

ONTARIO BIKEWAYS

PLANNING AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

**SHARED ROAD BIKEWAYS, SHOULDER BIKEWAYS,
BIKE LANES AND BIKE PATHS**

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2.6 Cycling Myths

The planning of bikeways is rapidly evolving. A number of new developments and misconceptions or problems concerning bicycle transportation safety issues have been identified by experts and are summarized below.

2.6.1 Sidewalk Bikeways Acceptable - Problem

In general, sidewalk bikeways are not encouraged without special design considerations as outlined in Chapter 5; bicycles and pedestrians do not mix well without adequate separation.

A sidewalk bicycle path as a multi-use path is unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons. Sidewalks are typically designed for pedestrian speeds and maneuverabilities, and are not safe for higher-speed bicycle use. Conflicts between pedestrians travelling at low speeds and cyclists, and between cyclists and fixed objects (e.g. parking meters, utility poles, sign posts, bus stop benches, trees, fire hydrants, mail boxes, etc.) are common. *Generally, separate bicycle and pedestrian paths should be provided.* If separation is not feasible, due to major expenses at significant topographic barriers, additional width, signing and striping should be used to minimize conflicts.

Conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians also result from people exiting stores, parked cars and buses. Walkers, joggers, and roller skaters also can and often do change their speed and direction almost instantaneously; this leaves cyclists insufficient time to react to avoid collisions. Similarly, pedestrians often

have difficulty predicting the direction an oncoming cyclist will take.

Sidewalk bikeways which cross commercial driveways or intersecting streets typically have a much higher percentage of accidents involving cyclists travelling in the opposite direction to the adjacent motor-vehicle traffic. This is because motorists are not looking for cyclists travelling adjacent to and off a roadway.

At intersections, motorists are often not looking for cyclists (who are travelling at higher speeds than pedestrians) entering the crosswalk areas, particularly when motorists are making a turn. Sight distance is often impaired by buildings, walls, property fences and shrubs along sidewalks (especially at driveways), and by street facility hardware.

Bicycle riding on sidewalks can be expected in residential areas with youthful cyclists. This type of sidewalk bicycle use is generally accepted, but it is inappropriate to sign a sidewalk as a bike path or bike route because a sidewalk will not safely accommodate older and high speed cyclists.

2.6.2 Separate Bike Paths are Safer than On-Street Facilities - Problem

Statistically there is a higher incidence of bicycle crashes on off-street facilities, either with motor vehicles or pedestrians at cross street intersections and driveways - particularly in commercial areas.

Bike paths have frequently been built with poor sight

lines, severely limited recovery areas, sharp deflections in the alignment at bridges with slippery threshold plates at the abutment, and often have accumulations of sand, debris, and eroded materials on the bikeway. These often lead to crashes which do not involve another vehicle or cyclist.

Cyclists are safest when they are properly trained and equipped to be confident in traffic and interact according to the established operational principles and responsibilities assigned to all vehicle operators.

2.6.3 Safer To Ride Against Traffic - Problem

Cycling against traffic is one of the leading causes of bicycle fatalities, especially among children. While some people encourage riding against traffic so that motorists and cyclists can see each other, in the same way pedestrians walk against traffic; in reality, a properly equipped cyclist with bright clothing, a rear-view mirror, and lights and reflectors at night is generally safer riding with traffic. Motorists are not looking for wrong-way cyclists at intersections, and approaching velocities are increased allowing less time for motorists to react to the presence of a cyclist.

2.6.4 Cyclists Can Get Off And Walk At Times - Problem

While we generally and often would like bicycle riders to walk through some difficult riding areas, the likelihood of their actually doing so is usually low. *Cyclists prefer not to have to dismount and to keep up their momentum generally.*

People do not like to be inconvenienced. Nothing is likely to excite people more than some restriction they cannot readily appreciate. They often conclude that the reason was non-existent due to no apparent need, and that the decision was poor, illogical, and arbitrary. If designs cause cyclists to make unnecessary stops, they will tend to ignore and disobey traffic controls.

2.6.5 All Cyclists Are Alike - Problem

Cyclists are not all alike. They come in many sizes and shapes, and have different levels of skills. There are youthful cyclists and there are older cyclists.

To treat them as if they were all the same can result in bikeways at inappropriate locations, which in turn can result in a lack of facility use. When we group all cyclists into the same class, we end up designing facilities that suit only some users. If we try to put the fast commuter cyclist on a sidewalk designed for children, we create a hazard. If we provide an arterial street bikeway to meet the needs of youthful cyclists, we create a hazard. Each age group and user type has its own characteristics, its own accident patterns, and its own needs.

2.6.6 Multi-Use Paths Acceptable for all Recreational Users - Problem

Using the same path for bicycles and horses also creates an unsatisfactory and possibly very dangerous mix. Horses startle easily and may kick up suddenly if they perceive cyclists as a danger. A bike path and a bridle path are also incompatible in their surface design requirements. Bicycles function best on hard surfaces;