

WARD 10 BIKE LANES REPORT





When I first heard the City of Edmonton was refreshing a very old Bicycle Transportation Plan, I was excited. Edmonton is a big city now, and big cities across the world – including winter cities – have great bicycle infrastructure that works for communities.

Our new Bicycle Transportation Plan aspires to a progressive and attractive vision. We want to provide an “integrated system of roadway, public transit, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities to accommodate the travel needs of citizens, businesses, and visitors.”

I support this vision, but I also recognize that Edmonton’s neighbourhoods are built primarily around the car as a dominant mode of transportation. As we move to modernize our transportation infrastructure, we need to understand the tension this change will bring.

We can, and should, work to provide safe spaces for cyclists, but we must also be willing to listen very closely to those who move around our city exclusively in automobiles. We must recognize that there are more issues at play than solely a "war on cars", and we should not be surprised by the confusion and backlash that new bicycle infrastructure has caused in south Edmonton.

And there has been confusion and backlash. I heard that during the 2013 election and I’ve heard it in hundreds of frustrated phone calls and emails since. People are confused and they are angry about these bike lanes. We’ve listened to concerns and suggestions from all manner of Ward 10 residents, and we’ve used that input to inform this report.

Not everything we heard was negative, as you’ll see later on in the report. Many people in the Ward are supportive of bicycle infrastructure, as long as that infrastructure works for their communities. Ultimately, our goal must be to use what we’ve heard to find a set of solutions that accomplish those goals.

- Councillor Michael Walters



How We Listened

We collected information for this report in several ways.

Online Survey: My staff designed an online survey to gather input from a broad group of people who might not otherwise attend a public meeting. Survey questions related to the challenges, opportunities and solutions around bike lanes. The survey was live for several weeks and there were 249 individual responses.

Public Meeting: We collected information at a public meeting held on November 26, 2013 at the Southwest Pentecostal Assembly. We set out 250 chairs in the SPA's gymnasium, and quickly required more chairs than we had set out. This facilitated meeting became standing room only, which demonstrated the level of public interest in the bike lanes issue. Trained facilitators guided table groups of about ten people through a set of questions mirroring those asked in the online survey, namely the challenges, opportunities and solutions around bike lanes. In spite of our coffee order arriving late, people were engaged with the format and questions for the evening, and generally felt that their concerns had been heard. We collected about 250 feedback forms with many hundreds of comments.

Public Inquiries: Since Fall 2013, my office has received hundreds of emails and phone calls from people both opposed to and in favour of bike lanes, which have further helped us to understand community viewpoints about bicycle lanes. This report summarizes the combined input received in our efforts to understand challenges, opportunities, and solutions as identified by meeting attendees and survey comments from community members. Because the survey and the public meeting posed the same questions, we've combined this data for the purposes of this report.

We've also used comments received in emails and phone calls to help shape and contextualize this report. We have also provided some quotations from participants that illustrate the challenges, opportunities and solutions.

The report also contains a summary of discussions held with Edmonton Transit drivers, sharing their perspective on the Ward 10 bike lanes.



What We Heard

Challenges

We heard about five main challenges with regard to bike lanes, reported here with the most commonly heard challenge first, followed by the next most commonly heard, and so on.

Traffic Congestion
Winter City
Safety Considerations
Underuse
Lack of Consultation

1. Traffic Congestion

Several areas of concern were identified relating to traffic congestion, including the following.

- A. Loss of traffic/turning lane
- B. School pick up/rush hour
- C. LRT impacts

Loss of traffic/turning lane

More than one-half of comments about traffic congestion identified loss of turning lanes as a concern.

In a few areas, bike lane installation has significantly altered traffic flow at intersections. Some of these, identified by Ward 10 residents, include:

40 Avenue and 111 Street
40 Avenue and 106 Street
51 Avenue and 106 Street

In most of these cases, a left or right turning lane was lost, cutting the peak traffic capacity of roads in half. This compounds issues explored elsewhere in the report and amplifies the traffic congestion issue. The addition of poorly-understood bike infrastructure like bike boxes causes further confusion.

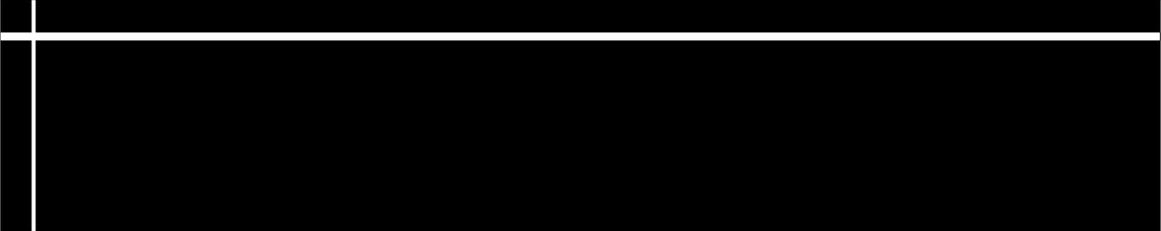
Many people identified the loss of lanes, in general, as a major concern. Changing two-lane roads to single-lane roads is a major challenge for people living in these neighbourhoods.

“Long lines westbound unable to turn right at 111 Street must wait in one lane of traffic until they are almost at the corner.”

“Bottleneck traffic causes problems at intersections. Right turning traffic and the facing left turning traffic are bottlenecked into the single lane. A good example of this is the corner of 40 Avenue and 119 Street – this is near three schools, and problems are created by eliminating a traffic lane.”

“I use 40 Ave and 106 Street 2 or 3 times a week and the bike lanes have increased my travel time due to one lane being taken away and the bike boxes at the 40/106 intersection.”





School Pickup/Rush Hour

Just over one-quarter of comments noted traffic congestion school pick up/ rush hour as a concern.

No one would argue that kids need to get to school safely. In the long term, I would be pleased to see children safely bicycling to school – but it doesn't seem these lanes were designed for that. In the short term, it appears these lanes do more to impede that goal than encourage it.

Parents are frustrated. Saddleback Road, 40 Avenue and 106 Street are all home to several schools. In many cases, installing bike lanes in these areas removed a lane of traffic in school pickup and drop off zones. Removing these lanes adds significant time to rush hour commutes. Many of the people we've talked to report that the lanes are increasing their idling time and causing lost productivity at work. The general perception is that these drawbacks outweigh whatever perceived value is added by the lanes.

“There are a number of school zones along the bike path that further contribute to traffic congestion – 106 Street is a very busy street, even with two lanes of auto traffic.”

“We have many schools in the area, which are high traffic on 40th Ave and 117/119 Street.”

“The issue in Blue Quill is that the bike lane runs in front of a school. It is making it dangerous as traffic (drivers, parents) are confused. We have had several close calls with children almost being hit because drivers are confused about how to drive with these bike lanes.”



LRT Impacts

About one-fifth of comments about traffic congestion identified LRT impacts as a challenge.

Most people would agree that the south LRT expansion was an undeniable benefit for communities in Ward 10. LRT ridership is outpacing Edmonton's population growth, and many people within the Ward make regular use of the LRT for their commutes. But developing the LRT doesn't just bring public transit to the communities it passes through. It also creates traffic challenges. People still drive, and that isn't going to change. Anyone who has driven on 111 Street is familiar with the timing of lights at surface LRT crossings. This has caused traffic to overflow onto neighbourhood collector roads like 106 Street. Removing a lane of traffic for bike lanes from roads that have already experienced increased traffic load has, understandably, frustrated drivers.

"A lot of people are getting upset about 106 Street because of the problems on 111 Street caused by the LRT. 106 Street has become a flashpoint because of anger about 111 St."

"The LRT has diverted traffic to 106 Street because the lights there are timed horribly."

"We try to avoid the LRT – and we run into bike paths!"



2. Winter City

Just over one-third of comments identified winter city factors as a challenge.

The feedback we've heard pegged the length of Edmonton's winter at anywhere from 5-8 months. I'd like to think it's closer to the former, but either way, we live in a winter city. We're learning to embrace it, and that's a good thing. In fact, it's the only way to make it through days when the mercury dips below minus thirty and the sun disappears at 4:45.

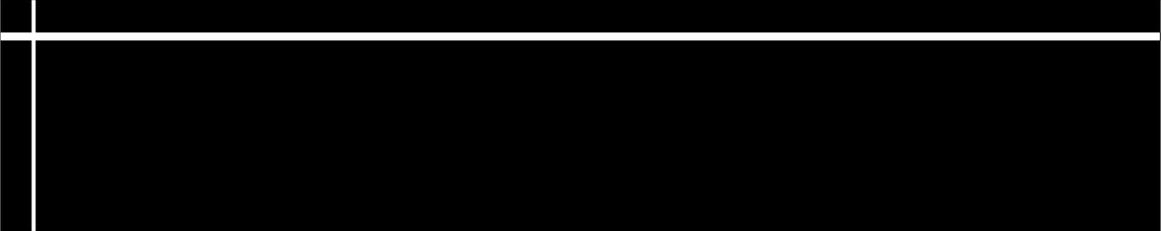
One of the realities of living in a winter city is dealing with snow. That seems like a no brainer. Snow can be a great thing – snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and building forts are the best things about winter – and it can be frustrating. No one has ever enjoyed digging out their car. Winter driving is hard. Many people in Ward 10 would argue that bike lanes are making it unnecessarily harder.

Aside from the Bike Route Winter Maintenance Pilot Program, bike lanes aren't maintained in the winter. We've heard that they're largely used to store windrow. Whether our city has a high enough population of winter cyclists to justify the expense of maintaining these lanes is another matter altogether – and residents of Ward 10 remain unconvinced. Their view is that, for 5-8 months of the year (depending on who you ask), they've lost a driving lane for no reason.

“Snow is not removed from bike lanes – and not everyone knows the lanes are there. You can't see the markings under the snow, and this can be dangerous when you have to make a right turn across the 'hidden' bike lane.”

“The winter weather poses difficulties as the bike lanes aren't cleared – in fact, snow and gravel are often dumped into them, leaving no space for winter cyclists.”





3. Safety

Many comments relating to bike lanes identified safety as a challenge. Within this challenge, the following specific considerations were identified.

Poor design

Lack of awareness/lack of public education

Transit driver knowledge

Poor Design

Almost one-third of comments relating to safety identified poor design as a challenge.

Many of the cyclists who responded to the survey and attended the meeting noted concerns with the design of the lanes. They commented that they feel unsafe using lanes positioned between a lane of traffic and a lane of parking, and also noted that they would likely be unwilling to allow their children to use the lanes.

“The parking along 106 St with the added bike lanes has the traffic lanes much closer... Safety is a real issue for cyclists.”

“I am a cyclist, and I only ride on the sidewalks and park walkways. With parking on the curbs for automobiles, the bike lane is out in the street, and it is dangerous to go out there.”

“Too many variations of different types of lanes, and the new cars/bike lane/parked car/curb-sidewalk approach is confusing and dangerous. I ride year round and do not feel safe in these bike lanes.”



Lack of awareness/lack of public education

Almost one-quarter of comments about safety identified lack of awareness and lack of public education as a challenge.

Some concerns have been raised about a lack of understanding and communication of how the lanes work. This is particularly notable in the case of the bike box on 106 Street, but was noted about the lanes in general. People don't understand how they work, and they feel that there has been, thus far, a lack of meaningful education on the subject.

"Little or no education as to what the lines/boxes mean and represent."

"How to share the road with cyclists was not taught in driver training up until recently. While some people know about the bike lanes, many do not. This is very dangerous and will cause accidents."

"Many drivers are ignorant of rules of driving where bike lanes are, causing near accidents. Safety is a big concern."

Transit Driver Knowledge

Just under one-tenth of comments about safety identified transit driver knowledge as a challenge.

Some people have raised questions about whether Edmonton Transit drivers are aware of how to safely drive in the bike lanes. There is a perception that buses tend to use the bike lanes as a bus lane, which can endanger cyclists.

"We need to set up a better education program to ensure that bus drivers and taxi drivers know how to use the updated roadways."

4. Underuse

About one- third of comments identified underuse as a challenge.

In my view, two possible measures of the success of these lanes are:

Are they being used?

Are they encouraging new cyclists?

It may be too soon to tell whether the lanes are successful. We're going on anecdotal evidence of what residents have seen. By and large, the perception is that the lanes are underused. If residents perceive the lanes to be underused, they're less likely to buy in to the Transportation Master Plan, which increases the likelihood of similar negative responses to new infrastructure in the future.

A small number of people have noted an increase in visible cyclists. This was a far less popular opinion, but it does reflect what we would hope for bicycle infrastructure to accomplish. Ideally, we will be able to find a solution that will lead to a real increase in bike lane use.

"The biggest challenge is we do not have enough bicycles to justify the disruption and cost of painting bike lanes."

"Nobody I have ever spoken to about this specific subject ever had a problem before bike lanes existed with riding around Edmonton on a bicycle. This is an expensive solution to a problem that does not exist."

I am in favour of bike lanes... I know we have to create them so people will use them, but I am not sure that the areas chosen by the city are the ones that large numbers of cyclists would actually use. The University area, for example, SHOULD have several bike lanes. People in Bearspaw, however, don't cycle to work, or to school, or to go shopping."



5. Lack of Consultation

Just under one tenth of comments identified lack of consultation as a challenge.

While the City of Edmonton has the best of intentions for community consultation, the community response to these bike lanes raises some questions about the efficacy of the consultation process in this specific case.

This has been a common theme both in doorstep conversations during the election and in my office's more formal information-gathering process. Many people in Ward 10 communities are not necessarily opposed to the idea of bike lanes, but they feel the consultation process before the installation of the lanes was less than meaningful. Ward 10 residents might not be so concerned with bike lanes in some form or another – but they want to be asked first.

“When residents have proposed that a bike boulevard or neighbourhood greenway be implemented on 8 blocks of our local road, Sustainable Transportation has dismissed our community’s request. You need to start listening to people in communities, and stop telling residents ‘the way it is going to be.’”

“No community consultation – it feels like bike lanes were forced on our community. Proper consultation with all stakeholders is important before implementing bike lanes to service a few.”

“The majority of the community were not informed until the plans were already approved.”



Opportunities

Four main opportunities were identified from participant input, as follows.

1. Encouraging healthy lifestyles
2. Increasing cyclist safety
3. Creating awareness about cyclists
4. Calming traffic

1. Encouraging Healthy Lifestyles

About one-fifth of comments about opportunities referred to encouraging healthy lifestyles.

Bike lanes are a component of active living. By finding a way to safely incorporate bicycle infrastructure into people's daily routines, we can provide an avenue for people to engage in outdoor recreation and sustainable transportation. In addition to providing a wide range of health benefits, bicycle transportation is undeniably more environmentally friendly than other forms of transportation.

"We have the chance to promote recreation – the opportunity to shop for groceries without using a car."

"More and more people will adopt healthy lifestyles and commute by bikes, reducing pollution and transportation costs."

"It may encourage more people to cycle which is good for their health and for the environment."

"Overall, I think the bike lanes are good – they make it safer to bike. I used to bike a lot, and I often resorted to using the sidewalk, which I knew was illegal but it was the only safe option."



2. Increasing Cyclist Safety

Just over one-tenth of comments identified this as a potential opportunity.

By increasing the profile of cyclists and providing them with a designated space on the road, we have the opportunity to increase cyclist safety – and if people feel safe cycling, we have an opportunity to increase usage of the lanes.

“I find I feel much more comfortable riding my bike on the bike lanes, so the lanes should encourage cycling.”

“In the summer – it’s good for cyclists, and drivers have become more aware and are watching for them. Cyclists are safer!”

“I was opposed to the bike lanes at first. But I did notice that there were more bikers out this summer than I had ever seen before. It actually made me think twice about biking, now that it is safer for bikers.”

3. Creating Awareness about Cyclists

About one-tenth of comments about opportunities referred to creating awareness about cyclists.

By increasing the profile of cyclists on the road, we have the opportunity to raise awareness of cycling as a form of commuting and recreation.

“As a former cycling commuter into downtown, any chance to highlight cyclists is a good thing – the ability to draw attention to cyclists in general.”

“Bike signs and lanes will make motorists more aware that they ‘share the road’ with bicycles.”





4. Calming Traffic

Just under one-tenth of comments about opportunities referred to traffic calming.

One of the purported benefits of bicycle infrastructure is that it can have a secondary effect of calming traffic. Narrowing roadways, combined with the presence of cyclists, can lead to a modest speed reduction, not a bad thing in quiet, established neighbourhoods.

Some of the people we've talked to have noticed a small amount of traffic calming in the neighbourhoods where bike lanes were installed.

"Motorists drive more at the speed limit along 106 Street now that they are in a single lane with cyclists alongside."

"Traffic calming measures (frequently used in Vancouver, for example) are an excellent way to make our streets and cities a safe and usable space for everyone."



Solutions

Comments about solutions identified a number of possibilities.

1. Use multi-use trails/separated lanes
2. Eliminate bike lanes
3. Provide better education
4. Use sharrows
5. Provide better winter maintenance
5. Have seasonal-only lanes

1. Use Multi-Use Trails/Separated Trails

About one-third of comments about solutions referred to using multi-use trails/separated lanes.

Many people voiced the opinion that the particular design of these lanes was flawed, and recommended that funding for bicycle infrastructure should focus on widened sidewalks or multi-use trails that would keep bicycles off the road, particularly in high-traffic areas.

Another, related suggestion was to require some form of separation from the road. Those who suggested this type of infrastructure generally noted safety concerns with the current lanes.

Most of those suggesting multi-use trails and separated lanes noted that they were aware of the added expense of this type of infrastructure.

“Perhaps pipeline green spaces could be used rather than busy streets like 40th Avenue. Wide, divided sidewalks, like 111 Street, are safer and more practical.”

“One major separated bike lane divided from cars with a high concrete curb from the SW to downtown is what we need.”

“Separated bike/multi-use paths might be desirable, but I do understand that there are costly implications to that in terms of appropriating land for the right of way.”

“Multi-use trails. People I have talked with keep stressing that if there was more emphasis on multi-use trails, more people would feel comfortable biking. No one feels any safer biking on the roads with the lanes.”



2. Eliminate Bike Lanes

Just under one-quarter of comments about solutions referred to eliminating bike lanes.

A common opinion from those particularly frustrated by the installation of the lanes is their outright removal. A small minority of these comments were of the view that bike lane infrastructure should not be financed by the City of Edmonton. A more popular view was that the City should focus funding on areas with many cyclists, often giving the example of downtown and Old Strathcona

“Cancel all bike lanes that have been set up so far and put them where they would be useful, like 111 Street, where they would increase safety for cars and bikers.”

“Simple solution would be to remove them. It was a complete waste of taxpayer money.”

3. Provide Better Education

About one-fifth of comments about solutions referred to the opportunity to provide better education.

People will never support bike infrastructure if they don't understand how it works. We have an opportunity to be creative about public education and to find ways to talk about bike lanes with communities.

“A great start to the new lanes would have been to roll them out with police patrol along 106 Street. This would give people some direction on how to use the new lanes, but also let them know that traffic rules will be enforced in these areas to keep cyclists safe.”

“I remember taking Pedal Pushers at Duggan Hall when I was 10 or so... we need a lot more of those type of courses if we are going to have more people biking. More and better education programs for drivers and cyclists offered in the neighbourhood on how to use the new infrastructure. Also, perhaps a lawn sign campaign or something visible to help create a social norm of safe/slow driving in our neighbourhood.”





4. Use Sharrows

About one-tenth of comments about solutions referred to using sharrows.

Another alternative solution to on-street, separated lanes is the sharrow, which some comments referred to as the bike route. This would have the right traffic lane be shared-use, with bicycles retaining the right-of-way, but motor vehicles having the option of using the lane when there are no bikes present. The 106 Street bike lane, north of 51st Avenue, already incorporates sharrows in some places.

“Eliminate the dedicated lanes and encourage shared road usage through signage and education.”

“We already have designated bike routes that have worked for my whole 45 year life.”

5. Provide Better Winter Maintenance

Less than one tenth of comments about solutions referred to providing better winter maintenance.

Everyone we talked to acknowledged that if bike lanes are going to be a part of our roadways going forward, we need to find a way to maintain them in the winter. The Bike Route Winter Maintenance Pilot will help us find ways to do this, but we also need to look to best practices in other winter cities to figure out the best way to encourage more winter cyclists and keep our lanes clear.

“Snow – remove it so that we can see the bike lanes and people can use their bikes in the winter.”

“Remove the snow rather than piling it up on the sides of the road.”

“Plow the snow from the bike lanes – or have another way to indicate the lanes through the snow.”





6. Have Seasonal-Only Lanes

Less than one-tenth of comments about solutions referred to having seasonal-only lanes.

Some people have suggested that, because the lanes are covered in snow for a significant portion of the year, it might be worthwhile to transition to seasonal lanes. In the winter, the bike lane area would be useable by cars.

“I might suggest making them applicable only in the summer months, but if the lines are somewhat visible in the winter, there will be confusion.”

“Perhaps the bike lanes could at least be seasonal.”

“I think they should be used during Spring-Fall period, and in the winter the roadway should revert back to two lanes.”





ETS Meeting Overview

On December 18, 2013, I met with Edmonton Transit drivers to find out how bike lanes on their bus routes have affected them. We had an engaging, frank conversation, which reinforced the idea that, as implemented, the bike lanes in Ward 10 are not working for the community. One driver drew a comparison between driving a bus and spinning two plates – the bike lanes have added a third plate to the mix, and we're expecting that none of the plates will break.

Drivers indicated a few specific concerns, including:

- A constant need to cross over the paths of cyclists
- Conflict between cyclists and buses due to a lack of education on how the lanes work

Some of the drivers pointed me towards a section of Alberta's *Traffic Safety Act* which governs their ability to encroach on a secondary lane. In short – they can't. In order to provide the bike lane with the appropriate amount of space, buses are forced to cross over the centre line.

While the drivers acknowledge that the lanes have made their jobs harder, they were also forthcoming with ideas to improve our bike infrastructure going forward, including:

- A mix of residential bike boulevards and multi use trails, especially in areas with lots of existing bike traffic
 - No more on-street painted bike lanes
 - Removing parking lanes
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In Summary

At the outset of this report, we noted that people are frustrated and confused. The stories and opinions we've gathered show that they also want to proactively contribute to a solution that works for their communities.

In short, and not surprisingly, there are many sides to this issue.

The City's first major focus of implementing the Bicycle Transportation Plan included the south side of Edmonton, covering much of Ward 10. This is both a blessing and a curse. It was a definite positive for Ward 10 to be at the top of the list for getting started on a more-sustainable, multi-modal transportation system that appeals to a broad range of people and makes our properties more attractive and more valuable. It was a negative for Ward 10 to be a major "test bed" for new types of facilities that turn out to need some reworking.

One of the main challenges people identified was traffic congestion. About half of the comments about the traffic congestion challenge indicated that people are upset that they've lost a lane of traffic. But despite frustration, about one-third of comments about solutions indicated that the City should invest in high-quality bike infrastructure, including bike boulevards in central neighbourhoods and multi-use trails elsewhere, as well as sharrows.

In talking more about challenges, about one-third of comments relating to safety referred to poor design of bike lanes. Some of these people were cyclists who are unwilling to ride in lanes that make them feel unsafe. Some were motorists who don't want to risk making cyclists unsafe. People are concerned about the same things, but they're coming at it from different perspectives.

The thing that everyone seems to agree on is that the existing bike lanes in Ward 10 don't work. There are many reasons for that: the impacts of LRT crossings on collector road traffic flow, a confluence of school zones and rush hour traffic, and a perceived lack of community consultation, to name a few.

There's less agreement on how to fix it. Some people want the lanes removed entirely. Other people would like to see better bicycle infrastructure (e.g. multi-use trails using pipeline greenways) so that their communities can still benefit from Edmonton's bicycle network. People in Ward 10 neighbourhoods recognize the benefits of bike infrastructure. For example, when asked about opportunities associated with bike lanes, the most commonly mentioned was the opportunity to encourage healthy lifestyles.



Going Forward/Recommendations

There isn't an easy, quick-fix solution to the bike lanes issue in southwest Edmonton. As we've seen throughout this report, the issue is far more complicated than meets the eye. After listening to communities in Ward 10, I'd like to propose a few ideas.

Blue Quill – Saddleback Road

A big question about this bike lane has been whether it is really necessary, given that an existing sidewalk, edging a park space, is only a few feet from the on-street bike lane. My recommendation is that we remove this lane and replace it with a multi-use trail around the edge of the adjacent parkland.

Additionally, in the near future, the area will be shaped further by First Place and seniors' housing and park enhancements. This provides an opportunity to include the multi-use trail as part of the overall park changes.

106 Street

Since its installation, the 106 Street bike lane, south of 51 Avenue, has caused traffic congestion and confused motorists. This is not to say that bike infrastructure can't work with this roadway, we just need to think more creatively and both find and fund a solution that works for everyone.

There are three main options for this bike lane:

- Removal of the lane, with consideration given to the impact on connectivity through the rest of the bike network
- Switching to a seasonal bike lane
- Redesigning the lane, with a modified and enhanced public engagement plan

40 Avenue from 119 Street to 111 Street

We should remove the on-street bike lane and replacement with either a multi-use trail or sharrow as part of the 2015 Royal Gardens neighbourhood renewal.

40 Avenue from 111 Street to 106 Street

We should remove the on-street bike lane and the bike box at the 40 Avenue and 106 Street intersection, and to replace the lane with sharrows through Duggan and Rideau Park.

General Recommendations

A common theme in many of the conversations we've had about bike lanes is a lack of understanding. How do the lanes work? How are cars supposed to interact with bikes? These questions have come from pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists alike. Moving forward, we need to seriously consider how we educate the public about bicycle infrastructure. This isn't exclusive to Ward 10 – enhanced engagement and education have to be major components of our bike infrastructure going forward.

Council needs to take a far more active role in working with communities on bike lane implementation.

Hopefully, we can re-focus our priorities on creating higher-standard facilities on core corridors with existing demand patterns creating a high-quality city-wide network that works for communities.

