

Bike share program explored by Aurora

As Cycle Aurora encourages residents to get out to explore the community on bikes this summer, municipal staff are looking at potential ways to get even more people up on two wheels and where they need to go.

The feasibility of a new bike share program for Aurora is currently being examined by Town Staff after Council authorized moving forward with exploring potential partnerships to make it a reality.

This latest step follows a Council vote in spring to look at the merits of a program overall.

In a report to lawmakers by Michael Bat, Traffic and Transportation Analyst for the Town, municipalities have begun to implement shared micro-mobility programs to promote cycling as a viable travel option and contribute to broader climate, health and economic goals.

Shared micro-mobility devices encompass all shared-use fleets of small, fully, or partially human-powered vehicles that could be rented through a mobile app or kiosk by residents or visitors of a municipality, said Bat in the report. Some examples include manual bikes, e-bikes and e-scooters.

York Region completed a bike share feasibility study in 2019, which recommended local municipalities take the lead in implementing bike share programs in their municipalities and York Region provide support where required, Bat continued, speaking to staff's recommendation for Council to proceed with issuing a Request for Information (RFI) to gauge vendor interest and partnerships. The purpose of undertaking the RFI process is to gather further information, including a more detailed implementation plan and associated funding scenarios from prospective private bike share providers to determine the feasibility of a bike share program for the Town.

Under the model under exploration, the bike share program would be privately-owned and operated with oversight from the Town, which will minimize the Town's financial risk exposure. Under this program all associated direct operating and capital costs would be borne by the third-party operator(s).

Ahead of Council's vote to proceed with the RFI process, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland questioned whether this was the best use of time by municipal staff. She said a similar program in London, ON, was not considered successful because they lacked in infrastructure that encourages active transportation.

This, she said, could prove to be the case in Aurora.

I feel the Town is not ready for this and the Region has decided they have no interest in taking this on, she said. I felt if this was going to be a ride-share program, it should be a regional project [because people will be crossing over municipalities] and bikes would be left everywhere.

The benefits of moving ahead with the recommended report, according to Director of Planning Marco Ramunno, was to seek interest from vendors and explore various delivery models and programs.

As part of our Active Transportation Master Plan, we had [consultants] assist on completing a bike share study. They made some recommendations and part of their recommendations are that we should actually explore partnerships with third party providers. [Then] we can report back to Council in the fall on any interest we receive and really explore those models for partnerships to actually [see] whether we can implement such a partner.

Even if a partner is found, replied the Councillor, infrastructure could still prove to be an issue if that isn't already part of the conversation with potential vendors.

As part of the Active Transportation Study, consultants looked at the program through this lens and Ramunno said they are recommending any resulting program be rolled out in stages, and three phases of 30 potential bike stations have already been identified.

But all that, he said, was at a ?high level.?

?The point here is to drill down and explore the models and how we can deliver such a program and having a third party provide such a program,? he said.

The identified sites for potential bike stations include:

John West Way and Hollidge

Town Hall

Wellington Street and John West Way

Wellington Street and Industrial Parkway (Servicing the GO Station)

Yonge and Church Streets (Servicing the Aurora Public Library)

Yonge and Edward Streets

Yonge and Kennedy Streets

Aurora Community Centre

Yonge Street and Orchard Heights

St. John's Sideroad and Bayview Avenue

Conover and Borealis

Aurora Family Leisure Complex

Wellington Street and Bayview Avenue

Wellington Street and Mavrinac Boulevard

Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex

Town Park

Yonge and Allaura

Yonge and Aurora Heights

Yonge and Bloomington

Yonge and Butternut Ridge

Yonge and Industrial Parkway South

Norm Weller Park

Confederation Park

Industrial Parkway South and Engelhard

Tim Jones Trail and Stone Road

Bayview Avenue and Stone Road

McDonald and Haida

Orchard Heights

Aurora Carpool Lot (at Wellington and Highway 404)

Hartwell Way

Tim Jones Trail and St. John's Sideroad

Locations, note the Feasibility Study, have been chosen to improve accessibility to ?major destinations, employment, and community services in the Town for people who may not have access to or may prefer not to use a private automobile; proximity to transit stations to make bike shares options for the first and/or last mile of the transit trip; and encouraging locals and visitors to explore the Town.?

?Choosing the service area depends on considerations of a variety of factors, including demand, land use and cost,? reads the study. ?It is recommended to base the service area in high-density parts of a municipality with mixed land uses to create convenient connections between a significant set of origin and destination points to potentially attract more people to use bike share. To ensure reliable coverage, a municipality should aim for a generally uniform density of bike share stations, commonly targeting to place a station within a 300 m to 500 m diameter buffer of each other.

?At the same time, it is important to consider capturing lower-density areas, where underserved populations may rely on active modes of travel and transit and would greatly benefit from improved connectivity to the transportation system via bike share. Therefore, a few stations may be placed outside of dense coverage areas based on land use, existing infrastructure, and community needs. Regardless of the chosen station density, all stations within the service area should be within a reasonable walking distance (e.g. within three to five minutes of walking) of each other and of key origins and destinations to provide users with a convenient and reliable way to travel from [or] to anywhere in the municipality.?

By Brock Weir