

## POLITICS AS USUAL: Two sides to the bike path

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

This week, I provide a bit of an addendum column.

It is in response to a wonderful letter I received from a reader. The reader handwrote a letter to me, rebuking me ? gently, I might add - for my position on cyclists using our sidewalks.

For those who may not recall, I wrote a column a few weeks ago loudly chastising those folks who use our sidewalks as motorways with their bikes and e-bikes, etc. I indicated in none-too-polite terms that they should get the heck off the sidewalk.

Well, there are two sides to every story and this lovely reader elegantly presented the other side of the argument. The reader pointed out that often it simply isn't safe to ride a bike on the road. Many motorists pay little heed to the safety of cyclists who share the road with them and, as a result, some cyclists use sidewalks instead.

The reader has a very valid point.

I ride my bike downtown (Toronto) all the time. I need my bike to get to rowing practice; so I ride it from Union Station to our club near Cherry Beach and back, many times a week. I always feel completely safe. But, that's because I don't ride my bike on the road per se. I ride it on the lovely bike paths that have been installed on or beside the roads.

The bike paths in Toronto were created specifically to address the dangers expressed in my reader's letter ? drivers that do not pay sufficient attention to other road users, such as cyclists (and pedestrians as is often the case) and cause accidents and mayhem as a result.

I have ridden on other roads that don't have bike paths and it is indeed a hair-raising experience.

A number of years back, I had my back wheel clipped by a TTC bus that decided I was taking too long to get moving and proceeded to change lanes with me still in it. I managed to stay upright and on my bike, but I think that had more to do with luck than any skill on my part. Pretty scary.

So, I agree with the reader's position that banning bikes all together from sidewalks and demanding they remain on the roads is not a viable option for many riders. However, the answer is not to allow them to ride on the sidewalk but rather to create space for bikes on the roads.

Bikes (and especially their motorized cousins) are vehicles.

They belong on the road.

But, as they clearly cannot compete with the one-tonne vehicles that also occupy our roads, we need to recognize that fact and create more bike paths on local roads. We have some bike paths ? but not enough. For example: there is no bike lane on Yonge Street or on much of Wellington. These are main roads that are often jammed with cars.

We need to find ways for our bike-riding residents to safely navigate our roads. Where possible, it would be advantageous to have dedicated bike lanes so that residents can enjoy a sustainable mode of transportation without risking their health and safety when doing so.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is ? after all ? Our Town.