



Ring road for bikes on track

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A vision to connect Toronto's waterfront, major rivers, some railways and hydro corridors through an off-road multi-use trail is getting closer to completion.

At its last meeting in early July, Toronto city council approved the installation of 13 mid-block traffic signals that will accommodate cyclists and other users of the approximately 30 kilometres of new trails the city will build this fall along the Finch and Gatineau hydro corridors and beside CN Railway's Leaside spur in the Don River Valley. All but a few kilometres will be off-road.

City staff and Mayor David Miller have pumped the project as the largest expansion of Toronto's trail system in one year. Since the city's Bike Plan and its 10-year implementation strategy was released in 2001, the city has built fewer than six kilometres of trails a year. The new trails will take the city's total to 198 kilometres; the plan's 2011 goal was 249 kilometres.

Upon completion of the \$23-million trails project, 57 per cent of which is being funded by the provincial and federal government's recreational stimulus funding program, Toronto will be far closer to the completion of an off-road ring trail that would allow an intrepid and healthy cyclist or in-line skater to circle much of the megacity. Such a route, for instance, could go from the Martin Goodman Trail along the lakeshore, up the Humber River, across North York and Scarborough via the Finch hydro corridor, and then back southwest through the Gatineau hydro corridor and finally along the Don River to Lake Ontario. Of course, the less ambitious user would likely be satisfied with a day's ride along a portion of the system.

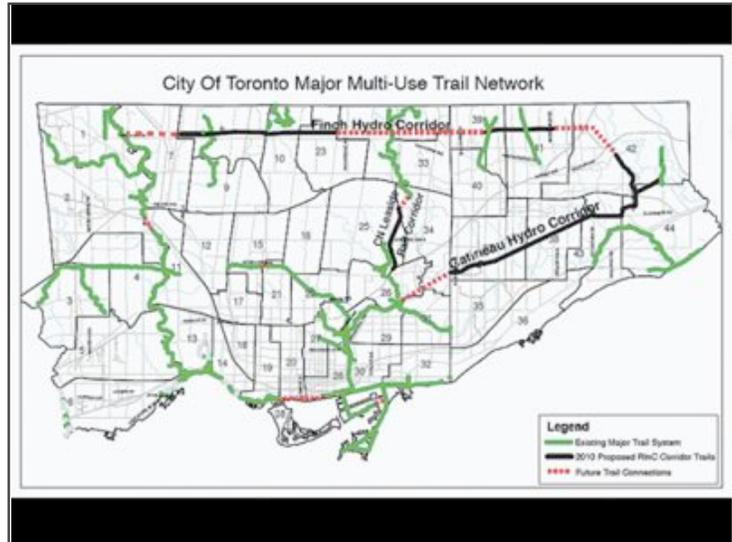
The Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation, which has pushed the city to build more off-road trails in its platforms, supported the construction.

"I think it's one of those things that's maybe not on people's radar on how important that is and how amazing that would be if we had those linkages in place," said TCAT's director, Nancy Smith Lea. "Already, the trail system is so well used and it's disconnected."

However, some gaps will still exist in the off-road chain, admitted Daniel Egan, the city's manager of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

There is a short but obvious break in the otherwise relatively uninterrupted Humber River trail, which runs the full height of the city, in Weston between Crawford-Jones Memorial and Cruickshank Park.

"We know that's a high priority," said Egan, explaining the proposed trail connection is on private property. "I don't know if we'll be able to build it next year, but we certainly need to resolve how it's going to be done."



Trail network. The City of Toronto's Major Multi-Use Trail Network. *Map/CITY OF TORONTO*

Similarly, a new trail along the CN Leaside spur between Eglinton Avenue and York Mills Road will essentially complete a trail system along the Don River from Steeles Avenue to the lake, save for a sliver of land connecting the trail north of York Mills to Betty Sutherland Park.

Both the Finch and Gattineau hydro corridor trails will also have to be completed. The tight timelines of the federal and provincial government stimulus funding programs, which require projects to be complete by the end of March, meant the city had to focus on easily completed projects, said Egan.

In central Toronto, the Martin Goodman Trail, "by far" the most heavily trafficked trail, will be connected from Spadina Avenue to Parliament Street, said Egan. The project, which would see the trail built alongside a pedestrian promenade south of the existing LRT right-of-way, will start next year but take about three years to complete, said Egan.

"One thing we've started to look at is some kind of bypass route," he said.

But a bypass, connecting Bathurst to the portlands via bridges or tunnels crossing both the eastern and western gaps to the Toronto Islands, isn't being considered, he said.

It's also not feasible, according to Geoffrey Wilson, president and CEO of the Toronto Port Authority, which operates the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport on the island.

The TPA is currently conducting an environmental assessment to build a tunnel under the western gap from Bathurst to the airport, but it will be paid for and used only by airport passengers, said Wilson.

The airport extends across the width of the northwest island, and there is no road around the periphery of the property to provide public access to Hanlan's Point, he added.

"In this day and age, an airport is a very high security endeavour," said Wilson. "Just by nature of (being) an airport operation, we can't have people bicycling across the tarmac."

The eastern gap is still used as a shipping channel, he added.

"So there's no possibility for a bridge across the eastern gap at this stage and we certainly wouldn't be having the means to finance a tunnel underneath," said Wilson. "So I don't think that's very heartening news for those of us who like to cycle."

NEW TRAFFIC SIGNALS

Pharmacy Avenue, approximately 115 metres north of Rannock Street

Warden Avenue, approximately 260 metres north of Bertrand Avenue

Bellamy Road, approximately 100 metres south of Jarwick Drive

Markham Road, approximately 290 metres south of Brimorton Drive

Brimorton Drive, south of Gander Drive

Norfinch Drive, approximately 525 metres north of Finch Avenue West

York Gate Boulevard, approximately 345 metres north of Finch Avenue West

Bathurst Street, approximately 65 metres south of Kenton Drive

Grantbrook Street, approximately 60 metres north of Blake Avenue

Talbot Road, approximately 23 metres north of Blake Avenue

Midland Avenue, approximately 215 metres south of McNicoll Avenue

Kennedy Road, approximately 195 metres south of McNicoll Avenue

Lawrence Avenue East, approximately 130 metres east of Leslie Street

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