

Scarborough bike path plans rolling along

Lawrence Avenue stretch would constitute city's longest continuous bike lane

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Call it the Great Bike Lane of Scarborough.

At 24 kilometres, stretching from Victoria Park Avenue all the way to the Rouge River, city staff are looking at carving out what would be the longest continuous bicycle lane in Toronto, along Lawrence Avenue - and starting work on the plan as early as next year.

"It's still in the early design stages at this point," said Daniel Egan, Toronto's staff lead on cycling infrastructure.

"We haven't gone out to public consultations or really even sat down with all the councillors to go through all the impacts. But I think most of it looks pretty doable."

The plan, if it gets the go-ahead, would see the wide roadway narrowed slightly for cars, and bike-only lanes painted on the north and south side.

Ward 38 (Scarborough Centre) Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker, an avid cyclist who's been pushing the plan forward with staff, said the long bicycle route would open up the possibility of commuting by bicycle for thousands of Scarborough residents.

"I think there are thousands of people in Scarborough who, for exercise, health and saving money on gas, would rather ride their bike to work if it was safe," said De Baeremaeker. "In Scarborough, it's almost impossible to ride a bike, because it isn't safe. You risk your life because cars are going 60-, 80-kilometers-an-hour, and as a cyclist, there's no dedicated space for you."

De Baeremaeker said that's especially true for Lawrence as it stands.

But he said the roadway is strategically located for creating across-town bike route that most of Scarborough would be able to access.

"It's a strategic location because it's around about the middle of Scarborough," he said. "If you had a bike lane right across Scarborough from the Pickering border at the Rouge Marsh, all the way to Victoria Park and maybe eventually to the Don Valley Parkway and Bayview Avenue, to go into the heart of Toronto - that gives you amazing flexibility. And we could put bike lanes there at virtually no inconvenience to cars."

However, De Baeremaeker is not the only councillor whose ward would be host to the bike lanes.

Ward 43 (Scarborough East) Councillor Paul Ainslie said he's cool to the idea - as long as the stretch of Lawrence in his ward, particularly between Galloway Road and Kingston Road, remains in such substandard condition.

"The part of Lawrence between Galloway and Kingston is like a lunar landscape - and its not due for repaving until 2015," said Ainslie.

"I can't look at my residents and tell them that they're stuck with this crappy piece of road they can't drive on, but we're putting in bike lanes. And if we're putting in bike lanes at all, we have to come to understand that Scarborough isn't a bicycle utopia. They use cars here - that's how people get around."

Ainslie said he'd support the bike lane only if the city also accelerated road resurfacing work on Lawrence.

"Either fix the pavement and respect the needs of motorists and bicyclists, or don't do it," he said.