

Pick up in-store, or get them delivered to your door

SHOP NOW



Best

thestar.com

Bike plan misses benchmarks

The \$73 million city proposal was launched in 2001 and only one-third of work completed

November 16, 2007

PAOLA LORIGGIO
STAFF REPORTER

Though it's been cited as a key part of the Toronto's transit strategy, the city keeps falling further and further behind on its bike plan.

At the outset, there were to be 1,000 kilometres of bikeways – a mix of lanes, signed routes and park paths – in place by 2011. Six years later, less than a third are built and the deadline's been pushed back to 2012.



TANNIS TOOHEY/TORONTO STAR

Cycling commuter takes advantage of dedicated lane on Dundas St. E., one of relatively few arterial streets that have been given bike space.

"It's sort of like New Year's resolutions," said Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker, who bikes to city hall from Scarborough. "It's one thing to write them down, it's another to implement them.

"So far, we've simply not done enough."

This year, Toronto now hopes to add 15 kilometres of lanes and "sharrows," shared lanes marked with a bike symbol to indicate where cyclists should ride.

As of yesterday, 7.5 kilometres were completed, with the balance to come before year's end provided no major snowfall interferes, said Daniel Egan, manager for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

The goal set earlier this year: 30 kilometres.

The \$73 million bike plan was launched in 2001 and has since missed every benchmark. When the city unveiled its climate change plan this spring, it also vowed to step up its bike efforts.

With only five years to go before the program's newest deadline, the backlog has swamped the city's to-do list.

To catch up, 50 kilometres must be built in 2008, 75 the next year, and 90 each year thereafter, according to city documents.

"How are they going to do 50 kilometres next year when there are so many left over from this year?" asked Tammy Thorne, who sits on the steering committee of the Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation, a bike advocacy group. "Even with their own extension (of the deadline), they're not on track."

Meanwhile, nearby Markham, a relative newcomer to the world of cycling, last year added 100 kilometres of signed routes and 12 kilometres of dedicated bike lanes.

Markham plans to build 400 kilometres of bikeways in the next 20 years, partly by adding them on to new road developments, said transportation manager Lorenzo Mele.

Mele attributes the plan's early success to strong public interest in cycling, as well as the city's physical expansion.

Bikeways are tagged on to all new road projects, of which Markham has plenty, he said.

Not so for Toronto, which needs to carve out room for cyclists on existing roads, a process that often incurs the wrath of many.

But Toronto's bike plan is also hobbled by bureaucracy and financial woes.

Though the program's budget was nearly doubled this year, to \$3 million, a hiring freeze prevented the cycling committee from hiring the four extra staff it needs.

Now that two have been hired, things should speed up, said councillor and cycle committee chair Adrian Heaps. He also wants to streamline the process of authorizing new lanes by reviewing several at once.

Others say the solution is far more simple: increase funding.

"There's no extra money to catch up on the backlog," said Thorne.

"I hate to say money is the solution," De Baeremaeker said, "but sometimes, it is."