

Mississauga Cycling Advisory Committee (MCAC)

End-of-Term Remarks: Irwin Nayer, MCAC Vice-Chair (January 8, 2019)

In early 2012 when I first met with Councilor Fonseca I warned her that I was going to be a contrary voice if I joined MCAC. It was still early days after the completion of the original, and deeply flawed, Cycling Master Plan. MCAC was committed to the CMP and I was determined to see it changed.

The then-new CMP (2010) failed to reflect best practices and much of our built infrastructure was inferior to what was being accomplished elsewhere. Mine was a lonely voice back then and it took years and much change in MCAC before the tenor of discussion came around to agree with the merits of the positions I held then and still do.

My biggest objection was to our reliance on enhanced sidewalks, better known by our favorite euphemism Multi-use Trails or MUTs. No doubt we chose to go down this road because they are the cheapest way to install infrastructure, but they do not serve the cycling community well.

We made no provision for cyclists to cross intersections legally, requiring them to intermittently become pedestrians in mid-trip. We did nothing to protect cyclists from turning vehicles as they inevitably chose to ride across them. There is no doubt that MUTs are active transportation infrastructure, but they are not cycling infrastructure! The mission I took upon myself was to change the prevailing view of MCAC on this subject with a view to creating an updated CMP providing for real cycling infrastructure.

I am the first to admit that I was quite naïve about how municipal government worked and it took years for me to come to the realization that politics often interferes with good governance. In our case every initiative to make Mississauga a bike-friendlier city meets with opposition from motorist residents who marshal political resistance at Council. Meanwhile we have not had an influential champion able to build consensus to counter these moves in the name of progress. We couldn't even get sharrows on Cumberland Drive! *<sarcasm; we do NOT support sharrows>*

While our committee evolved and grew ever stronger as the knowledge base of our citizen members expanded massively, Mississauga failed to keep up. Our Active Transportation staff did not evolve and senior management seemed content to stick to the path of least resistance.

As a result, despite the best efforts of a dedicated group of citizen members, we ended up with an "updated" CMP (June 2018) that is largely just more of the same. In fact I believe it is the CMP that would have been produced had there been no input at all from this committee.

Our CMP working group spent hours with the project team arguing for dedicated cycling infrastructure that would serve the commuting needs of a low-carbon emitting city stretching from border to border. We spoke with one voice and meeting notes indicate that we were heard, but little of that is reflected in the final result.

We asked for great and we got mediocre. We asked for a grand vision and we got tunnel vision. And when we needed political support at a most critical juncture, it was not even at this table.

Not only did the new CMP fail to get the endorsement of this committee, but we actually took pains to explicitly NOT endorse the plan. This was the point at which everything should have come to a halt, but our non-endorsement was glossed over and the CMP was received as if all was in order.

Meanwhile plans for additional infrastructure 'improvements' were in the works and being built with virtually no input from this body. The result is that several intersections have been made more dangerous for cyclists while appearing to be the opposite. The addition of bicycle-specific signals at MUT intersections will give cyclists added impetus to cross on green at speed as if they are in a safety cocoon. Meanwhile the signals do nothing to protect them from turning vehicles.

I want to be crystal clear on this point. I believe that the signalized intersections as installed will lead to a cyclist death and somebody will have to explain why it was allowed to happen when we warned about it and knew how to mitigate the danger. I voiced my concerns at the inauguration of the signals at Britannia and Winston Churchill, and all I got was push-back.

We are so discouraged that the vast majority of current committee members are not returning at the conclusion of the current term. Almost all of the institutional memory is leaving with us. I acknowledge that we are not indispensable, but this situation should have people wondering why it has come to this.

During my time at MCAC we have done some big things. We resuscitated a virtually defunct Ward Ride program into a highly successful **Community Rides** series. That success forced us to become far more professional about how we handled it. We did the same thing with **Tour de Mississauga** to the extent that Council decided it was too big for their comfort. We created connections with cyclists all over Mississauga and some of us made friends in the process.

What we did not do was build on our successes to create real connections with the cycling community to the extent that their collective voices could be heard by senior staff and political leadership. As a result it turns out that we actually have no voice. For that I regret not accomplishing more during my time here.

Nevertheless, there are things for which I am truly grateful. I have met many cyclists who fervently care about our subject matter and want us to succeed on their behalf. I have worked with many MCAC members over the years for whom I have great respect as advocates for cycling in Mississauga, many of whom are far better at it than I am. I am thankful for the training I have received to become a CanBike instructor. It has made me a better cyclist, a better advocate and a better teacher. And the city and region paid for that.

I have also had the chance to connect with cycling movers and shakers from many jurisdictions surrounding the west end of Lake Ontario and see the progress they are making in their cities and regions while they continue to leave us in their dust.

Lastly I am grateful for having had the opportunity to help lead our efforts and to work with all of MCAC, and in particular, for the leadership that Donnie Morris, MCAC Chair, has brought to the mix.

It is likely that the future of cycling advocacy in Mississauga does not reside in this committee. Mississauga needs a voice that will compel decision-makers to listen, learn and act to get us ready for the low-carbon future and the significant role that cycling will have in that environment. *END*