

## GETTING AROUND

# A bicycle-friendly city is environment-friendly, too

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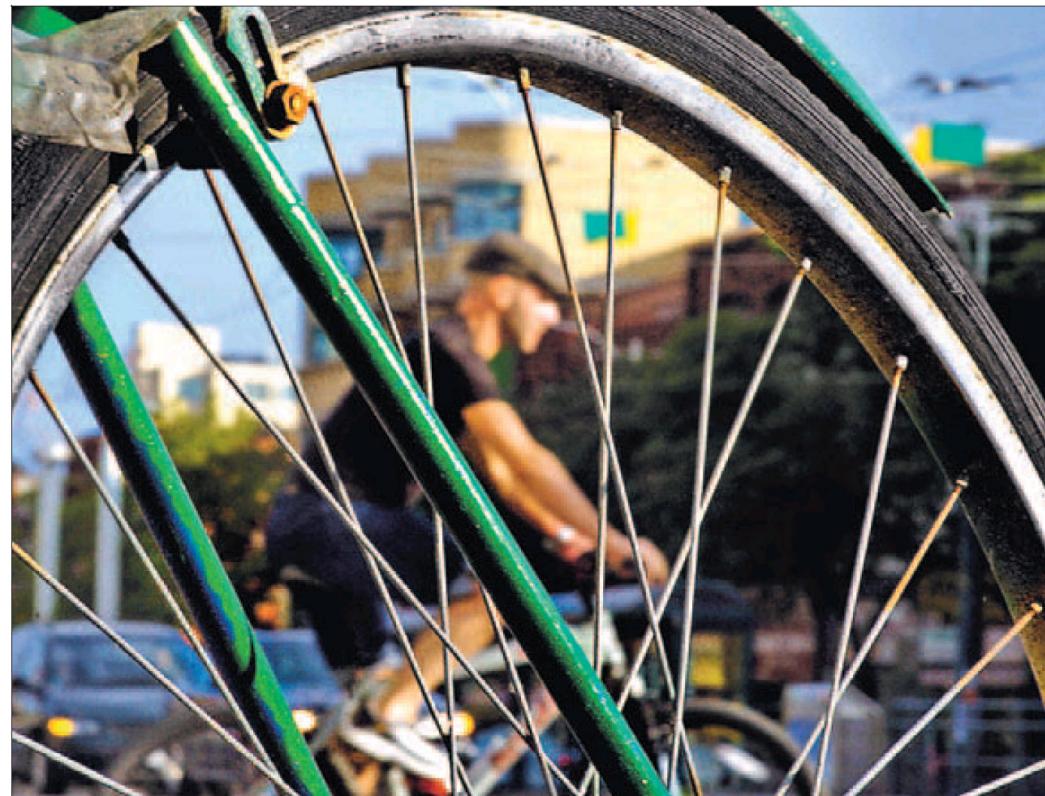
Pity our powerful political leaders as they grapple with the complex solutions to global warming. They are so burdened by the task of reducing massive greenhouse gas emissions — such as those from our transportation sector — and so preoccupied by the cost of action, they probably don't even notice the cyclists they pass (or who pass them) on their way to work each day.

Getting people and goods from A to B accounts for about 50 per cent of all Canadian greenhouse gas emissions when activities like car-making, road-building and fuel production are added to tailpipe emissions. Each litre of gasoline burned to operate a motor vehicle produces 2.5 kilograms of greenhouse gases. Emissions from operating a bicycle, on the other hand, are zero.

The issues and obstacles associated with bikes are simple — quite unlike the solutions that generally occupy our leaders, including the illusory promise of GM's electric car (100 years after the first ones were produced); pricey hybrids (often shipped 10,000 kilometres from Japan); or the timeline for the start of the hydrogen revolution (itself dependent on a massive increase in renewable power).

First, more bike lanes, which require a mere 150 centimetres on the side of a road, would produce more bike riders. A 1998 Environics poll found that 70 per cent of Canadians would bike to work for distances that took less than 30 minutes if they had a dedicated bike lane. And where bike lanes have been created in Toronto, the number of cyclists increased by up to 42 per cent, presumably because of the huge untapped potential of Toronto's 950,000 adults who ride a bike.

Second, Canada is a big country but people don't regularly commute from Tuktoyaktuk to Toronto. In fact, Canadian motorists make an average of 2,000 trips each year that are less than three kilometres, trips that can easily be made by bike. Schools, stores and churches are often within manageable distances, even in the suburbs. More cycling would certainly reduce the \$2.1 bil-



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**The bicycle is a simple, low-tech way to reduce one of the largest sources of greenhouse gases.**

lion in health-care costs the Canadian Medical Association says is associated with inactive lifestyles. Some distances are indeed too long for cycling, but combining biking with transit — especially with promised improvements — makes many distances feasible.

Third, people on bikes must obey traffic laws but this is no justification for depriving communities of bike lanes. No one argues that Highway 401 should be closed because some people drive on the shoulder, don't signal or speed. In each case, enforcement is the solution. And when cars and bikes each have a delineated space, conflicts and collisions ought to decrease — to the benefit of all road users.

Fourth, the weather and terrain in Canada make cycling more difficult, but not that much more difficult. A rain jacket or coat, along with heat generated from pedal-

ling, solve a number of problems during most months. Toronto is just a bit colder than Copenhagen, where 30 per cent of citizens commute by bike. In Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City, more people cycle to work than in Toronto. And while a hill can leave you puffing, the average Torontonian toils about one day each week just to cover the cost of owning and operating a car — about \$10,000 per year.

Finally, bike lanes must be put where there are cyclists — not where these lanes least inconvenience cars. Toronto, for instance, has a bike plan that does not yet include bike lanes on Bloor St. and Danforth Ave., even though 14 per cent of the vehicles on this east-west route are bikes. Since cyclists can easily stop and shop, there is no reason to divert them from our neighbourhood businesses.

The loss of some on-street parking

is a reasonable trade-off for the huge potential reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, and a healthier population. In any case, providing storage space for cars on major roadways contradicts a primary purpose of roads, namely, to move traffic. Parked cars and moving cyclists are also a poor mix — as any inattentive driver opening a car door can attest. Less car parking will be needed when more people bike and drivers who walk a short distance from a public lot become a part of the solution.

Global warming is the common enemy of people in cars and people on bikes. By supporting more bicycle use, we all help lessen the heavy burden on our leaders as they work to devise complex solutions to global warming for us.

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