

News



Elevated bikeways will level the playing field for cyclists, says architect Chris Hardwicke.

Photo By velo-city.ca

Spring Guide: Velo-city

High-speed, all-season, pollution-free: covered bikeway tubes are the future rapid transit

By JENNY YUEN



A glassed-in network of elevated bike lanes connecting the burbs to downtown sounds like something out of a Jetsons episode. But don't tell that to architect Chris Hardwicke.

In his Velo-City of the near future, not just cyclists, but skateboarders, rollerbladers, people in electric wheelchairs and "anything that doesn't pollute" will be whisked and whooshed in his tubular network above the city, using the tailwind created by the enclosed structure to accelerate to speeds of up to 50 kilometres an hour.

And all of it away from tailgating and polluting SUVs.

"Every other way of getting around has a dedicated infrastructure," argues Hardwicke. "Bikes are the only ones that get the leftovers."

Hardwicke says the city's Bike Plan reads more like a bike map. "It's not a plan to actually produce an ambitious change in commuting patterns. It's absolutely useless."

He says, "As long as people are fighting for space on existing roads and until enough people bike, there won't be the political will" to give bikes prominence over cars.

His plan, first floated in 2004, is for the tube lanes to follow existing railway and hydro corridors along highways and through parks and ravines. The illustrations on Hardwicke's [www. Velo-city.ca](http://www.Velo-city.ca) showing tubes in the sky are a little misleading. In his vision, metal structures will hoist the initial 5-kilometre stretch of glass a mere 5 metres off the ground (or as high as they need to be over trains and cars). Ideally, Hardwicke says, the first line should run along the Gardiner and up the Don Valley.

Not surprisingly, Toronto Cycling Committee chair Adam Giambrone says Hardwicke's proposal is too expensive.

"Looks like it's a multi-hundreds-of-millions-of-dollars plan, if not billions," say Giambrone. "What makes sense? If we have limited dollars, we have to be realistic."

But with oil prices and pollution on the rise and congestion costing the economy some \$3.7 billion a year, Hardwicke counters that there's ample justification for giving his idea, which he says will be cheaper than building a highway, some serious consideration.

Before you start laughing out loud, you should know that not all cities think of Hardwicke's plan as pie in the sky.

The Velo concept is already raising eyebrows in Japan, Colorado (biketrams.com), Chicago and London, where there's a similar proposal to build bike tubes underground. In Sydney, Cambridge and Sweden, cyclists already share covered bridges and overpasses with pedestrians.

Says Hardwicke, admitting to some difficulty when it comes to finding investors, "The question is, do we need to be more ambitious to effectively make change?"

It's hard not to respond with a yes. @

news@nowtoronto.com

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