



Pedal Powered

photos and story by Andrew Meade



“I would cycle to work every day, it was about a nine-kilometre commute and I loved it. It was probably the best part of my day.” - Becky MacWhirter

What would make a self-proclaimed avid cyclist put up their helmet and refrain from throwing a leg over their beloved cycle every day?

Loyalist College Sustainability Coordinator Becky MacWhirter had this very experience upon moving to Belleville from Toronto. MacWhirter used to commute daily when living in Toronto but blames the change in her riding habits directly on the lack of bicycle lanes and cycling infrastructure.

“I was living in Toronto for about five years and I would say I was a very active cyclist there. I would cycle to work every day, it was about a nine-kilometre commute and I loved it. It was probably the best part of my day. I moved here though and I wouldn’t call myself an active cyclist anymore.”

Bicycle commuting and active transportation in cities across the country are on the rise. According to numbers reported in the 2011 Statistics Canada census, cyclists made up 1.3 percent of commuters, and in made up even higher proportions in cities like Kelowna, BC at 2.6 percent and 2.2 percent in Ottawa, Ont.

Cycling and cycling infrastructure is becoming a

hot button topic in municipalities across the country. Locally the building of bicycle lanes and more accessible infrastructure like bike racks was on the campaign dockets in the Past fall municipal election in Belleville, Ont.

Released in April of 2014 the Belleville Transportation Master Plan found workers commute to their jobs on bicycle 23 percent less than the national average.

The plan identifies active transportation as an influential and essential part of building a vibrant and healthy community, and commuting under one’s own power, “is an undervalued component of the transportation system.”

Community groups and institutions realize the value of making the city more accessible as well. Loyalist College has been in talks with the Belleville city council to facilitate the creation of cycling lanes along Bridge Street to connecting roads ending across from Susanna Moodie School.

When asked about what keeps students and faculty from riding to Loyalist, MacWhirter says, “We’re somewhat isolated here, we’ve got Dundas,

Wallbridge-Loyalist, Moira. These are fast roads, there are a lot of cars, and no paved shoulders so it’s definitely tricky to get people here on bikes.”

Rob Janes, steering committee member of cycling advocacy group Belleville on Bikes, has a similarly dissonant outlook on the state of cycling infrastructure in the city.

“As far as infrastructure goes, we have none. Currently Belleville has zero kilometres of on-road biking infrastructure, but they do have a transportation master plan now that was accepted by council earlier in 2014, which maps out where this infrastructure will likely be but it’s an extremely long-term project. We are talking 30 years.”

As important as bike lanes are to making cyclists more at ease on the roads there are other factors that impact on commuters’ safety on the road. Education and changing the outlook of motorists about how bicycles are perceived on roadways needs to be changed in order to make all users able to safely share the road.

“Belleville would like to be a cycling-friendly community, but it is a car-centric community. Ev-

erybody drives and you see narrow sidewalks up against the roads, my experience is that most drivers are fairly accepting of bikes on the road but there are also a reasonable number that are not. I’ve had an uncountable number of close calls with cars.”

For Janes, the final piece of the puzzle to cementing bicycles place on the roads in Belleville is designating where bicycles go on the road. By installing lanes and signage motorists and cyclists know where bikes are going to be and where cars will be.

“People get used to bikes on the road, expect them to be in their lane and know they can be passed safely while having this separation (even if it is only by space). Greater visibility of cyclists will encourage drivers to sharing the road and encourage cyclists who do not feel safe on the road to get out there.”

As drivers and community members become more aware and educated about the place of bicycles on the road, changes will come about and make roadways a less intimidating place for cyclists of all levels to be.



Top: Signs marking bike lanes litter streets in Kingston, Ont.
Centre left: Laura Voskamp stops for a photo along the trail at Meyers’ Pier in downtown Belleville, Ont. Voskamp has ridden bicycles for years but Voskamp says her current bike is her first seriously bicycle and it makes a huge difference in her riding.

Centre right: Ideal Bikes’ employee Caleb Murray sits between bikes in his kitchen in his apartment on Front Street, in Belleville, Ont.
Bottom left: Ryan Zaback, 27, poses for a photo with his daily driver a 1980’s fixed-gear road bike conversion. Zaback says he enjoys the places his bike takes him and rides bicycles for the love of it.

Bottom right: “I’m finally getting a chance to recover from the last couple months, December and the holidays were crazy and we’re still getting tons of people in.” says Ed Kraus, owner and operator of Ideal Bike in downtown Belleville, Ont. Above, Kraus poses for a photo in his Front Street shop.