

Bicycling in Toronto 2002–03

Prepared by
Advocacy for Respect for Cyclists (ARC)



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Executive Summary

Introduction

Bicycling in Toronto 2002–03 is Advocacy for Respect for Cyclists' first annual report on cycling conditions in Toronto, and on what the City of Toronto has done to promote cycling in the past year. ARC's report card is intended to inspire the city to improve its pro-cycling activities, to applaud its achievements and to provide an ongoing record of the conditions cyclists face on a daily basis. The ratings are also intended to provoke cyclists and government to think about what makes a good cycling environment. The report is modelled on an annual project by Transportation Alternatives in New York City.

Toronto is in many ways a wonderful city for cycling. Last year the city passed two landmark documents that identify cyclists as an essential part of healthy neighbourhoods and target reduced automobile use as a key planning objective. If fully implemented, the Toronto Bike Plan and Official Plan will encourage more residents to ride on city streets, helping to create safer and more livable communities.

Yet the city's will to deliver on those promises remains uncertain. In 1995, *Bicycling* magazine recognized the former city of Toronto as the best cycling city in North America. But municipal amalgamation weakened the resolve of city council to support cycling initiatives, and the ranking soon dropped to number five. The allocation of city resources has failed to keep pace with residents' growing appetite

for bike facilities. As a result, the next few years will be crucial in determining whether Toronto can get back on track and realize its potential to be a true urban cycling mecca.

The Ratings

Overall Cycling Conditions in City

Rating: C+

Positives: More commuter cyclists on streets translates into safer sharing of roads with cars.

Negatives: Continued deterioration of cycling conditions due to motor vehicle congestion and worsening air quality. Inferior riding conditions outside of core.

Outlook: Uncertain, but Toronto has the potential to be among the world's best cities for cycling.

Leadership and Momentum from City

City Effort: C+

Positives: Two major planning documents – the Toronto Bike Plan and Official Plan – will boost fortunes of cyclists across city if fully implemented.

Negatives: Amalgamated city shows less support than former city of Toronto for the needs of cyclists.

Outlook: Ongoing battles for bicycle funding and respect raise questions about future progress.

Fatalities and Injuries

City Effort: D

Reality for Cyclists: C

Positives: Fatalities remain relatively low.

Key to Grades

A: Bike heaven – the envy of cyclists everywhere.

B: A good reason to get on your bike in the morning.

C: OK, but could look to other pro-bike cities for inspiration and ideas.

D: As bike-friendly as crossing wet streetcar tracks with a speeding car on your back wheel.

F: Two flat tires.

Negatives: Deaths and injuries remain preventable. Some residents still avoid riding on city streets.

Outlook: Without greater city effort on changing road design and reducing speed, Toronto will continue to see cyclist fatalities.

On-Road Bicycle Routes

City Effort: B

Reality for Cyclists: C

Positives: Many new bike lanes with city committed to building more.

Negatives: Lack of bike lanes on busiest cycling roads makes them dangerous for riders.

Outlook: Funding shortfalls mean city is unlikely to install all planned bike lanes on schedule.

Off-Road Cycling and Greenways

City Effort: B

Reality for Cyclists: A-

Positives: City boasts extensive network of off-road cycling paths.

Negatives: Lack of winter maintenance of paths.

Outlook: With more routes planned, Toronto cyclists will continue to enjoy these excellent ravine, park and roadside routes.

Parking

City Effort: A-

Reality for Cyclists: C+

Positives: City responsive to requests for increased bike parking – Toronto has installed more bike parking stands than any other city in North America.

Negatives: Still too many areas where it is a challenge to park.

Outlook: Good, but too many private businesses unwilling to implement bike parking.

Policing

City Effort: D

Reality for Cyclists: C

Positives: More officers on bicycles create

greater empathy with cyclists.

Negatives: Many police officers don't understand traffic laws as they pertain to cyclists.

Outlook: No evidence that police will attempt to bridge differences with cycling community.

Cycling Support Services

City Effort: B

Reality for Cyclists: C

Positives: City continues to actively promote a broad range of cycling programs.

Negatives: Overemphasis on cyclist education programs creates illusion of improved safety for cyclists.

Outlook: Practical needs of cyclists will continue to suffer due to skewed focus on education campaigns.

Transit

City/Regional Effort: D

Reality for Cyclists: C

Positives: Ability to take a bike on transit, when available, offers an effective means of travelling long distances across or out of city.

Negatives: Transit authorities lag far behind other cities in integrating bikes with transit.

Outlook: Transit priorities and funding shortfalls preclude any improvements in service for cyclists.

Implementation of Recommendations from Coroner's Report on Cycling Fatalities

City Effort: D

Provincial Effort: F

Federal Effort: F

Positives: City produces excellent analysis of collision data.

Negatives: City, federal and provincial efforts at implementing recommendations have no real impact on cycling safety in Toronto.

Outlook: Cyclists fear report is destined to be forgotten.

The Report Card

Introduction

Bicycling in Toronto 2002–03 is Advocacy for Respect for Cyclists' first annual report on cycling conditions in Toronto, and on what the City of Toronto has done to promote cycling in the past year. ARC's report card is intended to inspire the city to improve its pro-cycling activities, to applaud its achievements and to provide an ongoing record of the conditions cyclists face on a daily basis. The ratings are also intended to provoke cyclists and government to think about what makes a good cycling environment. The report is modelled on an annual project by Transportation Alternatives in New York City.

The Ratings

“To make the bicycle attractive for more people, we need far fewer cars on the road”

Overall Cycling Conditions in City

Rating: C+

This category is designed to measure the overall quality of life for cyclists in Toronto. In general, the past year has been a good one. Most impor-

tantly, there appeared to be more cyclists riding on city streets. Continued improvements in cycling infrastructure and greater awareness of the benefits of cycling appear to be primary reasons for this increase.

Despite encouraging pronouncements from city staff and many councillors on the need to reduce motor vehicle use in Toronto, the city continues to experience greater congestion, which inevitably means poorer cycling conditions. In order to really make the bicycle an

attractive transportation option for more people, we need far fewer cars on the road. The fear of injury by motor vehicles is a major disincentive to cycling for many city residents.

Air quality remains an equally major concern. Last year, Ontario recorded a record 27 bad air days, and in 2003 the city had notched its first air alert by March – the earliest on record. While cyclists are part of the solution to this serious problem, they are also among the most severely affected by pollution.

Most depressingly, ARC continues to see anti-cycling rhetoric from some politicians as well as from the Toronto police. It's unclear that cycling advocates have succeeded yet in convincing all Torontonians of the benefits of cycling. Councillor John Filion's 2002 opposition to bike lanes on Willowdale and Senlac avenues (in the former North York) is a reminder of the challenges to expanding bike infrastructure into Toronto's suburbs. More recently, Scarborough councillor Brian Ashton complained about city plans to build bicycle lanes on Dundas St. East.

Key to Grades

A: Bike heaven – the envy of cyclists everywhere.

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“We are cautiously optimistic that there is progress in the attitude of transportation services toward bicycles”

Leadership and Momentum from City

City Effort: C+

This category is a measure of efforts by the city government to promote cycling and a means to assess the

momentum behind that work. Over the past two years, the city passed two planning documents that if fully implemented are excellent news for cyclists. The Toronto Bike Plan, adopted in July 2001, and the Toronto Official Plan, passed in November 2002, commit the city to improving cycling infrastructure and encouraging cycling on city streets. Among the bike plan's goals are doubling the number of trips by Toronto cyclists by 2011 and increasing bicycle lanes from 50 km to 500 km.

The official plan reflects the traditional bike-friendly attitude of the former city's planners; we are also cautiously optimistic that the bike plan represents progress in the attitude of transportation services toward bicycles. Staff outreach on bike issues at transportation has improved slightly, as has the design of roads and intersections as they affect bicycles. However, some resistance to cycling priorities remains: during some recent road redesigns – notably Yonge St. north of Highway 401, Leslie St. at the 401 interchange and St. Clair Ave. West – cyclists have been largely excluded from the early stages of the design process.

The city should also be commended for creating a bike plan coordinating committee to ensure an integrated approach to implementing cycling initiatives. The committee met for the first time last year and includes representatives from various city departments. It will produce annual reports on the progress on the bike plan, the first of which appeared this spring.

Much of the momentum behind improvements to cycling conditions is due to efforts by supportive councillors in wards within the former city of Toronto. The new council as a whole has been less understanding of cyclists' needs. The next year will clarify whether the long-term commitment to improving cycling conditions in the city core can be extended to Toronto's suburbs. Though council passed the Toronto Bike Plan, funds to implement the plan's programs must be voted on in each budget; cuts to 2003 cycling budgets in various departments suggest this battle will be ongoing. Funding for all bicycle-related projects will drop this fiscal year by almost 50% – from \$2,908,000 last year to \$1,547,000 in 2003. (Not all spending on bicycle infrastructure appears in the cycling budget – an example is the \$1.5 million bike path on Lake Shore Blvd.) It is worth noting that if the city designated cycling programs as health and safety priorities, funding would be guaranteed.

“Despite the known dangers, the city won't improve infrastructure on major east-west cycling corridors like Bloor St. and Queen St.”

Fatalities and Injuries

City Effort: D Reality for Cyclists: C

In 2002, two cyclists died on the streets of Toronto. This brings total fatalities over the past decade to 28. While cycling fatalities have remained relatively low over the past few years, ARC believes many of these deaths are preventable. Fatalities have tended to occur on high-speed arterial roads. These roads are often the only practical cycling routes in suburban parts of the city, and excessive speeds and the lack of cycling infrastructure make them dangerous. Conditions on these roads remain a barrier to cycling. Additionally, an increased lack of civility on our roads – speeding, aggres-

sive driving and running red lights and stop signs – continues to be a very serious problem for cyclists. Too many motorists continue to ignore cyclists’ right to the road.

City collision data confirms that cyclists continue to get injured in large numbers on heavily used east-west cycling corridors in the downtown area, such as Bloor St. and Queen St. Despite the known dangers, the city won’t accommodate cyclists who use these routes by improving infrastructure. Particular dangers are cyclists being clipped by cars pulling into and out of parking spots and drivers who open car doors into cyclists’ paths.

To meet a recommendation of the regional coroner’s 1998 *Report on Cycling Fatalities in Toronto 1986–1996*, transportation services recently completed a study of some 2,500 bicycle collisions. The report provides excellent analysis, including technical support for cyclists’ long-held belief that they are most likely to get hit by cars from behind or from the side, or from the opening of car doors.

Yet the report fails to include information on the role of road design and speed in collisions between cars and bicycles. This failure of the city to respond to a key recommendation of the coroner – that the city identify high-frequency collision locations for cyclists and examine means to reduce those threats – remains a glaring omission. The city responds to these criticisms by saying the limitations of police reports mean that very little meaningful data emerged from the analysis of posted speed limits and number of traffic lanes. Additionally, they say the number of collisions is too small to provide useful data on collision hot spots, and that they are continuing with work in this area.

Generally, the city has been slow to move on recommendations to make roads safer for cyclists. Another safety concern is that the city’s commitment to keeping bike lanes clear of

snow remained a largely hollow promise again last winter.

On a positive note last year, transportation services did respond to cyclists’ complaints about unsafe road conditions once they were notified – particularly repaving dangerous “cuts” in roads following repairs. In addition, partly as a result of the data from its collision report, urban development services adopted an idea from cycling advocate Derek Chadbourne to place stickers in taxi cabs reminding passengers to look for bicycles before opening doors.

“Last year, the city said it was able to spend only half its cycling budget due to staff shortages

On-Road Bicycle Routes

City Effort: B Reality for Cyclists: C

Much progress has been made in adding new bicycle lanes in Toronto over the past few years. Among the notable and welcome additions are

lanes on Sherbourne St., River St. and Jones Ave. While the city’s bike plan rightly emphasizes expanding bike lanes to under-served suburban areas, ARC believes it still misses some key areas of the city. Most notably, it neglects continuous east-west lanes on major streets in the downtown core, such as Bloor St., Queen St. and King St., which are the most heavily used cycling streets and also the routes where cyclists are most likely to get hit. In addition, a response to cycling advocates’ longstanding demands for improved conditions on Spadina Ave. is yet to materialize.

Last year, the city said it was able to spend only half of its cycling budget due to staff shortages; transportation services planned to roll out six new bike lanes, but built only three. The construction added a modest 8 km of new lanes to a network that now totals 50 km. In 2003, the capital spending budget for cycling has been

cut to \$782,000 from last year's \$1.5 million (which represented less than 1% of the total capital budget for transportation). The projected budget for 2003 was \$2 million. The growth of the bike lane network is further impeded in too many neighbourhoods by the objections of businesses and business associations.

More positively, transportation services should be credited for making it policy to include bicycle infrastructure upgrades when redesigning or rebuilding roads. It should also be noted that city cycling staff have recently implemented a number of positive projects, such as a bicycle-activated traffic signal on Palmerston Ave. and two bicycle lanes running counter to traffic flow – on Strathcona Ave. in the Pape and Danforth neighbourhood and on Montrose Ave. near Bloor and Christie. Additionally, staff have worked very hard to improve cycling conditions on Dundas St. E.

Toronto's bike plan promises to expand the city's excellent system of off-road trails

Off-Road Cycling and Greenways

City Effort: B

Reality for Cyclists: A-

Last year saw the completion of a major new path on Lake Shore Blvd. East that links east Toronto with paths in the core.

Other important projects included upgrades to the Martin Goodman Trail and the completion of a new link from Martin Goodman to the Humber Trail. The good news is that Toronto's bike plan promises to expand the city's already excellent system of off-street trails. The bad news is that none of last year's pathway upgrades designated in the bike plan under the parks department were implemented. Among other projects, city staffers have been working hard to secure former Canadian National Railway land for the West Toronto Railpath, a proposed project on a rail corridor, and they

continue to work to transform former hydro corridor greenways in the north of the city into a series of trails. Both are very welcome initiatives.

However, though many of these off-road routes are designated in the city's bike plan as commuter routes, the city fails to clear them of snow during winter. The result is commuter routes that are useable only during warm weather and ongoing frustration for the increasing number of year-round cyclists in Toronto.

The city's efforts at installing bike racks are unmatched by many businesses, who often refuse to provide bike parking

Parking

City Effort: A-

Reality for Cyclists: C+

Three years ago, when the Toronto parking authority switched to a pay-and-display method for on-street vehicle parking, the removal of parking meters precipitated a sudden loss of regular bike parking.

That crisis has been alleviated thanks to the efforts of both the parking authority and transportation services. Transportation services, in particular, has gone to great lengths to replace lost meters, last year installing 1,500 post-and-ring parking stands on sidewalks. In addition to planned locations, staff encourage cyclists' suggestions for new locations through a dedicated phone number and by fax request. Additionally, it is now routine for transportation services to assess whether post-and-ring parking is needed when reconstructing sidewalks. Transportation is also planning to install secure bike lockers at some TTC subway stations. These excellent efforts are unmatched by many businesses, business associations and property management firms, who frequently refuse to provide bicycle parking. On occasion, city efforts to situate post-and-ring parking are hindered by business owners who don't want

sidewalks “cluttered” with bicycles. The result is too many areas in the city where it is still a challenge to find bicycle parking.

“Police often portray cyclists as dangerous scofflaws who endanger other road users. Statistics don’t bear this out”

Policing

City Effort: D

Reality for Cyclists: C

Actions by police in Toronto continue to confound and frustrate cyclists. Of major concern are ongoing police efforts to target cyclists during so-called “safety blitzes.” Police have

conducted these campaigns for the past four years, ticketing cyclists for rolling stops or for failing to conform to arcane by-laws such as not having noisemakers or reflective tape on the front and rear of the bicycle. Police have used these campaigns to characterize cyclists as dangerous scofflaws who routinely endanger other road users, including pedestrians. Statistics simply don’t bear out these contentions. During the past 10 years, a single pedestrian fatality in Toronto has been attributed to a cyclist.

Among other issues, inconsistent ticketing of cars and delivery vehicles parked in bicycle lanes remains a sore spot among cyclists. Vehicles parked in bike lanes create dangerous situations, forcing riders to cut unexpectedly into traffic; they also increase the likelihood of the so-called “door prize,” in which cyclists are hit by car doors opened into traffic. Door prizes have been responsible for at least one fatality and numerous serious injuries in the recent past. Police also continue to harass cyclists who attend the monthly Critical Mass ride.

ARC has long received reports of officers who seem not to understand the Highway Traffic Act as it pertains to cycling. Late last year, the

Toronto cycling committee asked the Toronto police to “upgrade all officers about the laws and by-laws related to bicycles” and to “list all bike-related laws in a separate section in the Wording and Set Fines Booklet.” Police accountability is an issue for cyclists as it is for other Toronto residents. The police complaints process is particularly unsatisfactory. On a positive note, increased use of officers patrolling with bicycles is certain to create an improved understanding of cycling and cyclists.

“The city’s safety education programs fail to deal with the root cause of most collisions – irresponsible drivers and badly designed roads”

Cycling Support Services

City Effort: B

Reality for Cyclists: C

City efforts to respond to the non-infrastructure needs of Toronto cyclists have focused primarily on the promotion of cycling events and services and the provision of cycling safety education programs. The city additionally has developed several programs to encourage employers to accommodate cyclists in their workplaces.

The city continues to strengthen its efforts to communicate its programs to cyclists. The city’s cycling home page (www.Toronto.ca/cycling) is excellent, as is its just-released map of cycling routes in Toronto. *Cyclometer*, an email newsletter dedicated to Toronto bicycle initiatives, remains a valuable resource. And the annual Bike Week deserves to be singled out as a vibrant, inclusive celebration of cycling of which the city can be justly proud.

Despite all these important efforts, ARC has serious reservations about the city’s emphasis on cycling safety education programs. The city, through urban development services, has chosen to focus on a harm-prevention strategy that

attempts to modify the behaviour of those most likely to get hurt in a collision – cyclists – instead of dealing with the root cause of most collisions – aggressive and irresponsible drivers, high speed and badly designed roads. While these programs are undoubtedly well intentioned, cyclist education is an area whose supposed benefits are backed up by little academic or scientific research. CAN-BIKE, a road-safety certification course offered by parks and recreation, is the city’s primary safety program. Last year, 172 Toronto cyclists completed this course. The urban development services budget for safety and education initiatives, including CAN-BIKE, will amount to \$54,000 this coming year.

Equally distressing is the fact that in its education efforts, urban development services has chosen to largely ignore the situations that are most likely to cause serious injury, such as dooring, and to focus instead on demonizing sidewalk riding. This path-of-least-resistance strategy, driven partly by some councillors’ seemingly single-minded obsession with sidewalk riding, leaves cyclists to fend for themselves in these other safety areas. In response to staff inactivity on these essential issues, advocacy groups including ARC have created a range of educational materials to inform cyclists about their rights and responsibilities, what to do following a collision, and other topics.

The reorganized Toronto cycling committee is more relevant than ever, and ARC applauds its recent efforts. However, there remains a significant gap between the committee’s laudable goals – advising the city on the design, development and implementation of programs and “ensur[ing] the role of cycling in a transportation system appropriately balanced among all road users” – and its achievements.

“Lack of vision by GO Transit and the TTC means Toronto is one of few large urban centres without bike racks on buses”

Transit

*City/Regional Effort: D
Reality for Cyclists: C*

Transit authorities serving Toronto remain surprisingly unresponsive to the needs of cyclists and to the potential for intermodal connections that may boost ridership. The Toronto

Transit Commission has not unveiled a bike-friendly transit initiative in recent memory. Regional carrier GO Transit has ended drivers’ discretionary ability to carry bikes in the luggage compartment on some bus routes and has refused to place bike racks on buses – all despite GO’s ongoing efforts to position itself as environmentally friendly. GO’s and the TTC’s lack of vision have left Toronto as one of few large urban centres in North America not to experiment with bicycle racks on buses. One potential bright spot is talk of cycling facilities at a refurbished Union Station.

“The coroner’s report was hailed as a blueprint for safer cycling conditions – but its recommendations have been all but ignored”

Implementation of Recommendations from the Coroner’s Report on Cycling Fatalities

*City Effort: D
Provincial Effort: F
Federal Effort: F*

In 1998, Regional Supervising Coroner W. J. Lucas released the landmark *Report on Cycling Fatalities in Toronto, 1986 to 1996*. The report’s conclusions are broad-based, thorough and supported by excellent documentation. It was applauded by Toronto cyclists and viewed as a blueprint by sustainable transporta-

tion advocates globally as a model for creating safer conditions for cyclists in North American cities. Unfortunately, those high hopes have given way to resignation. The report has languished, its recommendations all but ignored.

The city – particularly the police and transportation services – has balked at implementing what ARC considers many of the report’s most important recommendations. These include introducing lower speed limits, identifying dangerous locations for cyclists, improving police reporting of car–bike collisions and the creation of a team of professionals and advocates to review cycling fatalities.

The city has acted on aspects of the report. As noted above, transportation’s analysis of collision data is an important and very welcome initiative. Additionally, the city has an ongoing commitment to expanding bicycle routes and implementing or expanding cycling education programs – also recommendations of the report.

The provincial and federal governments, by contrast, have not responded to any of Dr. Lucas’s recommendations. Thus far, the province has ignored recommendations to improve collision reporting and failed to act on requests to clarify sections of the Highway Traffic Act as they relate to bicycle and motor vehicle interaction. The latter inaction is particularly troubling, because these revisions could immediately reduce cycling injuries and fatalities. Meanwhile, the federal government has failed to implement recommendations that would make large trucks less dangerous for cyclists.

“If fully implemented, Toronto’s plans will encourage more residents to cycle, so creating safer communities. But the city’s will to deliver on its promises is uncertain”

Conclusion

Toronto is in many ways a wonderful city for cycling. Last year the city passed two landmark documents that identify cyclists as an essential part of healthy neighbourhoods and target reduced automobile use as a key planning objective.

If fully implemented, the Toronto Bike Plan and Official Plan will encourage more residents to ride on city streets, helping to create safer and more livable communities.

Yet the city’s will to deliver on those promises remains uncertain. In 1995, *Bicycling* magazine recognized the former city of Toronto as the best cycling city in North America. But municipal amalgamation weakened the resolve of city council to support cycling initiatives, and the ranking soon dropped to number five. The allocation of city resources has failed to keep pace with residents’ growing appetite for bike facilities. As a result, the next few years will be crucial in determining whether Toronto can get back on track and realize its potential to be a true urban cycling mecca.