



Photo courtesy of Bike Brampton

BRAMPTON, A BICYCLE FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

Becoming a Bicycle Friendly Community is a game changer for Brampton



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Earlier this month, the City of Brampton was awarded the Bicycle Friendly Community Bronze status. Why should we care? The state of cycling in Brampton is likely not at the top of most resident's mind. Yet, achieving this award represents an important milestone for all of us, not just for those who bike.

Brampton currently faces several serious issues related to its rapid growth. With a population approaching 600,000 (2016 census), Brampton is Ontario's fourth largest city, bested only by Toronto, Ottawa, and Mississauga. And, with a growth rate of over 13 percent, it is also one of North America's fastest-growing cities.

Brampton has struggled with urbanization and its population density is roughly half that of Toronto's. Suburban sprawl means longer commute distances for work, shopping, and other errands. Providing frequent, convenient public transit is economically unfeasible for all but the most densified

routes. As a result, most people use motor vehicles to get around. But the car-centric culture comes with costs and a host of problems.

Driving everywhere means traffic demand quickly outstrips road infrastructure leading to congestion. The cost of building and maintaining roads create a growing financial burden for the

municipality. Municipal revenue on the sale of new homes doesn't cover the cost of providing and supporting this infrastructure, meaning the city's growth becomes an ever-increasing burden on the existing tax base.

Driving everywhere robs the population significant opportunity for physical activity. Sedentary living increases the risk of obesity, diabetes, and other diseases. One can easily draw a link between inactivity and the fact that Brampton's emergency care units are among the busiest in the country.

Driving everywhere has led to climate changing carbon emissions and disease-causing pollutants

clogging the air. More than 30 per cent of Ontario's carbon emissions come from the transportation sector. Thousands of premature deaths and hospital admissions are associated with breathing dirty air in Ontario. Recent studies also link air pollutants with increased risk of dementia-related diseases. In short, Brampton has major health and environmen-

tal problems related to its car-centric tendencies.

So, what is the significance of Brampton becoming a bicycle friendly community? It means city staff and politicians now recognize that more people cycling is the future of Brampton, whether it be for recreation or transportation. The city is finally embracing cycling as a legitimate transportation alternative to the car, Brampton now recognizes the need to develop neighbourhoods that are walkable, bikeable, and environmentally sustainable.

The Bicycle Friendly Communities Program measures capacity across five categories referred to as the 5 "E"s.

Engineering, represents the physical network, the ability for residents to use a bicycle to get from place to place. Connectivity, convenience, and safety are the three main criteria for creating this network. Sometimes it requires separated infrastructure like bike paths or bike lanes; the type is dependent on traffic volumes and vehicle speeds. Often pathways

and existing secondary roads can be combined to form a comprehensive cycling network without huge investments. Brampton is well on its way to defining this cycle network.

Encouragement, the second "E", is where Brampton excels. From virtually nothing four years ago, Brampton now boasts a whole range of cycling-related events. Bike the Creek, Brampton's signature ride, attracts more than 500 participants and showcases many of Brampton's and Caledon's natural and cultural heritage attractions around the Etobicoke, Fletcher's, and Credit watersheds.

Enforcement is the third "E" of the Bicycle

Friendly Communities program. Peel Neighbourhood Policing Unit (NPU) officers patrol on bikes providing friendly enforcement on the paths and other areas not easily accessible by cruiser. And, with last year's introduction of a law requiring motorists to pass cyclists by leaving at least one metre of space, Peel officers have another enforcement tool they can

use to make roads safer.

In the winter season, NPU officers help out with the fourth "E", **Education** as they promote cycling and walking safety by visiting schools throughout the region. Brampton is also home to Peel Police's Safety Village which helps elementary students practise skills in a safe environment. Last year the Cycling Advisory Committee trained six new CAN-BIKE instructors. And this summer Brampton Recreation is offering a range of cycling training courses for both children and adults at attractive rates.

The last "E" in the Bicycle Friendly Communities program is **Evaluation**. An extensive monitoring

and measurement plan will be part of the city's ATMP. The city will be installing bike counters in strategic locations augmented with data from Strava, a mobile GPS tracking app that monitors cyclists' movements.

Becoming a Bicycle Friendly Community is a game changer for Brampton. There is no question that cycling popularity is on the rise. And, recent studies by Share the Road Cycling Coalition suggest that cycling activity will continue to increase as safe, convenient infrastructure is installed over the next few years.

Increased cycling in Brampton will help relieve traffic congestion while making Brampton a healthier and more environmentally sustainable community. It will help offset rising taxes, increase road safety, and make our neighbourhoods more friendly and liveable. These are just some of the great reasons why we should all care deeply that Brampton has received this Bicycle Friendly Community Bronze award!