

Councillor Ben Henderson ~ Update on Bike Lane Plans



There has been much debate recently about the new bike lanes that the City has been retrofitting into our traffic system. The work is based on a large city wide plan that was developed after extensive consultation a number of years ago. Picking a route that works to create a good system is the easy part, figuring out how to retrofit it through existing roads and communities is more difficult. Just as it is with finding space to put the LRT through existing areas, adding proper bike infrastructure cannot be done without some tradeoffs.

The advantage is that we can make sure we can create a space where bikes clearly belong, that is out of the way of traffic and pedestrians, and allows for the smooth flowing and safety of all involved. Done well it should eradicate the kind of circumstances that lead to the death of Isaak Kornelson as he was biking on Whyte Ave last fall and got squeezed between a parked car and a cement truck. We have to find routes that allow bicyclists to travel as directly as possible from point to point, while at the same time avoiding the most congested automobile arterials. The bike master plan does just that. The tradeoff is that it often means that the new bike routes are going down roads that may not have the width to keep the drive lanes for cars, the sidewalks for pedestrians, space for bicycles and still keep all the street parking. It is over that lost parking that most of the concern has come from people living along those routes.

Every effort has been made in the design to maintain parking and to replace any lost spaces nearby. But if the bike lane gets compromised to the point that it has the bikes weaving in and out of traffic as the lane comes and goes, then we have not achieved anything. All we end up doing is creating inconvenience without improving safety. If we compromise it to the extent that no one uses the lane then we have achieved nothing.

We are focusing our efforts on providing high quality routes for bikes in the areas where there is already heavy demand. This may cost a bit more, and we may cover fewer kilometers, but I think this is a case where getting quality instead of quantity will be of benefit to all.

The good news is that, as a result of our efforts over the past few years, we have seen a marked improvement in the number of people biking. And for all of those people who can make that choice it creates more space on the roadway for those who have no choice but to use the automobile. If we can do this right it will benefit everyone.

Ben Henderson
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