

OBS2020 Synopsis

Thank you for the opportunity to attend OBS2020. The sessions proved very enjoyable and highly informative. I was particularly impressed by the many communities, both urban and rural, that showed a dedication and enthusiasm to implement and continue to develop meaningful cycling and active mobility infrastructure.

The opening remarks from Stephanie Hahn left me a bit surprised with her mention of a shakeup at Share the Road with a new Board and a new Director. Of course, their focus remains the same; a commitment to continue to advocate for more cycling safety in Ontario.

Remarks from Minister of Transportation, Caroline Mulroney, recognized that the pandemic created a significant increase in cycling causing bicycle sales to skyrocket. This led to a shortage of bikes and all cycling related products.

A more important takeaway was her recognition of the need to incorporate cycling infrastructure in government objectives going forward, including improving e-bike legislation and changing collision reporting to include dooring incidents of cyclists.

The session on *Cycling During the Pandemic and Beyond* recognized through CAA surveys that regular daily driving commutes were greatly reduced and walking and cycling were dramatically increased. Negatively, it also led to a greater frequency of poor and reckless driving habits.

A cross section of individuals representing a major urban centre, a smaller city and a rural community showed many thoughtful initiatives were quickly implemented to address the immediate need for more active mobility options that included increased safety considerations.

Having to introduce these efforts rapidly resulted in mixed responses from the public as there was little time for consultation; however, it highlighted the benefits such as weekend closures of streets with incredibly positive feedback, while at the same time recognizing the necessity of early and precise communication to the public.

The *Changing Hearts and Minds* session pointed out the importance of expanding cycling infrastructure in the suburbs. Cycling has many benefits but, first and foremost, to entice people to embrace the sport, roads and trails need to be safe.

Engaging the community in various ways, such as interacting with students and residents, arranging walkabouts, and inviting feedback can result in useful benefits that show their desire for more traffic control, an increase in parks and public spaces and greater cycling infrastructure. Easy access to safe bicycles, good bike parking and bike repair facilities can enhance the cycling experience.

The *Bicycle Friendly Communities Seminar* was particularly informative. The Bicycle Friendly Communities Program currently involves 78 dedicated communities that want to address and improve cycling infrastructure.

As a resident of Mississauga, I was obviously fascinated to hear the presentation from Matthew Sweet and Jenna Prokop. With no intention of favouritism, I was impressed by the trajectory of the city in the implementation of their cycling program. Considering the Cycling Master Plan of 2018, there is much already accomplished and a great deal more to come. There is the Community Groups Registry Program combined with the Small Projects Matching Grants Program and in 2019, out of the sixteen approved projects, there were five 'MOVE' ones. These were Erindale Village Association, Lakeview Ratepayers Association, Town of Port Credit Association, Whiteoaks Lorne Park Community Association and Sheridan Homelands Ratepayers Association. There was also a Peel Multicultural Council cycling initiative. Cycling has a terrific future in Mississauga and as a Strava user, I must say 'kudos'!

This entire session was particularly informative. Durham Region conducted an extensive community online survey. Apart from other results, 53% felt more secure bike parking facilities are important. The survey led to some key strategies; bike parking, signage and wayfinding, education and encouragement, and maintenance.

The amazing enthusiasm of Durham Region and the Town of Saugeen Shores to share the ongoing efforts with their cycling projects left me with a realization that the interest and determination of municipalities to recognize the importance of cycling in their communities is ever growing.

Additionally, Marian Mithani and Olivia White from Eco-Counter demonstrated the importance of counting data to develop an effective cycling community, including permanent count installations for year-round data. Also, Karen Labaree from BikeMaps showed an amazing ability to monitor accident data that would benefit municipalities in providing safe cycling environments.

In the fourth session, *Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals*, I was impressed by the amount of effort and study that is applied to the design of roundabouts, particularly as it pertains to pedestrians and cyclists. I learned that currently, there is no law for riding through roundabouts.

A presentation by Fred Sandoval from the City of Mississauga followed entitled, *Bike Signals and Crossrides*. One of the topics was that the most common collisions with bicycles involves motor vehicles turning right. A solution presented was to reduce the turning radius so that motor vehicles would have to turn at a slower speed allowing more time and a better view of oncoming riders. There is the use of truck aprons to accommodate larger trucks. It was a detailed and informative session that included the need for consistent markings and signage for cyclists at all types of crossings.

A detailed report was given by Dave McLaughlin and Shawn Smith of WSP on the newly revised edition of the Ontario Traffic Manual Book 18: Cycling Facilities Handbook. It is the primary design resource for municipalities across Ontario to reference. It is an update to the original 2013 edition and is nearing completion for release in early 2020. With the significant increase in cycling interest, more progressive attention had to be paid to safety and accessibility for all skill levels of cyclists. As well, the hope is that municipalities be consistent with adjacent

ones in critical infrastructure implementation. Every conceivable situation is addressed in this valuable resource.

It is clear that the role of APBP (Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals) is especially important in the research, design and engineering of safe and sustainable cycling infrastructure to assist municipalities in their efforts.

Day Two of OBS2020 began with opening remarks from Eleanor McMahon, who was the Founder and CEO of Share the Road for over seven years. She is currently President and CEO of the Trans Canada Trail. Her comments were complimentary to Caroline Mulroney with her positive cycling message on opening day. Eleanor feels that the shift to active mobility will continue post pandemic and that trails are a lifeline with mental as well as physical benefits.

Thus began the day with the first session being *Cycling Tourism and Trails*. Because of COVID-19, trail use in 2020 experienced a huge increase, providing economic benefit to local businesses. Mathieu Roy of The Great Trail said that 78% of Canadians feel trails are safe to use during the pandemic.

The Great Trail of Canada (Trans-Canada Trail) spans 27000 kilometres and connects three oceans. It is a phenomenal success that involves more than five hundred trail sections that make up the network.

Since COVID-19, the strongly elevated enjoyment of trails was evident in a recent survey that showed 69% intended to use a trail this winter. With all that interest, there is an increased need for adequate trail signage and ongoing maintenance. While there are tremendous financial requirements to deliver those needs, it is advisable that communities seize the presented opportunities.

Learning about the Great Waterfront Trail from Marlaine Koehler of the Waterfront Regeneration Trust was inspirational. A section of The Great Trail launched in 2019 that connects Sault Ste Marie and Sudbury. Cycling Northern Ontario is no longer just for the extreme cross-country cyclist.

The Waterfront Regeneration Trust facilitates and manages a partnership of over 155 communities, conservation authorities and others. Marlaine described the challenge of ensuring that a major highway had safe shoulders and other parts of the trail needing improved surfaces to accommodate more than trail bikes. Among many other responsibilities, they work hard to develop the tourism potential of the Great Waterfront Trail. Cycling in Northern Ontario and discovering the pristine beauty of the area can be an exhilarating experience.

Karen Bittner from the Town of Blind River showed how a little effort and creativity can transform various areas of a town to beautify and attract visitors and, in particular, cycling tourists.

Another exciting cycling adventure was shared by Jennifer McCourt from Discovery Routes Trails Organization. She provided an update on the status of the Voyageur Cycling Route. In 2020, it spans 645 kilometres following the path of the Voyageurs along the great waterways that

supported transportation and trade for several thousand years. It is a Nationally significant route with direct connections to the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, the National Capital Region and Quebec's La Route Verte. It also shares alignment with over 200 kilometres of The Great Trail.

Jennifer also reiterated the impact of the pandemic by noting that insight from northernontario.travel indicated that broad outdoor activity traffic was up 176% and searches on their site for cycling in Northern Ontario increased by 331%. One statistic showed that motorized touring decreased by 13%. Jennifer mentioned 'hyper-local and explore your backyard' campaigns that were coupled with take-out along cycling routes. In addition, tourism agencies engaged local storytellers and grounded travel freelancers to write about local cycling experiences.

The Guelph to Goderich Trail was introduced by Doug Cerson of G2G Rail Trail Inc. It currently has 140 kilometres of existing trail connecting thirteen communities, with only 15 kilometres of on road detour. Looking to have two major grants approved for surface re-hab, 2021 could see the G2G Trail become the largest off-road cycling project ever in Ontario. The trail incorporates the Lake Huron Route, the Perth Harvest Pathway, and the Kissing Bridge Trailway.

Session 2 on Day 2: *Cycling and the New Normal: Provincial Perspective* was comprised of a panel of MPPs representing Ontario. A member from each party, Jessica Bell - NDP, Stephen Blair – Liberal, Norm Miller – PC and Mike Schreiner – Green Party.

Jessica Bell wants more bills introduced that address road safety and amending the Highway Traffic Act. She wants tougher penalties for motor vehicle drivers involved in cycling collisions and actively promotes Vision Zero.

Stephen Blair was previously a city councillor with the City of Ottawa. He contends that there is no province wide plan in respect to cycling.

Norm Miller felt that cycling issues should not be partisan in any way. He acknowledged that it cannot be an attitude of driver vs cyclist and stated the need for more public education on this matter. He noted that change takes time and how attitudes towards paved shoulders advanced in a positive way over the last twenty years. He strongly supports 'dooring' legislation.

Mike Schreiner desires and is working to achieve all party support for cycling road safety initiatives. He noted that Quebec is well ahead of Ontario with cycling tourism endeavours.

Overall, it appeared that everyone was supportive of doing more to address cycling concerns and that private member bills continue to be introduced for cycling interests.

The next session involved *Building Support and Overcoming Challenges*. Amanda O'Rourke from 8 80 Cities spoke about overcoming challenges to create Canada's first Vision Zero pop-ups. 8 80 Cities was established with the help of an anonymous donor and is a non-profit organization based in Toronto with a mission to improve the quality of life for people in cities no matter their age, ability, or socioeconomic status.

8 80 Cities tries to implement community-based initiatives that promote safer streets by engaging local residents in taking direct action and building solutions in their community. They organized

three Toronto projects, pre-COVID-19, that illustrated ideas for a Vision Zero street. Two were created in front of schools, one at Pineway and another at Mountview where simple, colourful temporary structures were placed on the street to either restrict traffic or to slow vehicles considerably. Mountview closed the street and the resulting data showed an increase in the number of children walking to school and a 27% increase in students cycling to school with a corresponding 24.5% less children being driven to school. Pineway slowed traffic which showed a decrease in average speed from 35km/h to 24km/h. Both pop-ups proved successful and were nicely supported by the community.

A much grander project was conducted on Danforth. Many factors were addressed, decorative streetscapes, greater seating, parklets, enhanced lighting and separated bike lanes. Motor vehicle traffic was restricted to one lane in each direction. Results showed a increase in pedestrian and cycling activity, a higher gender balance, a much greater sense of safety, particularly crossing major intersections and, ultimately, a huge uptick in community spirit.

Zibbi Petch from IBI discussed how cycling facilities can often involve significant debate and deliberation in both the planning and design stages. She noted an approach used in Hamilton, the Cannon Street Bikeway, and with the King Street project in Upper Waterloo. Both highlighted her philosophy that emphasizes improvement over time and favours pilot projects, rapid implementation, and design adjustments later to perfect permanent installations.

The presentation by Peter Kavcic with the City of London, Ontario dealt in detail with the challenges faced when consultation faced seven alternatives originally put forth with the acceptance of an eighth and preferred approach to the King Street cycle lane project. There were also unique construction issues that involved the closing of streets and had to allow for the bike lane to be built in a timely manner to minimize vehicle, cyclist, transit, and pedestrian disruption. Ultimately, it turned the tide in support of more cycling infrastructure in London.

The final session of Day 2 was *Harnessing Data in Support of Cycling: Examples* dealt with the importance of data to identify trends related to walking, cycling, and transit, using an evidence-based approach. The data is also used to demonstrate connections between active transportation and health, wellness, equity, safety, and environmental sustainability. The information garnered can be used effectively to attract the interest of municipal councillors, staff, and citizens. Susan Sauve with the City of Peterborough along with Deanna Leahy from Peterborough Public Health cited data from 2016-2018 and pointed out the many safer cycling infrastructure improvements as a result of having adequate data. Because of the data, the city is promoting cycling education in their schools, bike mechanic interest to students and Peterborough is developing a cycling master plan.

Matt Kussin from the City of Kingston followed with information regarding an extensive and comprehensive survey conducted with over 22,000 mail outs, 4000 completed travel daily diaries, and very appealing marketing initiatives explaining the purpose of the survey, how the results will be applied, and offering households a chance to win a \$500 gift card. 'Kingston Moves' was the largest coordinated effort to collect detailed travel data in Kingston's history. Fortunately, it captured data prior to the impact of COVID-19, representing conditions

considered more normal. The data will direct cycling infrastructure development in the area for years to come.

The third and final day of OBS2020 began with *Equity, Diversity & Inclusion: Ontario Examples*. Armi de Francia from the Town of Ajax gave a detailed analysis of the factors affecting blacks and other visible minorities. Unfortunately, there still exists a fair degree of racist attitudes in society, even in Canada. Arni claims that there are systemic inequalities affecting cycling safety and showed a media report of an incident involving police and a black cyclist. She mentioned the subject of atonement as it pertains to transportation systems being used to steal lands from indigenous people, including bike trails.

Sabat Ismail from York University conveyed the importance of challenging power and creating change in order to have initiatives focused on equity be successful. She wants everyone to be a part of the solution and notes that equity relates to how costs are distributed.

Theron Pierce from Hamilton Bike Share showed that inclusion is possible with their *Everyone Rides Initiative*. There were four actions required to make Hamilton Bike Share more equitable; bike access, subsidization, education, and outreach. They tried to identify and remove barriers to bike use. Many community organizations were selected to create purposefully diverse partnerships. A series of free 'Partner Organizations Pass Types' were introduced to help promote cycling throughout the community, especially to underserved segments. A variety of bike types were used, i.e.: adult tricycles. The initiative proved remarkably successful.

The Centre for Active Transportation discussed building a cycling culture in suburban communities. Yvonne Verlinden introduced a statistic showing that from 1996 to 2016, cycling rates in Toronto and East York grew from 1.3% to 6.9%, while the rate in Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke actually declined from 1.1% to 0.8%. Three suburban obstacles were mentioned; access, knowledge and community. Access involves DIY bike repair, bike rescue and giveaway, and bike loan. Knowledge entails workshops, rides, and volunteer training, while community means online and in-person participation.

Mathew Davis and Katie Wittman from the City of Toronto discussed rethinking the transportation agenda by prioritizing equity in the cycling network and capital program. Using the Equity Index developed as part of the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy, proposed cycling routes in underserved neighbourhoods received a higher priority ranking. Planning is now incorporating equity-related data to further serve those communities by recognizing those neighbourhood improvement areas.

Nelson Cadete and Tamara Kwast representing the City of Brampton delivered an excellent presentation on *Connecting the Cycling Network* by sharing the City of Brampton Active Transportation Master Plan. There is significant cycling taking place in Brampton as it is a major gateway to the Caledon Hills and gives access to the Halton Hills area. A good cycling infrastructure in the City of Brampton is of paramount importance.

Their master plan is titled, *Living the Mosaic, Brampton 2040 Vision*. That certainly indicates a sustained long-term effort to build and support a connected cycling and pedestrian network

across the City, as well as connecting to neighbouring municipalities to enable safer, more convenient active mobility modes.

Designing for safety and comfort involves three types of facilities; shared, designated, and separated. Nelson and Tamara presented a plethora of useful details including projected costs that shows how the City is determined to achieve their goals with an impressive dedication to cycling infrastructure. Their closing slogan says it all, *Ride a Bike. Discover Your City.*

Justin Swan with the City of Ottawa appeared in a video presentation *on Designing Neighborhood Collector Streets*. He showed how to balance space within typical street rights-of-way to provide enhanced space for walking and cycling.

The City of Windsor had an impasse with a CP Rail embankment. Jeff Hagan describes how the City proceeded to overcome the issue by providing the new Dougall Avenue Multi-Use Trail Tunnel. He explains the background that led to the project, the construction process, and the new opportunities that this allows for an expanded trail network.

Session 3 on *Connecting the Cycling Network with Transit* began with Alex Gatien from The Centre for Active Transportation recommending the use of their guide, *Improving Active Transportation and Public Transit Integration: A Guidebook for Policy and Planning*, which is a resource for municipalities and transit agencies to use to improve walking, cycling, and transit integration. While using transit is extremely safe, this is often not the case when walking or cycling to transit. This guide is a comprehensive tool to assist in instituting best practices.

Cai de Ridder from WSP and Allison Miller with the City of London explained London's bike parking design guidelines for connecting with transit. Together they have developed the Neighbourhood Bike Parking Guidelines to assist municipalities in their approach to safe and practical implementation of bike parking facilities to access transit effectively and safely.

Kallie Hakala from Alta Planning + Design spoke about cycling to Ottawa's LRT and improving multimodal connections to rapid transit. There are 13 stations in stage 1, which recently opened amid a realization that many opportunities for cycling connections were overlooked requiring cyclists to often ride in mixed traffic on a busy road to a station lacking enough bike racks. A quite different approach is being undertaken for the coming additional 24 stations in stage 2. There are many different scenarios to encounter when planning workable connections to rapid transit. Kallie featured a few of the design components and explained their relevance.

The final session of OBS2020 dealt with *Connecting the Cycling Network with Trails*. Martin Tavares and Michael Habib with the City of Vaughan presented their vision of the Vaughan Super Trail. Initially there were existing trail segments dotted around Vaughan. The vision was to create a world class desirable, identifiable and memorable signature trail linking communities to each other and with cultural, natural, heritage public spaces and destinations accessible to residents and visitors. Their guiding principles were connected, safe, comfortable, charming, and multiseasonal. It comprised a collection of unique and charming local trails within a larger city-wide system. Progress over the last five years is impressive. The connected trails network is almost complete. A truly remarkable achievement and a fantastic super trail.

Brian Patterson from Urban Systems closed out the summit with his session on ‘Connecting Kitchener’s Cycling and trails Master Plan’. It is an integrated plan of on-street cycling and off-street trails. Two community surveys were conducted with over 3200 residents engaged resulting in excess of 2300 responses. In addition 9 pop-up events, 3 public events, 10 bike rides and 2 walking tours were held to generate interest and to obtain feedback. It turns out that the top three purposes of trail use are cycling, walking/hiking, and enjoying nature/wildlife. There is a plan framework that incorporates connections, experience, and culture with accompanying strategies in all three sectors. The future of the master plan appears to be well on its’ way with excellent upgrades and an enhanced trail network. Brian left us with a note from visiting cyclist. “Kitchener is amazing! They have the best trails. You have to visit.”

OBS2020 was an exciting, informative, and enjoyable experience for me. I missed attending an in-person summit but overall, this was a terrific event that solidifies the determination, dedication, and extraordinary commitment from so many individuals and municipalities to further support active mobility and especially cycling infrastructure development. Thank you again for allowing me this wonderful opportunity.

David Cuthbertson