

# St. Catharines Standard (ON)

## City flattens the tires of downtown cyclists

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One could excuse the city's cyclists if they are feeling a little left out by St. Catharines city council

A couple of weeks ago, council backed off a change to a bylaw that would allow cyclists to share downtown sidewalks with pedestrians

Then on Monday, council moved to request Niagara Region redesign Ontario Street - soon to be converted to two-way traffic - to exclude designated bike lanes.

To add insult to injury, the Region's plans for two-way King and St Paul streets don't include bike lanes either (although it must be noted Niagara Region staff isn't warm to the city's suggestion to eliminate the Ontario Street bike lanes)

Cyclists can't ride on the sidewalk and they put themselves at risk riding on a road without bike lanes

So what is a downtown cyclist to do?

The city does have valid concerns about bike lanes on Ontario Street.

The very thing that makes it treacherous to ride on downtown streets is the same that makes bike lanes impractical: the roads are narrow.

Traffic has little room to manoeuvre around the cyclist and there is always the threat of the door of a parked car being opened into the path of a bike rider.

The conversion to two-way traffic requires a new alignment on Ontario Street, and city engineers predict adding bike lanes to the mix will increase traffic congestion by 50 per cent.

This is inconvenient for motorists, does no favours for efforts at downtown renewal and is bad for the environment.

Which means an alternative has to be found.

Bicycles help get cars off our streets and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

They are great exercise for the cyclists, helping us fight the growing obesity problem.

Instead of finding new ways of discouraging cycling downtown, St. Catharines city council should be doing all it can to encourage more people to use bicycles.

The suggestion to direct bicycle traffic to Yates Street and other side streets is a good one, provided the city and/or Region provide proper signage

advising cyclists of the safer route

But this is only a start.

What St. Catharines needs is a comprehensive downtown cycling strategy, as suggested by St. Patrick's Coun. Mark Elliott at Monday night's council meeting.

It's no secret the downtown is in need of revitalizing, and the city has expressed desire in developing a "creative cluster" in the core.

Amenities like a performing arts centre and employers like Silicon Knights and the nGen new media incubator are among the centrepieces of this vision, but it also means making sure the downtown is a welcoming place for both pedestrians and cyclists.

That means doing more than installing bike racks at every corner.

It means ensuring safe routes into and around the core for cyclists so they can use the bike racks when they get there.

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