

Crosstown Connector: The Path to Bicycle Culture in Halifax

What is the Crosstown Connector?

The Crosstown Connector will be a transformative piece of cycling infrastructure that will change the perception of cycling on the Halifax Peninsula.

In 2010, the Halifax Cycling Coalition (HCC) gathered over 1400 signatures in support of a bike lane along Agricola Street to connect the North End and the South End of the Halifax Peninsula. Public consultation on the proposed route is approaching and the HCC is anxious to reiterate the benefits of selecting Agricola Street as the preferred route.

Why do we want more people to choose to cycle?

Cycling is:

- a simple strategy to address congestion and reduce demand for expensive road construction and maintenance;
- a convenient and desired way to get around the city (that is currently rarely chosen because it is considered unsafe)¹ ;
- an active, healthy and often pleasant way of getting around the city;
- an economically smart way to travel reasonable distances on the peninsula - as gas prices rise in the coming years, HRM residents will struggle to continuously fill their tanks² ; and
- an environmentally friendly form of transport not dependant on fossil fuels and does not emit greenhouse gases.

Why does HRM have a unique opportunity with the Crosstown Connector?

Other cities have proven that the best way to encourage more cycling is to make cycling a safe and convenient choice for getting from A to B. In HRM, 41% of commuters travel less than five kilometres to work³ , making cycling a viable commuting choice in the region. However, because we do not have a cycling network to help people navigate the peninsula on a bike, cycling is a difficult choice. The Crosstown Connector could turn this around, if we do it right.

Why is Agricola Street the best option to accomplish this goal?

- The Agricola route has flat grades, no buses, relatively low traffic volumes, and holds a pedestrian-friendly character. The other routes fall short in these areas.
- Of all four proposed options, the Agricola route best connects the places where people live, work and play on the peninsula; it would bring cyclists directly to or near the MacDonald Bridge, the North End business district, the Commons, Downtown, Dalhousie University, SMU, Point Pleasant Park, the hospitals, and the shipyards.
- The Agricola route already shows higher levels of cycling than most other routes, indicating that the factors above do, in fact, play an important role in a cyclist's route choice.



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How will the bike lane impact businesses on Agricola? Will the loss of on-street parking do more harm than good?

The re-allocation of road space from automobile parking to a bike lane will have impacts on the surrounding community. However, the HCC is confident that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

It takes more than abundant parking to attract business – let’s build on the strengths of the North End

The North End is a unique place in HRM – it hosts a thriving arts community and countless defining local businesses. Its proximity to downtown and schools, and its relatively dense residential neighbourhoods are land use features well-suited to cycling.⁴ The HCC strongly believes that building on the strengths of the existing community is the best way to further develop a unique destination in the HRM that attracts shoppers, tourists and new businesses. Therefore, in the case of Halifax’s North End, creating a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly environment is more important to a successful business district than maintaining plentiful on-street parking.

People on bikes spend just as much money as people in cars, if not more

Multiple studies have shown that even though cyclists tend to spend less money on each trip, they make more trips and spend more in the long term.⁵ Further, when people are likely to walk or cycle in their community (when it’s a safe and convenient choice), they are more likely to shop at a store close to where they live rather than drive across town.⁶ In the dense residential neighbourhoods of the North End, this is good news for local businesses.

Some on-street parking can be replaced

Several opportunities to replace some of the existing on-street parking lie right nearby. Side streets in the area and underutilized parking lots could absorb some of the demand for parking. If these opportunities are used strategically, we can mitigate the negative impacts of the loss of on-street parking while taking advantage of the benefits a new bike lane would bring.

Final thoughts

We are at a critical moment right now in HRM and in Nova Scotia – we have an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in Atlantic Canada by taking an important step toward making our city a healthier, safer and more enjoyable place to live, work and play. The Crosstown Connector should be seen as an opportunity to build both the Halifax cycling network and a key component of the Blue Route (proposed Provincial cycling network). The HCC encourages residents, businesses and councillors to support the development of a bike lane on Agricola Street at the upcoming public consultation.



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Endnotes

1. The 2004 National Survey on Active Transportation by the Institute for Social Research at York University indicated that 64% of Canadians would like to cycle more often (<http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/programs/environment-utsp-casestudy-cs77ebike-planning-1177.htm>). Perceived safety concerns are the most commonly cited reasons for not cycling (http://thirdwavecycling.com/pdfs/at_business_case.pdf)
2. The average vehicle costs around \$8000 per year to own and operate while the cost of a bicycle comes in around \$200 per year including the cost of purchase and maintenance over ten years. This will only increase as gas prices continue to rise (<http://www.vtpi.org/tca/tca0501.pdf>)
3. Statistics Canada 2006 Census: <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-re-censement/2006/as-sa/97-561/table/t10-eng.cfm>
4. The North End urban land use patterns, in combination with the particular residents it attracts, likely contribute to its existing high cycling rates: up to 8% of residents in the North End cycle regularly to work according to the 2006 Canadian Census.
5. Several of these studies can be found at:
http://www.cleanairpartnership.org/files/BikeLanes_Parking_Business_BloorWestVillage.pdf;
http://copenhagenize.eu/dox/Commerce_and_Bicycles-Thomas_Krag.pdf;
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/archives/cycling/cycling_en.pdf;
<http://www.cleanairpartnership.org/pdf/bike-lanes-parking.pdf>
6. Go For Green's The Business Case for Active Transportation breaks down the economics of investing in bicycle infrastructure (http://thirdwavecycling.com/pdfs/at_business_case.pdf)

