

Friday, November 15, 2024

Online Submission

Procedural Services Branch
Whitney Block
Room 1405
99 Wellesley St. W
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

RE: City of Guelph Submission to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy Regarding the Bike Lane Approval Framework Proposed in Bill 212

The City of Guelph (the “City” or “Guelph”) appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the proposed framework for the provincial approval of certain municipal cycling lanes proposed as part of Bill 212 – the *Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, 2024*. This submission outlines the overall comments and recommendations from the City regarding the proposed legislative framework.

Executive Summary:

Overall, the City is concerned about the impacts that this proposed approval framework may have on future transportation planning in Guelph. The City’s existing and planned cycling infrastructure is informed by Council-approved plans and strategies, and is the result of extensive community engagement, technical studies, and environmental approvals through the provincial Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (MCEA) process. Through these plans, studies, and approvals, the City ensures that any new cycling infrastructure maintains sufficient road capacity for vehicular traffic, and that traffic flow disruption is minimized, in line with the intent of this legislation.

Given the extensive planning and approval frameworks already in place, the City concerned that this proposal would introduce additional steps and oversight which may delay, or fully hinder the City from realizing its goals of developing a safe and efficient cycling network. Additionally, the City is concerned that the bike lane removal provisions in this proposal may result in significant sunk costs and financial losses to municipalities if an existing bike lane is directed to be removed.

Based on these concerns, the City respectfully recommends that this framework be reconsidered given the potential for disruptive impacts to municipalities. Should this proposal come to pass in its current form, the City recommends that its enactment be postponed until clear regulatory guidance is developed which supports the intent of the legislation, while

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enabling the development of safe and effective cycling networks in Ontario's municipalities.

Importance of local context and decision making

To begin, we want to stress the importance of the local context in municipal decision making. As the level of government closest to the community, Guelph City Council and staff are best positioned to make infrastructure planning decisions informed by local context, input from residents, and local growth and transportation needs. Guelph's cycling network is the product of Council-approved plans and policies, and is backed by community engagement, traffic studies, safety audits, and environmental reviews dating back over a decade:

- The [2012 Cycling Master Plan](#) has been guiding the development of Guelph's cycling network over the past decade, and is the outcome of extensive community engagement, study and approval by the council;
- The [2019 Community Plan](#) supports the City's cycling infrastructure goals., and identifies improved connectivity by non-auto modes as a priority for the community;
 - The [2022 Transportation Master Plan](#) is the most recent comprehensive master plan which proposes a [core network of protected bike lanes](#) across the City, as the outcome of an MCEA process, rigorous engagement, technical study, and analysis.
- The [2024-2027 Future Guelph Strategic Plan](#) identifies the implementation of the Transportation Master Plan as a key objective, and identifies the importance of accessibility of cycling facilities.

These studies and strategies have required substantial time, cost, and effort to complete, and represent the vision of Guelph City Council and the Guelph community.

In addition to local planning processes, the City also adheres to federal and provincial assessment processes and guidelines in designing and constructing cycling infrastructure. Cycling infrastructure projects are subject to the MCEA process, and follow guidance outlined in Ontario Traffic Manual Book 18, as well as guidance from the Transportation Association of Canada. These guidelines and standards are the product of input from leading experts, consultants and practitioners from across the province and country, and the City's adherence to these processes and guidelines ensures that cycling infrastructure is designed to high standards, and any traffic and environmental impacts are mitigated.

With the extensive planning, study and engagement that goes into the development and design of the City's infrastructure, the City is concerned that this proposed approval process could override context-informed local decision-making, and present an unnecessary additional approval step which could hinder the implementation of planned municipal cycling infrastructure.

Value of cycling infrastructure

While we understand that the scope of this proposal does not necessarily extend to all cycling lanes, we want to re-iterate the value of dedicated cycling infrastructure in creating a resilient transportation system and enhancing overall road safety in Guelph.

Guelph is geographically compact, meaning it is possible to access most of the city by bike in 30 minutes or less. This represents an opportunity to achieve a significant mode share by bicycle, alleviating pressure on our road network for vehicular traffic, and sustainably accommodating growth in our community. We conservatively expect to achieve a 10% cycling mode share by 2051, provided we can deliver a safe and continuous network of cycling routes. This objective is aligned with local policies for reducing GHG emissions and supports Canada's 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan objectives.

The utility of dedicated cycling infrastructure extends to other road users beyond cyclists. Bike lanes also accommodate users of micromobility devices such as e-bikes and e-scooters, which will continue to be important as the Ministry of Transportation considers a five-year extension to O.Reg. 389/19 to allow e-scooters on public roadways. Guelph is a participant to this pilot project as of July 2023, and permits e-scooters on our municipal road network.

It is important to note that aside from supporting cyclists and micromobility users, dedicated cycling infrastructure is a key component in managing vehicular congestion on Guelph's roadways. Providing infrastructure that supports alternative modes such as bikes, scooters and other micromobility devices is a practical method to mitigate congestion, and to ensure that the transportation system remains resilient in the face of rapid population growth. The removal of cycling facilities in favour of traffic lanes has the potential to cause 'induced demand', where the additional vehicular capacity causes an increased use of cars as opposed to alternate modes of transport, resulting in continued congestion.

Dedicated cycling infrastructure also supports road safety, and is a key component in Guelph's commitment to Vision Zero which sets a goal of zero serious injuries and fatalities on Guelph's roadways. In Guelph, cyclists are over-represented in terms of collisions causing serious injury or death – despite only 3 per cent of trips currently being completed by bicycle, cyclists are involved in 9.9 per cent of all serious collisions. This discrepancy speaks to the need for safer cycling infrastructure, especially on major roadways connecting to key destinations. Extensive academic research supports the finding that protected dedicated cycling infrastructure increases trips by bikes and decreases the number and severity of collisions involving cyclists.

While efficient traffic flow is crucial in road design, it should not come at the expense of the safety of vulnerable road users. The City prioritizes the planning and implementation of new or improved cycling infrastructure while ensuring that road capacity for vehicular traffic remains sufficient and traffic flow disruption is minimized. This balanced approach is essential for promoting sustainable and safe transportation options and maintaining an effective transportation network.

Impacts of Bill 212 on Guelph's future cycling network:

Since 2012, the City has achieved some critical connecting links by reconfiguring roadways for dedicated cycling facilities, as supported by traffic impact studies and analyses. Given the physical and environmental constraints to expanding roadways, the reconfiguration of roadways represents 'quick wins' for our community, achieving cycling connections in critical areas, supporting access to schools, commercial areas, employment areas and recreation, and enhancing safety for all road users.

Looking ahead, the City may continue to strategically reconfigure roadways as an interim opportunity to fully connect the cycling network, support affordable transportation options, and support affordable housing by giving people reasonable, convenient and safe options to move throughout the city. A notable upcoming project is the planned construction of separated cycling lanes in Downtown Guelph, which will provide safe and convenient connections to Guelph Central Station and support a growing population. As Downtown Guelph is identified as a protected Major Transit Station Area, this project also supports provincial objectives by providing alternative transportation methods, supporting increased density, and supporting the reduction of parking minimums by reducing the reliance of residents on cars. Complimenting this project, an additional 4 to 6 km of protected bike lanes across the City are planned for the near future.

As mentioned above, these projects are the outcome of council direction, community input, and thorough design and planning work. We are concerned about the potential impacts of Bill 212 on the City's ability to undertake this important work going forward. Adding ministerial approval requirements extends the time between identifying a need and executing the recommended action, and may delay, or even prevent the City from completing this work. To improve cost effectiveness and minimize disruptions to residents, the City often couples bike lane installation with other scheduled road reconstruction work, and the addition of further approval requirements can introduce barriers to the City's ability to complete this work in an efficient and timely manner.

Additionally, Guelph has been awarded funding under the joint federal-provincial Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) for the completion of protected cycling infrastructure. This legislation may result in impacts to the scope of projects supported through this funding, as these projects may involve the reconfiguration of existing traffic lanes to accommodate cycling infrastructure.

Aside from impacts to future infrastructure, Guelph is equally concerned about the potential of this legislation to result in the removal of existing bike lanes. Cycling lanes represent significant investments into the City's transportation network, and the potential removal of facilities under this proposed legislation would result in unrecoverable sunk local tax dollars. This is particularly concerning in today's economic climate, where municipalities across the province continue to face rising costs, and working to avoid putting an additional financial burden on property taxpayers.

Should Bill 212 come to pass in its current form, Guelph and other municipalities would need to be actively engaged in the development of specific regulations and guidelines under this legislation. Additionally, should the Province determine removal of any existing bike lanes is warranted in the future, we expect that the Province reimburse the City for the sunk costs of their construction, and pay for their removal.

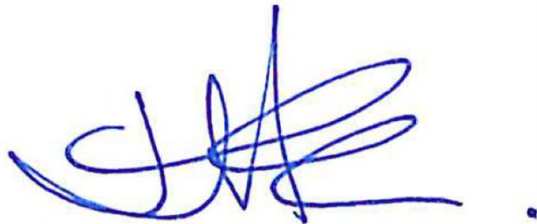
Closure

We appreciate this opportunity to provide input on this proposal. We want to emphasize that we share the Ontario government's vision of an effective, fast and safe transportation system, and we believe that municipalities are best positioned to make decisions about local cycling infrastructure. Should this legislation pass, we look forward to working with the government to develop regulatory guidelines which support the intent of the legislation, while facilitating the development of safe and effective cycling networks in Ontario's municipalities.

For additional feedback please refer to the Guelph City Council motion from September 24, 2024 regarding this matter, as well as [Mayor Guthrie's letter to the Premier expressing his concern with the proposed cycling lane framework](#).

Should you have any questions about the feedback provided, or require additional details please do not hesitate to contact the City at intergovernmental.relations@guelph.ca.

Sincerely,



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