



Active Transportation

Photo Credit: Author

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Introduction

While the use of automobiles might seem the obvious choice for getting around smaller cities and towns, many people choose other, active modes of transportation like walking and cycling. Active transportation has seen a surge in popularity in many cities across North America in recent years. In particular, rates of cycling, have seen a rise in numbers in cities of all sizes, geographical regions, and climates throughout the continent (Pucher et al., 2011). The reasons for this are complex, but ultimately relate to how cities are providing both support programs and attractive spaces for cycling, making active transportation safer and more convenient (Pucher et al., 2010).

"A bicycling renaissance is... underway in many cities of North America"

- Pucher et al., 2011, p.471

Cities have been doing a lot in recent years to make their active transportation network more attractive and user-friendly for users of all ages. Infrastructure renewal projects and cycling education and marketing programs have made many people reconsider how they get around, and many people are benefiting. In fact, there are a multitude of things that cities and towns have done to encourage active transportation, setting noteworthy precedents that other urban areas can follow.

Bike Lanes

Perhaps one of the most common examples of bicycle infrastructure seen in many cities and towns today is the humble, painted bike lane. Low-cost and easy to implement (Siemiatycki, Smith, & Walks, 2014, p.33), the painted bike lane has shown its ability to attract cyclists and help them move around safely.



Photo Credit: Costanza

Figure 1: New Orleans's South Carrollton Avenue bike lane

A New Orleans, Louisiana study shows that the installation of a painted bike lane can effectively foster more bicycle ridership on the particular street and on adjacent streets (Parker et al., 2013). **The study also notes that bike lanes can be an effective means of attracting new cyclists in an urban environment that is not known for its cycling culture (p.S105).**

Over in Vancouver, British Columbia the contentious Burrard Street Bridge bike lane project completed in 2009 -- where an entire lane of traffic was



Photo Credit: Complete Streets for Canada

Figure 2: Burrard Street Bridge before the 2009 bike lane trial

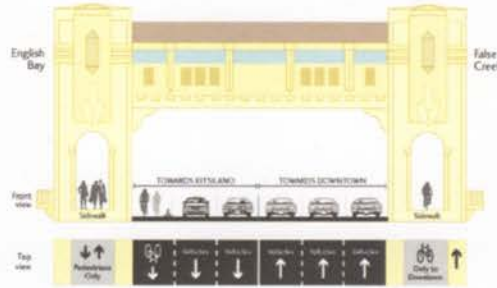


Photo Credit: Siemiatycki et al., 2014, p.43

Figure 3: Burrard Street Bridge after the 2009 bike lane trial

removed in favour of a bike lane -- is an example of how **pilot projects can be effectively used by municipalities to influence skeptical residents and politicians** (Siemiatycki et al., 2014). These pilot projects are low-cost, can be reversed, and can allow the general public to warm up to the idea of bike lanes before the project becomes permanent.

Of course, attracting new cyclists is not always as easy as painting a simple strip of white paint on the pavement. In Vancouver, the success of the Burrard bike lane project was the result of years of political maneuvering (Siemiatycki et al., 2014, pp.28-31). After the first attempt at a bike lane over the bridge failed in 1996, it took a new council and a charismatic mayor to pave the way for the 2009 success thirteen years later (p.14). Presumably, not all bike lane projects will be as controversial and drawn-out as this one. However, if Vancouver is any example, cities and towns should take note that even small changes can sometimes take concerted political will and leadership.

The Burrard Street bike lanes saw a 26% increase in bike traffic (70,000 cyclists) in the first three months

- Siemiatycki et al., 2014, p.18

Older Adults on Bicycles

While it might not seem obvious for older adults to cycle, many do still choose active modes of transportation. There are a variety of programs and initiatives that are available to support older adults who cycle.

Portland, Oregon, known for its high rate of cycling among its general population (Pucher et al., 2011) has a Senior Cyclist Program supported by Portland Parks & Recreation (Portland Bureau of Transportation, 2014). The program is aimed at older adults age 60 or over, and allows participants to (re)familiarize themselves with transportation cycling on a three-wheeled recumbent bicycle provided by the City of Portland. Classes take place along Portland's car-free Springwater Corridor Trail, where questions and concerns can be addressed by a qualified instructor.



Photo Credit: Eckerson Jr.

Figure 4: Participants of the Senior Cyclist Program in Portland, Oregon

While not exactly an example of how the *built form* encourages active transportation, Portland does provide a good example of how **cities can encourage older adults to cycle by providing the necessary support and education programs.**

Figure 5:
Winter cycling
in Calgary



Photo Credit: City of Calgary

Figure 6:
Plowing the
Midtown
Greenway and
Light Rail Trail
in Minneapolis



Photo Credit: Murphy

Cycling in the Winter

**Many cities
clear their off-
street pathways
within 24 hours
of the end of a
snowfall event**

Some may also see our typical Canadian winters as a barrier to cycling, but there are many who choose to cycle on a year-round basis. A Calgary, Alberta study aimed to determine the typical characteristics of “winter cyclists” in cold-weather cities (Amiri & Sadeghpour, 2013). The researchers found that a third of the cyclists (33%) were 45 years of age or older, and most cyclists (71%) do not mind temperature of down to -20°C (pp.4-5). Perhaps not so surprisingly, **this study identified better snow and gravel removal as winter cyclists’ first choice for improving active transportation infrastructure in the winter** (p.5).

Incidentally, Calgary has a comprehensive pathway snow clearing policy for the benefit of those who choose active modes of transportation. The City is committed to clearing 300 km of its network of pathways (out of a total 800 km) within 24 hours of when the snow stops falling (City of Calgary, 2014). The City also provides a snow and ice control map that identifies pathways and on-street bikeways that are regularly cleared.



Photo Credit: H-JEH Becker

Figure 7: Calgary’s Bow River trail
at the Peace Bridge in winter

Another cold-weather city known for its contingent of winter cyclists, Minneapolis, Minnesota has a pathway clearing policy similar to Calgary’s. Minneapolis’ Park Board and Public Works Department have policies to clear snow from their more than 130 km of off-street trails in less than 24 hours after a snowfall (City of Minneapolis, 2011). In addition to their clearing policies, **both Minneapolis and Calgary have online resources and information for those who may be interested in taking up winter cycling**, or simply looking to reacquaint themselves with proper road rules and effective winter cycling technique.

Final Thoughts

Active transportation plays an increasingly larger role in how people move around our cities and towns. Adequate infrastructure gives people the opportunity to choose active modes, government programming can support cyclist of all ages and abilities, and proper maintenance in all seasons allows people to cycle on a year-round basis. Cities and towns of all sizes can be a leader in active transportation planning and policy. All that is needed is sound political leadership and a strong vision.

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