



Paths for People

FIVE REASONS YOU WANT BIKE LANES

Protected bike lanes are a win for all Edmontonians. Here are five reasons we all want them.
August 24, 2017

ONE: DRIVERS PREFER THEM

Researchers in San Francisco have discovered an unprecedented agreement between drivers and cyclists: They both want protected bike lanes. Drivers there indicated higher degrees of comfort with increased separation from cyclists, while cyclists indicated the same with increased separation from motorists.¹ Researchers asked 1,177 drivers to rate their comfort with increased segregation from cyclists, from sharrows to lanes to protected tracks. They then asked cyclists the same question. Their conclusions? “[W]hile drivers and cyclists disagree on almost everything, they can both agree on the value of investing in separated/protected bike lanes. More than 80% of respondents in every user group agreed that separated lanes make cyclists more predictable on the road ...”²

What does this mean for Edmonton? Motorists here have increasing anxiety over the growing numbers of cyclists (as well as pedestrians and other active mobility users) on our streets. Many communities see more than two per cent of residents making daily commute trips by bike, and these numbers are expected to grow substantially in coming years. Investing in segregated lanes, now, will make all road users happier and safer.

TWO: THEY UP THE PACE YET KEEP IT SAFE

Our ability to move around a city boils down to how much space there is to share. But conventional wisdom, that space taken from a motorist for a protected bike lane means that motorist will be slowed down, is proving false. Department of Transportation research conducted before and after New York City installed its protected bike lanes suggests that the lanes there have enticed more people to commute by bicycle, which in turn has reduced the total number of drivers and their demands for space on the street, which in turn means *less* congestion for the drivers who remain. With less congestion, drivers have seen their travel times *reduced* by as much as 35 per cent.³ Meanwhile, the same protected lanes have also reduced injury rates for cyclists (down 17 per cent) and pedestrians (down 22 per cent), but most especially for drivers (down 25 per cent).⁴

What does this mean for Edmonton? Our city’s population is set to grow to 1.5-million people in about 25 years. Demands for space are set to intensify as we become a small big city rather than a big small town. Installing infrastructure that allows more of us to

¹ <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0965856416305018>

² <http://usa.streetsblog.org/2016/08/12/study-even-drivers-prefer-protected-bike-lanes/>

³ <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2014-09-03-bicycle-path-data-analysis.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

move, faster and safer, is the only way we will keep our city livable and lovable.

THREE: MONEY MONEY MONEY

One of the most common fears about bike lanes is their perceived effect on street space for drivers to park their cars—and in turn, on the profitability of businesses near that parking. But researchers in Toronto have determined these fears are unfounded. In 2008, the researchers set out to speak to business patrons along Bloor Street, one of Toronto's busiest commercial strips, and found that only 10 per cent of business patrons drove there, while the remainder arrived by foot, transit or bicycle.⁵ The researchers also found that patrons who arrived by bike, foot or transit *spent the most money* and visited the most often.⁶ These findings are echoed in several other cities that have created protected lanes for cyclists. In San Francisco, for example, more than 60 per cent of retailers surveyed after lanes were created said sales had increased.⁷

What does this mean for Edmonton? Our city is weathering the softening price of oil remarkably well, but our small and medium-sized local businesses can definitely use a cash injection. Research suggests protected bike lanes are part of the recipe to create vibrant streets that will, in turn, create more profitable and resilient retail businesses. If we build bike lanes we all benefit where it counts — our pocketbooks.

FOUR: THEY REDUCE INJURIES BY 90 PER CENT

Canadian research shows that a lack of real and perceived safety is the major driver behind our country's low cycling rates (we make about 3 per cent of all trips on bikes compared to continental Europe, where up to 30 per cent trips are made by bike). Indeed, researchers in Vancouver found safety had the highest power to convince people to cycle and concluded that this safety was linked to the location and design of bicycle routes.⁸ They also found protected lanes seem safe because, well, they really are safe. Indeed, they examined injury risk for cyclists using 14 types of infrastructure in Canada, to determine that infrastructure's influence on injury rates. In Canada, protected bike lanes reduce injury risk by up to 90 per cent compared to a reference street without protected lanes.⁹

What does this mean for Edmonton? Our city has committed to Vision Zero, which is the goal of reducing the number of injuries on our roads suffered by motorists, cyclists and pedestrians to zero. We will not meet this goal without significant, connected and usable protected bike infrastructure. Period.

⁵ <http://ottawa.ca/cs/groups/content/@webottawa/documents/pdf/mdaw/mdyx/~edisp/con056212.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Winters M, Davidson G, Kao D, Teschke K: Motivators and deterrents of bicycling: comparing influences on decisions to ride

⁹ <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2012.300762>

FIVE: THEY ARE MAGIC MEDICINE

Imagine a miracle drug that reduced your risk of dying from heart disease by more than 50 per cent, of dying from cancer by 40 per cent and of developing either heart disease or cancer by at least 45 per cent. Well, it's cycling.¹⁰ A 2017 British study looked at 263,450 subjects who commuted to work and grouped them by the different modes they used to get there. They then followed subjects for five years and were floored with what they found. The authors have pushed the UK and other countries, like Canada, that have lagged behind continental Europe on cycling infrastructure to embrace the “potentially transformative” effects doing so could have on public health.¹¹

What does this mean for Edmonton? Each hour, each day, Alberta spends \$2.4-million on our healthcare system.¹² Every dollar spent is a dollar taxed. What this means is embracing cycling offers massive potential savings.

¹⁰ <http://www.bmj.com/content/357/bmj.j1456>

¹¹

http://theconversation.com/cycling-to-work-major-new-study-suggests-health-benefits-are-staggering-76292?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=facebookbutton

¹² <http://www.health.alberta.ca/about/health-funding.html>