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**Council Causing More Car-Nage On Our Roads
By Karen Stintz, Guest Columnist**

Getting around Toronto is going to get considerably more difficult over the next few months and years.

Next week, city council will consider the closure of the fifth lane on Jarvis, a recommendation about preventing cars from turning right on a red light at a number of intersections, and discuss changing the flow of traffic on portions of Richmond and Adelaide from one-way to two-way streets.

This week, a proposal emerged that may reduce parking spaces and auto laneways on Bloor and Danforth to better accommodate cyclists.

Of course, there is the ever looming issue of what to do with the Gardiner Expressway.

This debate has pitted certain road users against others, picked winners and losers and ultimately forgets that the transportation network needs to accommodate the people who live and work in this city, irrespective of whether they take the bus, ride a bike, or drive a car.

The emerging reality is various city committees are making decisions about people's mobility on an ad hoc basis. Not well planned. Not well coordinated.

If we continue in this fashion, we will frustrate and anger residents. Worse, we will contribute to problem that we should in fact, be trying to alleviate: Congestion.

Congestion has significant economic and social costs. The Conference Board of Canada notes the impact is in the billions of dollars. Costs include delays in moving goods and services, the costs of commuting, and the costs to local business when parking is limited or non-existent.

The social costs are harder to put a number on but no less significant -- the cost of sitting in traffic, missed appointments, being late to pick up children from daycare or children's activities.

And of course, delayed and idling cars and public transit vehicles add to greenhouse gas emissions.

Experts from major cities around the world tell us if we want to reduce congestion and have a sustainable urban transportation system, we need to achieve certain "travel behaviour" from citizens.

That is, we need to provide the right incentive to reasonably reduce car dependence (such as an attractive, high-quality public transit system) and series of disincentives so they don't return to car use (commonly referred to as "travel demand management tools").

If we don't, we'll experience the same result as Dublin, for example, where they achieved a 40% increase in transit use but the lack of car restraint measures resulted in a 28% increase in car use at the same time.

A study of best practices in large and medium-sized European cities, titled World Cities Research, March 2005 concluded policies to reduce congestion work best when they are integrated together and any restraints to car movement should be implemented alongside improvements to alternatives to the car. These have allowed people to continue to make journeys so there is no adverse effect on personal freedom or city economies.

This is in contrast to Toronto's approach, which is to make driving so difficult that people will use other modes of transportation out of frustration. If we continue in this way, we risk losing people and business from the city.

METROLINX NOT READY

Considering that the Metrolinx plan -- the primary alternative to a car -- is years away from being a reality, it doesn't make sense to aggressively implement a bike plan and car restraints that are not integrated with the transit timelines.

Reducing congestion in Toronto is a goal we all can benefit from and is worthy of our collective efforts. Let's make sure we are having the right discussion and productively debating the right issues.

Let's achieve what matters to us all -- the ability to move around Toronto, safely and efficiently, whether by foot, car, bus or bike.