

Region continues to promote cycling as part of active transportation

By Bill Rea

Cycling is an important component of an active community, and Peel Region has plenty of opportunities to accommodate it. That was one of the points made recently to Regional councillors, as they heard results of a Joint Cycling Research Study. The study was conducted by the Region and the Waterloo Public Transportation Initiative.

Jeff Casello, an associate professor at the School of Planning and Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Waterloo, told councillors one of the complications is there is a lack of data on cycling.

He said the goals and objectives of the study included engaging people to understand the motivations and obstacles to cycling, as well as gathering data on where and when they travel, the infrastructure facilities they use the most and where cyclists believe these facilities are in the most need of improvement.

The data was collected from three groups between July and October 2012, with representation from throughout the region, reflecting diversity in age and incomes. A total of 212 people contributed to the study.

Casello said the results indicated the most common motivation to cycling is it improves fitness and health, followed by it being a source of enjoyment, it helps the environment and it's low cost and convenient.

When it comes to obstacles to cycling, Casello cited safety concerns as the main one, especially when it comes to interaction with other traffic. Other prominent concerns involved weather, poor behaviour on the part of motorists, road conditions and increased travel time.

Casello said that during the study period, the 212 participants made almost 2,400 trips covering more than 23,000 kilometres. The non-recreational trips averaged 6.4 kilometres and the bikes were travelling about 15 km-h, allowing for access to many destinations.

Casello concluded there is a lot of potential for increasing the amount of cycling in Peel, with a wider variety of bicycle-friendly infrastructure. He said the study found cyclists represent a wide range of age groups and income categories, with the majority being ?choice cyclists.?

He also said the next steps should involve the Region and area municipalities going over this data and assessing where there should be priority investments and policy changes.

Brampton Councillor Paul Palleschi observed the City has set up a new cycling committee in the last year. He added he had to make a recent trip to Toronto and was amazed at the number of cyclists there.

?It's absolutely catching on,? he declared.

Brampton Councillor Elaine Moore agreed there's plenty of opportunity.

?I think we need all the help we can get,? she commented.

Casello noted there is traditionally an adversarial relationship between cyclists and motorists, and that needs to be worked on.

Caledon Councillor Allan Thompson too noted the number of recreational cyclists, adding education is important to improving safety. Thompson said the majority of cyclists behave responsibly.

?The minority have an attitude problem,? he observed, commenting many of them aren't visible, and some even wear black when riding at night. ?If you can't be seen, you can't be noticed.?

?I couldn't agree with you more,? Casello replied.

Staff continues to promote cycling as part of Peel's Active Transportation Plan.

A report on the issue went to council at the same meeting, which stated the plan and an implementation strategy was approved about two years ago.