

## Cyclists seeking a cultural gear shift

**Pro-cycling schemes tried in other cities deserve road test here, advocates contend**

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Street parking for bikes, roads where drivers yield to cyclists, car parking that actually protects two-wheeled travellers: Ideas that might make a Jarvis St. car commuter cringe are already reality in Europe and California.



LUCAS OLENIUK/TORONTO STAR

Sea of cycling partisans taking part in the Bikes On Bloor rally for dedicated lanes leaves behind High Park, en route to Queen's Park assembly May 31, 2009.

And they're just as achievable in this city, advocates and planners told the second annual Toronto Bike Summit last week.

Some of the innovations luring people to the pedals elsewhere:

### **TRAFFIC CALMING**

Imagine a city where 400 kilometres of roads have a speed limit of 30 km/h or less.

In Freiburg, Germany, there are 177 Home Zones, residential streets where the limit is a stately 7 km/h. On some, cars must yield to bikes and on most, they're restricted to one-way travel.

The city has 220,000 residents of whom 28 per cent move about on bikes, up from 11 per cent in 1982. More than 30 per cent of commuters use two wheels, and the number of bikes travelling into the downtown each day – about 36,000 – is up by 60 per cent since 1990.

The train station has a secure garage for 1,000 bicycles and bike parking has tripled in 20 years.

Could it work here?

Freiberg, rebuilt after World War II, was on the road to a North American-style car culture in the 1960s. Then the oil crisis hit, and locals mobilized to block a nuclear power plant. Green activists never looked back, said Virginia Tech assistant professor Ralph Buehler, who hails from a town near Freiburg.

"One of the lessons of Freiburg is: it takes time. It's a process of trial and error."

## **EACH TO HIS OWN LANE**

New York has been going fast to implement bike and pedestrian policies that "are innovative in the North American context" but old news in Europe, said Josh Benson of the N.Y.C. Department of Transportation. On 8th and 9th Avenues, protected bike lanes were built next to the sidewalks. Street parking is placed about 20 feet (6 metres) into the road. Painted stripes and bollards separate vehicles from bikes so effectively that parents feel safe to cycle with their young children.

Cyclists even have their own traffic signals, with cars required to wait while they make turns. That's aimed at changing a disturbing statistic: nine of 10 cycling fatalities occur at intersections.

"Unfamiliar road configurations freaked people out at first," Benson said, but that's lessened over time.

New York has added 200 miles (322 kms) of bike lanes to its existing 400-mile network in three years. Commuter cycling has increased by 35 per cent just in the past year.

## **PARKING IT**

Portland, Ore., has something the Toronto Cyclists Union wants – street parking for bikes. Watch for a pilot project on Spadina Ave. soon.

Traditionally, merchants and politicians balk at reducing street parking for cars. But for as little as \$1,000 – that's what Portland's bike "corrals" cost – or up to \$50,000 for a sheltered bike "oasis," retailers can actually attract more business, said Eric Anderson, a Berkeley, Calif., planner.

"Put up what signs you like, but people need a place to park," he told the Toronto audience.

Two case studies in Berkeley tried out in-street bike mini-lots, one simply replacing a regular parallel parking space, another a diagonal spot. It can be as simple as placing some curbs around a rack in the designated space.

In Portland, "once the word got out, people started requesting them all over the place," Anderson said. The city has 14 designated bike parking spots now, and a backlog of 50. It hopes to triple the number of active sites by the end of the year.

## **WHEELS FOR EVERYONE**

Chicago advocates were determined to involve the city's many black and Hispanic residents in the cycling movement. To do so, the Active Transportation Alliance partnered with housing, immigration, health and seniors organizations.

"Churches are huge power brokers in the African American community," said the alliance's Adolfo Hernandez. "If you have someone preaching the bike, that's really important." The group helped organize a Bike-To-Worship day that attracted 200 churchgoers.

Bike safety ambassadors and route ambassadors help teach mechanics, skills and cycling culture to grades 2 and 3 students.

The alliance also helped mobilize Go Healthy coaches, who meet families and help them figure out how to avoid car trips. A pilot project with 100 families worked so well it's being extended to two neighbourhoods.