

POLITICS AS USUAL: The Better Way?

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I can't bring my bike on the train in the morning.

As per TTC bylaws, I am required to have a foldable bike in order to ride the subway each way.

Most days I don't mind, but when it is exceedingly hot and the train is very crowded, it does make for a very uncomfortable ride. Indeed, as I trudged down the subway platform last week with my foldable bike safely stowed in a large sized shoulder bag ? the full weight of its 28 pounds crushing my shoulder ? I thought there has to be a better way.

The TTC's motto is, ?the Better Way?, but honestly it seems, for us commuters, it is the ONLY way, and, as with all monopolies, there isn't much incentive, much less consideration, of the comfort of the users of their service.

You either use it or you walk. Period.

I guess you could drive, but with the cost of gas, insurance, parking and one's sanity in bumper to bumper traffic, driving really isn't a choice. Certainly not for me.

So, we all grumble but ultimately make do with what we are provided.

Don't get me wrong: what we have is okay. It affords me the opportunity to get around Aurora and Toronto somewhat efficiently and for a fairly reasonable price. But, as with all services, improvements can be made.

I row virtually every day (weather permitting) sometimes twice a day. That requires me to get to Cherry Beach in Toronto from Aurora by transit at 5 a.m. and then back up to my office near Steeles by 9 a.m. Every day, I travel over 125 km round trip ? by GO bus, then bike, then subway, then bike, then GO train home. (Yes, I know, on paper that sounds crazy. I guess it is, but I love to row, so there you go).

In the midst of all that, I have to pack and unpack my folding bike multiple times just so I can ride a train. That is where the inefficiency comes in.

Sustainable transportation means multi-modal transportation. It means considering how commuters access the transit system ? walking, driving and yes biking.

It means efficient, effective and accessible sustainability options should be afforded commuters at every access point to the transit system.

Toronto has fantastic bike lanes. I ride them every day. But, use of the bike lanes is not integrated into use of the various modes of transit. It's clearly not a real consideration.

Consider this: if you ride your bike from the lake to Union station, and then want to get on a bus, you have to fold up your bike, or hope that the one of two spots on the front of the bus is still available.

If you want to use the subway and it's between the hours of 7 and 10 a.m. and 3 and 6 p.m., then you have to fold up your bike. Period.

Your only other option is to leave your bike locked up at a subway station, like you park your car. But a bike is not a car. That's the whole point of using a bike. I need to use my bike when I get off the train. If it's parked at a subway station, then I am forced to walk or wait for another bus. That does not make sense.

As we move further into the 21st century, we need to have integrated transit planning that truly considers multi-modal transit ? gas, electric and, yes, human powered.