

BIKE 2009 SUMMIT

tcat toronto coalition for active transportation 



On May 28, 2009, the Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation and the Clean Air Partnership hosted its second annual Bike Summit bringing together speakers from around North America and Europe to share best practices and challenges in cycling infrastructure, technical design, policy, research and advocacy. Held at the Novotel Toronto Centre, this one-day conference sold out in advance, and about 220 registrants representing government, the private sector, non-profit organizations, journalists and the general public were in attendance. The goal of the Bike Summit and this summary report is to inspire practitioners and the general public alike to discuss, debate and promote the possibilities of bicycle-friendly planning, policies and investment. This report touches on some of the highlights and the lessons learned from the day.

Progress since Bike Summit 2008 – Momentum Building in Toronto!

- For the first time ever, the entire Toronto Bike Plan was fully funded within the 5-year Capital Plan. With this \$70 million investment, the City will create 410 km of bike lanes, 122 km of shared roadways and 83 km of off-road paths.
- 2008 saw the most kilometres of new bike lanes (35 km) ever put on the road in one year in Toronto.
- Metrolinx unanimously voted in favour of the Regional Transportation Plan. The 25-year plan commits \$20 million per year to be invested in cycling and walking in the GTHA.

"This is my coming out party as a cyclist."

- J. Robert Prichard, President and CEO Metrolinx



Photo courtesy Yvonne Bambrick

"Promoting active transportation is a vital component of a livable, sustainable city..."

- Eva Ligeti, Executive Director, The Clean Air Partnership

The Importance of National Policies

Similarities abound between Canada, the United States and Germany, which all have strong economies, high standards of living, important automobile industries, high levels of car ownership, and extensive road networks. So why do Germans drive less? A key difference in Germany is that the federal government's National Bicycling Plan sets out a supportive framework for local governments to enact bicycle-friendly legislation – something that is missing in North America. However, these policies have not always been in place; instead there was a shift in the 1970s away from the more North American-style car-dependent government policies. For example, car use is discouraged through higher fuel taxes while simultaneously lowering social security taxes. In this way, citizens decide where their tax dollars go, and as a result road users pay more for road maintenance instead of public subsidies like in Canada and the United States. Also in Germany, unlike in Canada, government-regulated driver training and testing incorporates bicycles. As a result of these national, regional and local policies, Germany now has:

- About 10% of trips made by bicycle, compared to 1-2% in Canada and the United States

- About 1/3 of the per capita energy use in United States
- About 1/3 of the per capita CO₂ emissions in the United States
- About 40% fewer per capita traffic fatalities than in the United States

Except for a few exceptions, notably in British Columbia and Quebec, upper levels of government in Canada are not showing leadership when it comes to creating communities that support active transportation. Unlike many European nations, there are very few policies, planning directives and infrastructure funding programs.

Addressing Barriers for New Cyclists

Initial barriers to choosing cycling for daily transportation include equipment costs and various work and family requirements. General trip barriers are weather concerns, geography and topography, traffic volumes, and lack of adequate bike facilities. Finally, destination barriers are trip distance, lack of safe bicycle storage, lockers and showers, and poor employer support. Once governments and the private sector start implementing infrastructure projects and policies this will lead to some new cyclists, which encourages other new cyclists, and eventually improved safety in numbers through greater visibility and continued public support for further bicycle infrastructure investments.

"Cycling is safer where more people are doing it."

Kevin Krizek, Virginia Tech

Cycling Advocacy and Community Engagement - Not Your Usual Suspects

Aside from more obvious partners like professionals in public health, environment and transportation, advocates should try to work with community based organizations, housing and development organizations, and places of worship to attract wide-spread support. By fostering community-based cycling and health initiatives, Chicago's Complete Streets Ambassadors educate 41,000 people each summer, and the Go Healthy Individualized Marketing program has expanded to two neighbourhoods of 60,000 residents each and hopes to go city-wide in the next few years. Schools are also a great place to start a cultural shift, and so communities must include school-based programs in their promotional efforts.

"If you have someone preaching the bike, then it's going to work."
Adolfo Hernandez, Director of Advocacy, Active Transportation Alliance



Chicago's Complete Streets Ambassadors, Photo courtesy Adolfo Hernandez

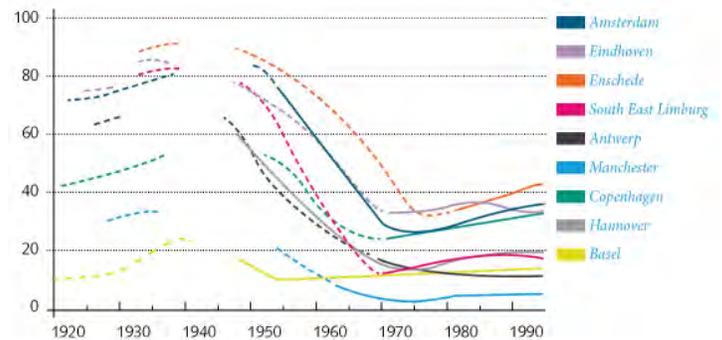
"Governments jump on bandwagons - they don't create them."
Pauline Craig, Transportation Planner, City of Toronto

The Role of Local Government in Promoting Cycling

The importance of the role of local government in supporting cycling is exemplified in the Netherlands, where there is a strong focus on bicycle safety. Traffic safety policies such as reduced speed zones and safe school routes, as well as cycling paths, lanes and streets have given the Netherlands the best national cycle safety rating worldwide. Not only that, but the Netherlands also has the largest percentage of cyclists than any other country (27%) across all ages and social classes, demonstrating the relationship between safe infrastructure and number of cyclists.

The chart to the right shows the difference in local bicycle use in various European cities between 1920 and 1995. The general drop in cycling-supportive policies in the 1950s is

reflected in a decrease in bicycle use. When governments – particularly those in the Netherlands and Denmark – started once again to promote bicycle policies in the 1970s bicycle use rose and continues to rise to this day. Interestingly, the chart also shows that even in the Netherlands, cycling use varies from city to city, reflecting differences in policy and cycling investment.



Historical development in bicycle share in 9 European cities.
 Image courtesy Martijn J. te Lintelo and Fiets Beraad

New Approaches to Street Design

While there is a large variety of bike lane designs, the key message at Bike Summit 2009 was that there is no one best option. The most successful design will consider bicycles from the outset, and will consider limitations such as road width and motor vehicle traffic flow in selecting the best option.

On Toronto's Cherry Street, motor vehicle traffic lanes will be reduced from four to two, with bike lanes in both directions. The Queen's Quay area will include the installation of a multi-use path and a planted barrier separating motorized vehicles from pedestrians and cyclists.



Queen's Quay revitalization
 Photo courtesy Nigel Tahair



Cherry Street design
 Photo courtesy Nigel Tahair

Research

According to Dr. Kevin Krizek, it's estimated that about 6% of the population in North America are frequent participants in cycling (recreational or utilitarian), therefore investments must focus on serving their needs, as opposed to the rest of the population who are unlikely, in the short-term at least, to try cycling under current conditions. Research has also shown that the density of bike facilities is very important for encouraging cycling through heightened visibility and convenience.

While the benefits of more cycling are touted widely by advocates, the actual effects of a given investment in cycling projects are hard to calculate, and supportive economic data that demonstrates value is needed. Changes in bicycle infrastructure only reflect marginal changes in the overall, much larger and more complex transportation network, so it can be hard to monitor statistically. Decision-makers still don't have access to a full evidence base of research to support investment decisions related to bicycles. Evaluation of any project, whether newly installed infrastructure or a new program, is key, and should not be merely an after-thought. However, advocates should not rely on the evidence and research alone – we will always need political will, and so electing cycling-supportive parties and politicians will continue to be a necessity, especially in Canadian cities like Toronto where majority council support is required; compared to many American cities where mayors and commissioners can singularly authorize policy and planning projects.

"We allowed people to use the word lane only in the context of a car. But a bike lane is a traffic lane. Bikes are vehicles, they might not be motorized, but they're vehicles. They're cleaner, faster, sexier, healthier, more affordable. But they're vehicles. We marginalize ourselves, as a movement, by not challenging language that excludes us."

Dave Meslin, Founder, Toronto Cyclists Union

Bicycle Parking Best Practices

On-street bike parking

Installing bike parking directly on the roadway is an idea that is taking hold in many cities. On-street parking has been hugely successful in cities such as Portland, Oregon. Not



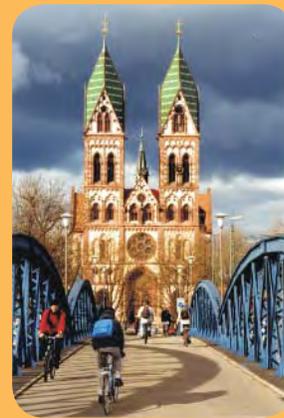
Photos courtesy Eric Anderson

only does this type of bike parking keep sidewalks clear and orderly for pedestrians, it helps legitimize cycling as a valid mode of transportation that is good for business. In locations where on-street bike parking was installed in Portland, there have since been 50+ requests from businesses to remove on-street car parking for bike parking, and the number of bike parking locations will triple by the end of 2009.

Case Study – Freiburg, Germany



Freiburg 1960s



Freiburg 2000

Photos courtesy Ralph Buehler

While most nations' per capita CO₂ emissions have continued to rise in the last two decades (27% in Canada), Freiburg, Germany's per capita CO₂ emissions have dropped 13% between 1992 and 2003; now at less than 1/3rd the average in the United States. This is largely a result of strong policies that have redesigned the city from one built for cars to one favouring other modes of transportation. Land use planning goals became and remain focused on improving quality of life, strengthening neighbourhoods and reducing distances travelled. Driving in Freiburg was also made more inconvenient and expensive with the introduction of many more one-way streets (on which cyclists are exempted) and higher parking rates in the city centre. In 2007 the share of trips taken by car had dropped from 38% in 1992 to 32%, and policies continue to restrict car use while providing attractive alternative options in public transit, walking and cycling. The city's bicycle mode share is now 30%. Environmental benefits are not the only positive outcomes of such policies. By making streets for people instead of cars, the number of cycling fatalities in Freiburg is 1.2 per 10 million km cycled, versus 5.8 in the United States. The most encouraging aspect of the Freiburg example is that these results come from a policy shift that began in the 1970s when few other cities were taking such leads. The key to the success was the long-term perspective that new policies should be implemented in stages over time, and that plans can be altered along the way if necessary. Even in Portland, a Platinum-level Bicycle Friendly Community, progress has taken over twenty years to implement.

Bike Stations

While the majority of bike parking is short-term, sometimes bikes (just like cars) need to be stored for longer periods of time in a more secure setting. Long-term parking requires controlled access, weather protection and sometimes lockers and/or showers. The result is a bike station like the one that opened up in 2009 at Union Station in Toronto – the first in Canada.



Photo courtesy Pauline Craig

Complete Streets

A common theme amongst most presenters, along with advocates and professionals worldwide, is that what is really needed is a complete streets approach to building livable cities. When allocating road space, cycling and pedestrian interests should not have to battle for prominence in order to maintain motor vehicle capacity. However, a complete

street will not look the same in all communities and in all situations – context is very important and assessments based on dense urban versus suburban/rural issues are challenging but necessary. Many of the upper level government policies, like the Growth Plan for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area and the Regional Transportation Plan, are in place, and now what we need is local policies that conform with these directives and get projects happening on the ground.

Case Study – New York City

Recently New York City – along with its western counterpart, Portland – has raised the bar in North America when it comes to cycling. New York City has built 200 miles of bike lanes in the past three years, as part of a massive shift in the way the New York City Department of Transportation builds and manages its streets. New York now has over 600 miles of connected bike routes. As a result, the city has experienced a 35% growth in commuter cycling in the last year: in the past nine years, daily bicycle trip volume tripled. New York has also experimented with unique and innovative bike lane designs. Depending on the route, options such as segregated bike lanes, shared bike and car

lanes, and solid colour bike lanes have tailored designs to meet all needs. Since the introduction of fully protected bike lanes, safety has improved and ridership has risen 50% on these paths.



Top: 8th & 9th fully protected bicycle paths
Left: Broadway, 42nd to 35th Street
Photos Courtesy Joshua Benson

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SPEAKERS AND PRESENTERS:

Eric Anderson, City of Berkeley Bicycle and Pedestrian Planner

Joshua Benson, New York City Department of Transportation Director of Bicycle Projects

Ralph Buehler, Virginia Tech Assistant Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning

Pauline Craig, City of Toronto Transportation Planner

Joshua Engel-Yan, Metrolinx Senior Advisor

Hannah Evans, Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, Ontario Growth Secretariat Director

Adrian Heaps, Toronto City Councillor

Adolfo Hernandez, Active Transportation Alliance Director of Advocacy

Paul Hess, University of Toronto Associate

Professor of Geography and Planning

Megan Jamieson, International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), Canadian Regional Office Director

Kevin J. Krizek, University of Colorado Associate Professor of Planning, Design, and Civil Engineering

Eva Ligeti, Clean Air Partnership Executive Director

Martijn J. te Lintelo, City of Nijmegen, the Netherlands Senior Advisor of Mobility Policy

Eleanor McMahon, Share the Road Cycling Coalition President and Founder

Dave Meslin, Toronto Cyclists Union Founder

Norma Moores, IBI Group Senior Transportation Engineer

Jennifer Niece, GO Transit Transportation Planner

Janet O'Connell, Bicycle Trade Association of Canada Executive Director

J. Robert S. Prichard, Metrolinx President and CEO

Nigel Tahair, City of Toronto Senior Transportation Planner

Usman Valiante, Bicycle Trade Association of Canada Director, Cycling Advocacy

Gary Welsh, City of Toronto General Manager of Transportation Services

Andréa White-Kjoss, Bikestation President and CEO

Paul Young, South Riverdale Community Health Centre Health Promoter & Public Space Workshop Consultant

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS:

Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation and Clean Air Partnership Staff: Claudia Duggan, Caitlin Gillespie, Eva Ligeti, Nancy Smith Lea, Fred Sztabinski

City of Toronto Staff: Miya Akiyama, Vanessa Butterworth, Matt Cowley, Jesse Demb, Daniel Egan, Derek MacGillivray, Jana Neumann, Sibel Sarper, Sam Schachar, Sean Wheldrake

Volunteers: Allyson Amster, Laurel Atkinson, Yvonne Bambrick, Alex Bowron, Craig Barnes, Andrew Bieler, Rick Conroy, Erica Duque, Vic Gedris, Anthony Humphreys, Susana La Rosa, Mimi Lau, Barbara Lea, Neluka Leanage, Eunice Lee, Nancy MacDougall, Sharon Mason, Dylan Passmore, Luke Rodgers, Karen Smith, Ben Smith Lea, Michelle St-Amour, Herb van den Dool

For more information and presentation slides and videos from Bike Summit 2009 please visit <http://torontocat.ca/main/bikesummit2009>