out that organizers asked councillors to indicate whether they supported specific bike lanes in their wards, and concrete spending initiatives.

TCAT, a coming together of like-minded cycling and pedestrian-rights groups, is so new that it does not have a concrete plan of its activities, if any, after the election. But the idea is for activists to wave those surveys in councillors' faces if they go back on their word.

And the promotion of biking and walking, instead of driving, in major cities, Mr. Murray adds, isn't necessary only from the point of averting a carbon dioxide-driven worldwide environmental apocalypse.

It is a key factor in the here-and-now question of which cities will succeed in the post-industrial age.

He argues that attracting the 21st century's coveted, highly mobile, highly educated knowledge workers, who will drive economic growth, means creating a city where they want to live, a place where there are things to do and see, other than "driving by sprawl in an automobile."

And, as other cities, including Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Portland, Ore., have determined, he said, one easy way to create the "quality of place" to attract these workers is simply to build networks of bike and walking trails popular with them. No offence to lawn bowlers.

*Dr. Gridlock appears every Monday. Send comments or questions to [jgray@globeandmail.com](mailto:jgray@globeandmail.com)*

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