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'Active' commuting isn't just about pavement

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Toronto has more on-street bike lanes and more bike parking than other cities, including Vienna, Berlin, New York and Montreal.

But we're not keeping pace with those places in terms of features that would really draw more people to cycling and walking, according to two new studies released by the Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation (TCAT).

"With some of the positions taken in this election campaign it feels like we're moving backwards," said TCAT director Nancy Smith Lea.

"Bike-friendly cities have separated bike lanes on arterial roads. Toronto has none. And unlike Montreal and Vancouver, Toronto doesn't have lower speed limits in residential areas, a matter of utmost importance for pedestrian and cyclist safety," she said.

The \$35,000 active transportation studies, funded by the Toronto Community Foundation, showed that there's safety in numbers, with the rates of injuries or deaths from cycling and pedestrian accidents rising more slowly than the number of people engaged in those activities.

Separated bike lanes, a feature many cyclists say make them feel safer, have been extremely effective in attracting people to active commuting in Montreal and New York, said Kevin Behan of the Clean Air Partnership.

His report *Active Transportation in Canadian Cities* showed distance to be the biggest factor in discouraging people from active commuting. So it's unlikely that bike lanes to the far suburbs will break that barrier, he said.

"There is the theory that if you put the infrastructure out there, the cyclists will follow," he said. But "I don't think it's the case that suburban infrastructure would lead to huge numbers of cyclists."

The study shows that 8.8 per cent of Torontonians walk or bike to work, compared with 6.3 per cent in Chicago and 35 per cent in Berlin. And walking is far more prevalent than cycling in Toronto.

The eight cities Behan studied showed that those with the highest rates of active transportation had the lowest rates of car ownership. Cities with lower gas taxes also had fewer cyclists and walkers.

What surprised Behan, an avid cyclist, was that the Toronto residents most inclined to change to active commuting tended to be in the 55- to 64-year age group. The number of cyclists that age doubled between 2001 and 2006, while the increase was only about 20 per cent for those aged 25 to 44.

The second TCAT report, by Ada Chan, called *Building Better Cycling Arteries in Cities: Lessons for Toronto*, shows that cycling increased 72 per cent in Montreal between 2000 and 2005, when the city introduced raised bike lanes. Half of the city's cycling occurs on separated bike paths and lanes.