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No comparing Toronto, Denmark

December 15, 2009

Re:Denmark cycles into future, while

Toronto `lags behind,' Dec. 12

With the world's attention on Copenhagen, it's perfect timing for Tess Kalinowski's article highlighting how the Danish have embraced the bicycle. By contrast, Toronto's progress seems painstakingly slow.

Councillor Adrian Heaps is quoted as saying we only have anecdotal evidence about the economic impacts of bike lanes on Bloor St. But we do have scientific evidence. Last year we did a study asking both merchants and patrons about bike lanes on Bloor and the results were overwhelmingly positive. Among the findings: only 10 per cent of patrons drive to the Bloor Annex area; those arriving by foot and bicycle visit the most often and spend the most money per month; and bike lanes would likely result in more commercial activity, not less.

Nancy Smith Lea, Program Director,

Toronto Coalition for Active

Transportation, Clean Air Partnership

Copenhagen is much smaller in size than Toronto and has far greater population density. This is the folly of many relatively young U.S. and Canadian cities, built in the era of cars (when gas was cheap and pollution was not a concern). It is particularly intense in Toronto, but we are stuck with it and, contrary to rhetoric, our politicians are bent on making the problem worse by encouraging more sprawl (see "Planner slams Simcoe sprawl," Dec. 9, a particularly egregious example).

Greater area and low population density are, relatively speaking, not conducive to either more affordable and useable cycle paths or public transit. And Torontonians are unwilling to pay for it; these things are not free. That said, Toronto can do better on both fronts. To do so it must look at solutions unique to its unique environment and avoid impossible-to-duplicate comparisons to vastly different environments.

The place to start is to recognize Toronto's existing design, its relative lack of population density combined with sprawl, its NIMBYism and the fact that progress costs money. We simply cannot afford to accommodate all desires. Only then will Toronto realize its great potential beyond what it has (enviably) already achieved.

Paul N. Hornsby, Toronto