



VISION ZERO

BUILDING ACTIVE & SAFE STREETS FOR ALL IN TORONTO

BY NANCY SMITH LEA,
TORONTO CENTRE FOR ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

A city that is safe for walking and cycling is a healthy, active, and vibrant place where people want to live, work, go to school, and raise a family. It's also the kind of city where we can say goodbye to our loved ones as they head out the door in the morning, and know they'll return to us safely at the end of the day.

TORONTO'S ROAD SAFETY PLAN

In Toronto, 64 people, on average, are killed each year just trying to get from point A to point B, and the majority (59 per cent) of them are people walking or cycling. In 2016, Toronto City Council adopted a *Vision Zero Road Safety Plan*, which has the laudable goal of eliminating all traffic fatalities.

A recent Forum Research poll revealed that most Torontonians aren't aware of the City's *Vision Zero* plan, but of those that are, the majority (56 per cent) believe it's not doing enough to ensure the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

WHAT IS VISION ZERO?

Vision Zero is a revolutionary movement that started in Sweden 20 years ago; and that country now has one of the lowest rates of traffic fatalities in the world. This new approach to road safety has the simple yet powerful moral imperative: No loss of life on public roads is acceptable. The traditional approach to road safety relies heavily on road user education, operating under the assumption that it is never possible to reach everyone, and so injuries and fatalities are the price we have to pay for mobility. In the *Vision Zero* approach, it's up to the road designers to ensure that they are building forgiving streets that accommodate the mistakes that humans inevitably make.

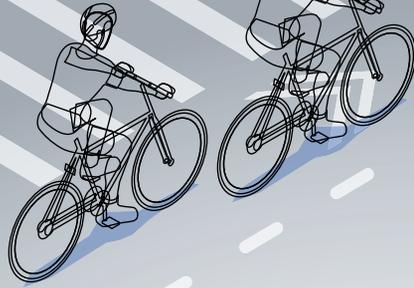
There is a movement in cities around the world to embrace *Vision Zero*. So far in Canada, 12 jurisdictions, including Toronto, have developed *Vision Zero* policies. Edmonton was the first Canadian city to adopt a policy, and release a video that hits the message home, asking "How many traffic deaths are acceptable in your family?" The answer is zero, and that is the only acceptable goal for everyone.

THREE PRIORITIES FOR NEXT TERM OF COUNCIL

We know the proven solutions to improve road safety. To get moving on achieving *Vision Zero* in Toronto, a coalition of community leaders recently developed a set of 15 priorities called *#BuildTheVisionTO: Safe and Active Streets for All*. The coalition is asking candidates in the October 2018 municipal election to commit to implementing them. Here is a spotlight on three of the actions:

1 IMPLEMENT TRAFFIC CALMING IN ALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ZONES BY 2022.

Pedestrian injuries are one of the leading causes of injury related deaths for children. In June 2018, the Public Works & Infrastructure Committee adopted a staff report to designate safety zones around all elementary schools. Fines will be increased and signs advising people to slow down will be installed, but traffic calming will only be considered site-by-site. While an important first step, signage has little effect on driver behaviour. Traffic calming is the deliberate slowing of traffic by making physical changes to the street. Measures such as speed humps, bulb-outs, and raised crosswalks have been proven to slow traffic and reduce collisions.



2 BUILD SIDEWALKS ON EVERY STREET BEING RECONSTRUCTED.

Sidewalks are an essential piece of the City’s transportation infrastructure, providing accessibility and safety for all, including children, seniors, and people with disabilities. Yet nearly 25 per cent of all local streets in Toronto don’t have a sidewalk, and many more only have a sidewalk on one side. Where sidewalks are missing, people have no alternative but to walk on the roadway or shoulders. The City’s road classification criteria recommends a sidewalk on at least one side of all local roads. Road reconstruction presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to add a missing sidewalk and is the most cost-effective and efficient approach to doing so. The City’s Disability, Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee endorsed this approach for accessibility, safety and walkability reasons. Unfortunately, local councillors frequently oppose adding sidewalks, and this results in decisions that deviate from City policy.

3 BUILD PROTECTED BIKE LANES ON MAIN STREETS, INCLUDING THE MAJOR CORRIDORS IN THE CYCLING NETWORK PLAN.

According to a 2018 Nanos poll, 11 per cent of people in Toronto ride a bike every day, and two-thirds of Torontonians would ride more often if there was better infrastructure in their community. City Council adopted a city-wide *10-Year Cycling Network Plan* in 2016, and it will be updated in early 2019.

While the Plan included Bloor Street, Yonge Street, and Danforth Avenue as critical elements to connect the network, studies for Danforth, Yonge, and other major corridors were put on hold and subsequently removed from the implementation plan by Council.



I DRIVE. WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT WALKING AND CYCLING?

According to the 2016 Census, 50 per cent of Torontonians drive to work, 37 per cent take public transit, 9 per cent walk and 3 per cent bike. If you mostly drive or take transit, you may ask what’s in it for you in building safer streets for people walking and cycling. Here are some reasons to consider:

1. The more people on bikes, the safer it is for everyone. The installation of protected bike lanes in New York City resulted in large reductions in crashes and injuries for not only cyclists, but drivers and pedestrians, as well.
2. Bike lanes make driving easier. Before bike lanes were installed on Bloor Street in 2016, only 14 per cent of motorists reported feeling comfortable driving next to cyclists, compared to 66 per cent after installation.
3. Streets with bike lanes move more people at a lower cost. A protected bike lane takes up roughly 60 per cent of the road space needed for a typical traffic lane, and 10 bikes take up roughly the same space as one parking spot.
4. Walking and cycling trails increase property values. Studies have found that properties located near trails sell for up to 32 per cent more than those farther away.
5. Bike lanes get people out of their cars. After the bike lane was installed on Sherbourne Street, of those who now cycle, 24 per cent previously drove.

VOTE WITH YOUR FEET FOR ROAD SAFETY

Any day now, council and mayoral candidates will be knocking on your door asking for your vote. Ask them if they support walking and cycling, and if they endorse the *#BuildTheVisionTO* campaign. You can read all of the candidates’ completed surveys on the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation’s website at www.TCAT.ca. And don’t forget to vote on October 22nd!

.....

Nancy Smith Lea is the Director of the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation, a project of Clean Air Partnership. She has received several awards for her work in active transportation, including being recognized as one of 12 extraordinary women city builders by Spacing Magazine, and as one of eight women change makers in Toronto by the United Way Greater Toronto.

For more information, visit www.tcat.ca.

