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## Give the bike lanes a chance

University plan logical way to improve area

**Karen Stintz, National Post**

With all the dismal reports on the cost of congestion in Toronto and our ever-growing commute times, there is no shortage of conversation about how to get Toronto moving again. Contrary to what many think, there is also no shortage of plans trying to move people safely and efficiently from point A to point B in our city. We have a Bike Plan. We have a Walking Strategy. We have a Transit City plan. We even have a Pothole Filling Plan.

What we are most alarmingly short of, however, is an overall plan that rationally connects all these ideas together, methodically working toward a common vision. Residents must be clear about what we trying to achieve and how; both today and in future when we expect upward of 500,000 new city dwellers. Such a plan is critical in restoring public confidence so that we have a rational process for making tough choices about how to use our scarce road space.

Right now, residents can't see the big picture, because there is no big picture. Rather, we consider every proposed change to our roadways in isolation of other transportation decisions, be it a new bike lane, a new turning signal, let alone the removal of a lane-way or roadway.

Not surprisingly then, City Hall ignites a passionate public response about transportation issues on a regular basis, provoking confusion and frustration amongst all our road users.

The most recent example is the proposed bike lanes on University Avenue. After obtaining the approval of the Public Works Committee on Tuesday, proponents of the lanes claimed them a critical "tipping point" in sharing Toronto roads. And yet, the media has roundly dismissed them as an "ingenious way to compound gridlock" and downright "nutty." The mayoral candidates almost collectively went apoplectic.

This charged dialogue places an interesting project at risk. After attempting to lay down bike lanes two kilometres from the door of every city resident for the past eight years, city staff did a major rethink and said it was time to "complete and intensify" the bike lane network in the downtown core. This is where bike lanes are most frequently used and will also be the area served by the much-anticipated Bixi bike rental program.

In addition, during the snail's pace implementation of the bike network, other major cities like New York, Montreal and Chicago were busily installing bike lanes but using new lane marking strategies. Swiping some of the best ideas, the bike lanes on University will physically separate cyclists and motorists with bollards. Not only does this work best in other cities, but it reflects the wishes of

Toronto's cycling community and the "wanna-be" cyclists who say they would bike if they felt safer. Without trying some of these initiatives, we won't know how to make our transportation system more attractive to current and future users.

It's also worth noting that the lanes may prove to be a logical way to improve the transportation options of university students and the increasingly dense residential neighbourhoods that are being built up to the west of University Avenue.

This project too, will provide data to help inform our next steps with bike lane construction. City staff plan to evaluate the lanes by examining any changes in EMS response times, assessing traffic and cyclist volumes, as well as the impact on parking and conflicts between road users.

Unfortunately, the benefit of transportation initiatives such as this may be lost when the public, sick of trying to figure out a good idea from a bad idea, become so frustrated they simply entrench into their respective positions. I suspect, for instance, the decision to add bike lanes on Jarvis Street (made without a rational plan) has made many less open to support this project.

Next year we will have a new mayor, a new city council and a requirement to update our City's Official Plan. It is also very likely that we will still need to figure out how to build our future public transit system, in absence of provincial funding. It is time to create a comprehensive mobility plan for our city. The mayoral candidates would serve us well by articulating how they would take on this important work.

Until then, let's give those bike lanes on University a proper evaluation. If they don't make a positive contribution to how we move in this city, you can always vote for the guy who swears he'll rip them out.

- Karen Stintz is city councillor for Ward 16, Eglinton Lawrence.

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