

Cyclist challenges Mayor Ford to take a spin this summer
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TORONTO – Toronto’s Mayor Rob Ford has lots of opinions about cycling in Canada’s biggest city, but does he actually know what it’s like? Local cyclist, Candice Anderson, wonders if the Mayor has ever had a true Toronto cycling experience.

Before Mayor Ford removes any more bike lanes or destroys bike depots, Anderson thinks he should take a spin on a cyclist’s wheels for a change. To give the Mayor that chance, she’s launched the “Rob Ford Rides the City Challenge” inviting him to experience, first hand, the joys of urban cycling this June during Bike Month. She hopes that this opportunity will allow the Mayor to learn more about some of the frustrations and dangers that cyclists face and in turn, become more compassionate to the cause.

Anderson launched the challenge after being hit by vehicles three times while cycling in downtown Toronto – an experience that’s not unusual as Toronto has the highest number of cyclist collisions in the country. While these experiences have been frightening, Anderson says she’ll never stop riding. “Cycling is such an enjoyable and quick way to get around the city. It’s really unfortunate that it’s also so dangerous and there seems to be little interest in encouraging a shared-road culture or improving infrastructure to make it safer.”

With 900,000 adult cyclists in Toronto, Anderson is not alone. Traffic congestion costs the city an estimated \$6 billion annually in social and economic costs (feelingcongested.ca). Encouraging and supporting cycling as a viable and safe means of transportation in the city is the most economical and easiest way to relieve this congestion. Many studies have also shown that cycling infrastructure attracts and supports business.¹

“Would Mayor Ford rather those 900,000 cyclists travel in single-occupancy vehicles or on the TTC?” Anderson asks. “In addition to less congestion, cycling provides a solution to TTC overcrowding issues while putting less wear and tear on the city’s crumbling road infrastructure. Encouraging people to cycle and making it safe for them to do so is an immediate solution to some of the city’s most acute problems in transportation and infrastructure.”

Mayor Ford is well known for his comments about cyclists being “a pain in the ass” to motorists, and has claimed that it’s “their own fault” if a cyclist is killed. But Mayor Ford also remarked during his time as Councillor in 2009 that: “If I lived downtown I’d be with the cyclists. You don’t need a car to get to point A to point B [sic].”² However, since becoming mayor of Canada’s largest city, he has done little to make cycling safer or

¹ Carolyn Szczepanski for Momentum Magazine, 2013. “How Bicycles Bring Business.” Available at: <http://momentummag.com/articles/how-bicycles-bring-business/>

² YouTube, 2009. “Toronto Mayor Rob Ford - "Cyclists are a pain in the ass" Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwxiv2aznB0>

easier in the downtown core. During his time in office, there has been a net removal of bike lanes in the city, and more recently he has vowed to “kill” the proposed bike station at Nathan Phillips Square.

Anderson holds out hope that 2013 is the year Mayor Ford embraces urban cycling. “I think Mayor Ford is a good natured and hands-on type of guy,” she says. “If he had some personal experience with the challenges cyclists face and realizes what a joy it is to cycle in the city, he might be more compassionate towards cycling issues and realize how supporting this community is a simple and low-cost solution to many of the city’s big issues. It’s just good business sense.”

“Whether or not Mayor Ford accepts the Challenge,” Anderson continues, “I will never stop riding. But I hope that someday I can stop being fearful for my life each time I head out the door on two wheels.”

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Contact

Candice Anderson

416-799-6108

candiceanderson@outlook.com

www.urbanbandit.ca

More information on the challenge

Petition site: www.change.org/RobFordRides

Facebook: www.facebook.com/RobFordRidestheCity

Twitter: @MayorFordCycles

Background on the challenge:

<http://urbanbandit.ca/2013/02/08/rob-ford-rides-the-city-challenging-torontos-mayor-to-cycle-for-a-day/>

Background on the challenge organizer:

<http://urbanbandit.ca/2013/02/11/my-cycling-story>

More about the Challenge organizer, Candice Anderson

Candice Anderson is a freelancer and blogger who grew up in the Toronto area. She has been living and commuting downtown by bicycle for the last six years. Anderson is a self described urban environmentalist and is a graduate of York University’s Master in Environmental Studies Program. Anderson blogs about cycling and other environmental issues on her site www.urbanbandit.ca.

