



Chris Hardwicke

# Velo-city

**New cycling infrastructure shapes a sparkling vision for people-powered transportation.**

**I**T'S MONDAY morning. You get your gear on and strap your bag onto your bike. It is cold and raining today, but after just five minutes of riding you can see a glassed-in on-ramp in the distance. A quick lane change and you pump your way up the ramp into the three-lane bikeway tube.

Switching into the slow lane, you can already feel the draft pulling you forward as cyclists in the fast lanes blur past you and into the distance. Once you get your rhythm, your shoulders relax as you let down your defences. No more cars breathing down your neck.

It's strangely quiet as you ride along, looking through the raindrops on the glass out to the panorama of the urban landscape. In the distance, you can see the cluster of red brake lights on the 404 as you pull into the next lane and gear up. Up ahead, you see a familiar bike trailer and realize it's your friend taking his kids to day care. Pulling into the slow lane, you chat with your friend for a few minutes before they get to their off-ramp.

A few minutes later, the bikeway widens to six lanes as you pass the GO station and hundreds of GO riders merge into traffic on their yellow bikes. Further on, you notice a hint of fragrance, which quickly grows into a field colour as you pass the greenhouses located along your route. Just around the corner, you cross the Don Valley as the sun breaks through the clouds. In no time, you are passing by the market stalls, making a mental note to pick up

some organic bananas later. Shifting down, you take the next off-ramp to work. Checking your watch, you notice you are early again.

Welcome to Velo-city.

Sound like a futuristic vision of utopia? Not really. One hundred years ago there was a brief moment in history when the bicycle was seen as the future of transportation. H.G. Wells wrote two books featuring the bicycle: *A Modern Utopia*, in which Wells describes his vision of a world in which the bicycle is a primary mode of transportation; and *The Wheels of Chance*, a quixotic romantic comedy that follows its cyclist hero biking around the villages of southern England. In that novel, Wells uses the bicycle as an illustration of the newly discovered freedom of mobility. This brief period of liberty disappeared as soon as the automobile took over the roads.

Ironically, bicycle groups were the first civic groups to lobby for good roads. Bicycle maps dating back 120 years show a network of bicycle routes extending in a hundred-mile radius around the City of Toronto. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Canadian Wheelman's Association created the Good Roads Movement to lobby for the first paved roads to be built in the city for bicycles – before automobiles were even on the scene.

Velo-city is part concept, part vision. It is a highway for bikes, a network of elevated bikeways that connect distant parts of the city. Each direction of travel

in Velo-city has a separate bikeway tube with three lanes of traffic for slow, medium and fast travel. The separation of direction reduces wind resistance and creates a natural tailwind for cyclists, increasing the efficiency of cycling by about 90 percent and allowing for speeds of up to 50 kilometres per hour. Because Velo-city is elevated, it does not require any additional real estate as it can be located in existing highways, power and railway corridors.

Velo-city offers an alternative: a parallel infrastructure that acts in support of other modes of transit. The bikeways are connected to the subway, railway, highway and parking lots, thereby offering more commuting choices. The tenacious bicycle has been around for over 100 years and last year bicycles outsold automobiles in North America. Velo-city simply gives bicycles the same level of dedicated infrastructure that other modes of transportation enjoy.

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Find out more at [www.velo-city.ca](http://www.velo-city.ca)