

POLITICS AS USUAL: Cycling Safety

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I have previously written about my concerns regarding bike safety in and around York Region and Aurora in particular.

I have personally experienced the white knuckle ride of terror that is riding down St. John's from Bathurst to Yonge on my bike. So I know whence I speak.

However, given this week's serious accident involving a cyclist, I am going to make the case once again for the desperate need for enhanced cycling infrastructure if not for improved commuting then at least for the sake of safety.

This past week, a cyclist was seriously injured while riding his bike near the intersection of Yonge and Golf Links.

Media reports indicate that the cyclist has life threatening injuries. Now, I do not know what happened, and before you send me emails, I do not know who was at fault. Yes, people do crazy things on their bikes that are quite dangerous, and drivers do crazy things that endanger cyclists. But that, frankly, is not the point of the column.

The point is urban cycling safety should be safer.

And for it to be safer, cycling needs to be more of a priority when considering Regional and Municipal transit planning and infrastructure. Literally billions of dollars have been spent on the Viva Busway (or Rapidway? I can't keep track of the names?) and not a few paltry dollars could be set aside for bike lanes?

If you're going to proceed with a massive transit infrastructure plan, why couldn't it include people-powered transit too? Makes more sense to do it all in one go rather than trying to add in bike lanes after the fact.

Cycling safety could be substantially improved by the creation of proper - and connecting - bike lanes. One could say I am somewhat biased. And one would be right. I am biased. I ride my bike everywhere.

When I am not on transit, I am either on my bike or walking. It's how I get around.

So, I think we need more bike lanes. And not just lines on the road. I think we need an integrated cycling road network, with separated bike lanes, like they have downtown in Toronto and Vancouver and elsewhere.

I ride my bike in downtown Toronto traffic and yet am perfectly safe. Why? Because the lanes are separated, for the most part. (Yes, the bike lanes under the Gardiner that extend towards the lake are just lines on the road, and yes, every day as I stop at Yonge and Queen's Quay, even at 5:45 in the morning I have to watch for cabs and buses trying to squeeze me over so they can make the turn. So it is not ideal).

In Aurora, I frankly do not feel safe riding my bike on most of the main roads - Yonge Street in particular. There isn't even a line on the road, let alone a barrier to demarcate where cyclists should be and cars should not. This needs to change, and, hopefully it will, in the very near future.

(In the interest of full disclosure, I sit on the Town's Trails and Active Transportation committee and this fall we are looking into developing a cycling master plan where we will be looking at this very issue. Will keep you posted on our progress!)