

Peddling out a better plan

June 29, 2011

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Durham's Regional Cycling Plan is outdated and flat-out not working, so says Ajax Mayor Steve Parish, a cycle enthusiast.

"We really haven't got anything off the ground on this," he says of the plan, which was passed by council in October 2008. "The cycling plan that we adopted a little while ago is not working."

Mayor Parish says he believes the region should commit a large sum of money, like \$500,000, annually, to a fund for the plan. And local area municipalities should match that sum.

But not everyone's main priority is a cycling plan, some councillors warn.

"While we want to participate, it's costly which is difficult for us," says Clarington Mayor Adrian Foster, adding at \$86 per metre, it would cost about \$1.7 million just to pave shoulders on Highway 2 between Courtice and Bowmanville.

"I don't have \$3 million kicking around to do one spine (of the projected bike plan)."

Mayor Parish says he understands not all municipalities want to make cycling a priority, but those who do should be able to do so.

"There's a huge number of people that would use the cycling route...to commute," he says, adding the positives of bike routes impact more than just cyclists.

"There are some key routes for tourism. It's not about tree-hugging," he says. "It's about economic development."

Pickering Councillor Jennifer O'Connell says she agrees.

"The real issue that we have are the connections. I often get calls from residents saying 'I ride my bike from here, but then I can't get anywhere'," she says. "It certainly has to be a partnership."

And partnerships are exactly what Durham's looking to form in terms of cycling.

It's looking to revamp its Regional Cycling Plan in 2012 and is looking for suggestions and updates from the lower-tier municipalities.

Mayor Parish says Durham should also gather suggestions from those who use the routes – cycling groups and clubs.

“They’re the people who actually know about it, use it and have some input on it,” Mayor Parish explains.

However, some councillors say they’re concerned that would send false messages to cycling groups.

“I would not want to give these cycling clubs the impression that we’re going to be suddenly building all these lanes,” Mayor Foster says.

Oshawa Councillor Bob Chapman says the lower-tier municipalities should be responsible for gathering feedback from the groups, should they so choose, that way there are no false expectations.

“We want to hear from the Oshawa residents. They’re the ones cycling through Oshawa,” the councillor adds. “I think people are going to have different expectations than what they get.”

In March, the City of Oshawa added three additional requests for bike routes.

A linkage to the two future GO stations at Thornton Road south of Gibb Street, and in central Oshawa between Simcoe Street and Ritson Road.

Most recently, the city also requested the region add a multi-use boulevard trail adjacent to Harmony Road from Beatrice Street to Hwy. 407.

Oshawa Councillor Nancy Diamond made an amendment that would give the eight municipalities the option to extend the invitation for suggestions to cycling clubs, rather than have groups send in comments directly to Durham.

Her motion passed.

Municipalities have until September to make their comments and suggestions on the cycling plan.