



Tuesday, June 16, 2020

Dr. David Mowat
Mr. Saad Rafi
Office of Recovery and Rebuild
100 Queen St. W.
Toronto, ON

Dear Dr. Mowat and Mr. Rafi,

Re: Phase II bikeways required to mirror transit under Recovery and Rebuild Plan

Toronto's Recovery and Rebuild strategy must quickly expand upon the 40 km of new, and previously planned, bikeways approved by Council on May 28, 2020. The approved bikeways, including temporary ones, could only be considered adequate if the city had been living up to its 2016 Bike Plan and if a global pandemic had not occurred. Unfortunately, the pace of bike lane installations over the past four years has been indifferent while the global pandemic has dramatically changed virtually every aspect of our lives, including our transportation needs.

Bells on Bloor, a volunteer road safety organization, began advocating for bike lanes on Bloor in 2007. Since then, we have appeared before city committees and the courts, conducted research, and developed community and business alliances in pursuit of bike lanes on Bloor, while monitoring City Hall's progress on its bike plans. Last month, along with 120 community groups we signed a [letter calling for the urgent installation](#) of 100 km of new bikeways to mirror busy TTC routes, for the benefit of city residents, especially essential workers.

We are particularly concerned that a failure by the city to install new bikeways, consistent with themes of equity and resilience that guide your work, will have adverse consequences that outlive the pandemic. Specifically, a failure to install bikeways as an alternative to the TTC will:

1. squander a valuable opportunity to test bikeway locations and design features during a time when there is significantly reduced motor traffic;
2. prompt many people to get back in their cars, undoing years of work promoting active transportation for its health, air quality, and climate benefits; and

3. potentially exacerbate inequalities in our city by adding to the burden of illness from deteriorated air quality on lower income neighbourhoods, the risk of becoming victims of motor traffic, and the potentially diminished survivability of COVID-19 from poor air quality.

In June 2016, City Council approved [a new Bike Plan](#), which established a blueprint for the installation of 335 km of bike lanes, sidewalk-level paths, and cycle tracks. This plan was based on the transportation needs of the community absent any consideration of a global pandemic. The 2016 Bike Plan was preceded by a [2001 plan](#) that outlined the installation of 460 km of new bike lanes -- but achieved the installation of only 80 km over a ten-year timeframe.

By the summer of 2018, it was already clear that the 2016 Bike Plan was far off course both in terms of new bike lanes and studies to guide proposed installations. No amount of letters to the [mayor](#) and [transportation staff](#), deputations, [FOI requests](#), or [media attention](#), however, could motivate an increase in action. At the time of the Bike Plan update in July 2019, when a [staff report](#) noted that “[m]ore people are riding bicycles in Toronto than ever before” a number of rationalizations were presented for the lack of progress while a set of diminished near-term priorities were [approved by council](#), with other objectives deferred beyond 2022.

Tellingly, in 2019, the city reached a new low with only 2 km of bike lanes installed, despite a \$16 million annual cycling capital budget in addition to \$20 million in available funding from the federal government.

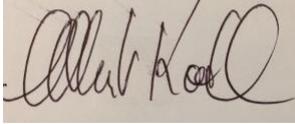
We present this background in support of our position that a modest effort at catching up with the 2016 Bike Plan does not constitute a pandemic recovery plan. The needs of the community have changed dramatically with the pandemic, particularly the fact that many people are wary about getting back on the TTC until a vaccine for the virus is developed.

Curiously, the city’s [recent press release](#) reiterates that bikeways are needed as part of the restart and recovery process “to mirror major transit routes to provide a safety valve for the TTC.” The city’s *ActiveTO* plan, however, simply ignores Yonge St., and its 750,000 daily transit passengers, and the busiest bus routes. Surely, one cannot expect that these TTC patrons can be accommodated in cars without significant increases in congestion and other adverse impacts.

By contrast to Toronto, the City of Montreal, which had 360 km of bike lanes in place to Toronto’s 160 prior to the pandemic, is already installing 60 km of new bikeways as the *first step* of a larger plan. Other cities around the world, including Paris and London, are similarly undertaking expansions of their cycling networks in response to the pandemic and to build upon existing urban trends (which also exist in Toronto) toward active transportation.

We therefore urge you to carefully consider the needs of city residents, and to chart a course that allows people to get around the city in a healthy, clean, safe manner by developing and implementing an urgently needed phase II of bikeways.

Sincerely,

A rectangular area containing a handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored background. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Albert Koehl".

Albert Koehl

Cc: Barbara Gray, General Manager, Transportation Services
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health
James Pasternak, Chair, Infrastructure and Environment Committee
Chris Murray, City Manager