

Red Mile Complete Street Advocacy Group
1211 – 550 Riverfront Ave SE
Calgary, AB T2G 1E5
www.redmilecsag.ca

April 30, 2020

The Honourable Catherine McKenna
Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
180 Kent Street
Suite 1100
Ottawa, ON K1P 0B6

RE: National Urban Cycling Strategy and COVID-19 Economic Stimulus

Minister McKenna,

Over the last few decades urban cycling has been growing in popularity as a transportation mode in the world's leading cities. Both Calgary and Edmonton have recently undertaken initiatives to create core networks of cycle tracks in their downtowns to encourage a greater number of people to consider cycling as a commuting option. Unfortunately a lack of dedicated funding at the municipal level limits the potential to encourage a shift in commuting habits in Alberta's cities. A change in perspective on infrastructure priorities must begin at the top. With focus now turning towards stimulus spending to help the Canadian economy recover from COVID-19, the Red Mile Complete Street Advocacy Group strongly believes now is the time for the Government of Canada to implement an urban cycling strategy and support it by providing dedicated urban cycling infrastructure funding to Canadian municipalities.

The Red Mile Complete Street Advocacy Group is made up of a small group of Calgarians and was formed to encourage the City of Calgary to further expand on its core urban cycling network to include Calgary's main shopping and entertainment corridor, 17th Ave. Our advocacy efforts have led to discussions with other cycling advocacy groups in the region and what has become evident to us is that a lack of capital funding is a barrier to completing the existing network plan, let alone expanding on that vision. Unfortunately it seems that in many Canadian cities the planning work to make cycling infrastructure an integral part of the transportation network has been done but the capital funding to follow through with the planning quickly falls victim to austerity measures combined with infrastructure budgets designed to focus primarily on the automobile.

While urban cycling infrastructure has typically been dealt with exclusively at the municipal level, the introduction of the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change by your government has created a clear set of priorities that can be best achieved by providing targeted funding to the municipalities that are responsible for a sizeable amount of Canada's emissions. The Pan-Canadian Framework has been designed to support reducing emissions and accelerating the transition to a diversified lower carbon economy by investing in transit and infrastructure projects. The record amount of transit investment that has come from the plan should be applauded however investment in infrastructure to encourage urban cycling is low hanging fruit that can go a long way in accomplishing the goals of the Pan-Canadian Framework with a minimal amount of expenditure.

As our country begins its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, government stimulus spending will play a large role in helping the economy recover. Urban cycling infrastructure holds a distinct advantage in terms of infrastructure stimulus spending as projects can begin with little lead time and typically do not involve high levels of construction complexity, which opens up bidding to the largest number of contractors. Due to the fact urban cycling infrastructure uses more labour and less automated processes as well as a greater amount of locally produced materials a University of Massachusetts study found that bicycle infrastructure projects can create up to 46 per cent more jobs than automobile focussed road projects for every \$1 million invested. Last but not least, as urban cycling infrastructure typically involves the modification of existing road space, these projects can continue later into the typical construction season allowing Canadians to keep working for as long as possible.

As a complementary action to reduce emissions as outlined in the Pan-Canadian Framework as well as an important piece of economic stimulus to put Canadians to work post COVID-19, we are encouraging the Government of Canada to introduce an Urban Cycling Strategy that would deliver two years of targeted funding to Canada's largest municipalities with the goal of increasing the amount of cycling infrastructure that is integrated in their transportation networks. We are proposing that the plan be structured in the following fashion:

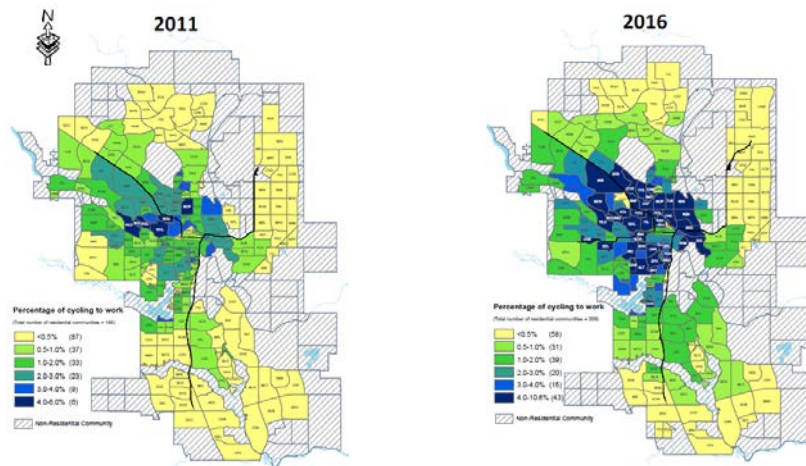
Proposed Canadian Urban Cycling Strategy and Two-Year Infrastructure Stimulus Fund:

- Funding provided to all Canadian cities with census metropolitan areas over 200,000 people.
- Estimated total program cost of \$265 million (\$132.5 million each year).
- Proposed breakdown of funding:
 - Population between 200,000 & 500,000: \$2.5 million per year
 - Population between 500,000 & 1,000,000: \$5 million per year
 - Population between 1,000,000 & 1,500,000: \$10 million per year
 - Population of 1,500,000+: \$15 million per year
- Proposed structure of funding:
 - Funds are to be used for the creation of new cycling infrastructure or the upgrading of existing cycling infrastructure that is designed to be a part of a city's transportation network. Cycling infrastructure that is primarily for recreational use would not qualify.
 - Funds are to be used for construction costs only and may be applied towards ancillary projects such as required modifications to traffic signals but may not be used for related items outside the scope of the strategy such as public realm improvements.
 - Funding prioritization for projects would be done at the municipal level based on local planning needs with the caveat that the goal of the cycling strategy is to increase the size of the urban cycling networks as much as possible and that cycling infrastructure that separates users from automobile traffic (cycle tracks and multi-use pathways) should be prioritized over designs that mix users (painted on-street lanes and sharrows).

A relatively small investment in terms of national infrastructure funding of \$265 million spread over two years can deliver over-sized results. In 2014 the City of Calgary started an 18 month pilot project that introduced a core network of cycle tracks in the downtown. The project cost was \$5.45 million and created 6.5 km of new cycle tracks in the centre city. The results were impressive and highlight how the goals of the Pan-Canadian Framework can be partially accomplished through investments in urban cycling infrastructure. By structuring the funding as we have proposed, even the smallest municipalities involved in the urban cycling strategy will have the financial capacity to recreate something similar to Calgary's network.

Results of Calgary's cycle track pilot project:

- ✓ The creation of a core connected cycling network was seen as being critical to success.
- ✓ 1.2 million bicycle trips were made between June 18, 2015 and November 20, 2016.
- ✓ The percentage of women riding increased to 30% from 22%
- ✓ The number of Calgary communities where at least 4% of people commuted by bicycle went from **six** in 2011 to **forty-three** in 2016 (shown in blue in the City of Calgary graphic below).



In terms of the impact the new cycle track network had on Calgary's air pollution it is important to note that a study by the European Cyclists' Federation found that every kilometer cycled avoids 250 grams of CO2 emissions being generated. Unfortunately further investment in Calgary's core network has stalled. Edmonton has looked to Calgary's success and introduced a new 7.8 km core network downtown at a cost of \$7.5 million however funding for further expansion is not guaranteed. This pattern of a lack of sustained expansion funding after seeing success in initial urban cycling networks seems to repeat across our country. Creating a national funding strategy enables Canadian cities to move beyond the basic infrastructure that has been built to date and create urban cycling networks that have the critical mass to help drive a shift in commuting habits on an even larger scale than we have seen in Calgary.

As the COVID-19 recovery emphasizes the importance of diversifying and boosting our economy it should be noted that cycling infrastructure can play a role in attracting new multi-national companies and the talent they require to Canadian cities. In Edmonton the creation of the new bike lanes was due in large part to the advocacy of engineering giant Stantec on behalf of its employees. Recently Calgary joined several other Canadian cities in competing for the new Amazon HQ2. As part of its competition process Amazon included the following request from applicants; "please also include transit and transportation options for commuting employees living in the region. For each proposed site in your region, identify all transit options, including bike lanes..." Both examples should be seen as proof that large modern corporations see cycling infrastructure as a critical aspect of attracting and retaining talent. Increasing its availability in Canadian cities should be seen as a priority.

Creating a national urban cycling strategy backed by funding for cycling infrastructure improvements will decrease the need for Canadians to make trips using vehicles, decrease the amount of greenhouse gas emissions, help attract top talent and companies to our cities, improve mobility for people who are working to join the middle class and improve the health and vitality of Canadians. Distributing an estimated \$265 million in funding to Canadian cities with more than 200,000 people as part of COVID-19 economic recovery efforts is one of the best ways to rapidly put Canadians to work building projects that can be bid on by smaller firms and inject infrastructure stimulus money that will primarily remain at the local level. This is a win-win in achieving your government's priorities. We welcome your feedback and any opportunities to discuss the topic further.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Binks". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and "B".

Jeff Binks
Lead Advocate
Red Mile Complete Street Advocacy Group
E: redmilecsag@outlook.com
C: (403) 805-3313