



BENEFITS OF CYCLING: ARE THERE NONE?

Presentation to the TSC, November 2025

Halifax Cycling Coalition

WE WILL MAKE A RECOMMENDATION

- Decisions about bike-lane infrastructure projects should be informed by evidence
 - Well-informed decisions require thorough and accurate evidence
 - We all make decisions by comparing the costs and **BENEFITS** of our actions
 - Decision-making at HRM does not compare financial costs with expected benefits
 - HRM does not currently make decisions based on the totality of evidence
 - We recommend that this change and become evidence-informed
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SMOKING

- **Costs** money to buy tobacco products
- Known **harms** to users and others
- No known **benefits**

(the recent [\\$32.5B tobacco court settlement](#) demonstrates that taxes paid by tobacco companies are a fraction of their costs to our health care system)



GYM MEMBERSHIP

- **Costs** money to join
- Active life has known **benefits**

(joining but not going to the gym has no known benefits)



INFRASTRUCTURE

Separating people driving motor vehicles from
people cycling

(note the autonomy of the young person)

BUILDING SEPARATED CAR LANES

Because

- in the past Halifax decided to allocate no road space to people using their bicycles
 - today building this infrastructure costs financial resources
 - which is also called 'building separated bike lanes'
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COST OF NOT HAVING SEPARATION

Today this **cost is paid by people cycling**, who risk their lives when they ride in traffic, their families, loved ones and friends

SUCH COSTS ARE ENORMOUS

- 2025 Road Safety Report: safety of people cycling is getting worse
 - By not separating people cycling from people driving, HRM shifts costs to people cycling
 - By investing in separated motor vehicle and bicycle lanes, HRM would provide many **benefits**
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HRM EVALUATION PROCESSES ARE FLAWED

- HRM does not account for the **benefits** of separating car and bike lanes
- Equivalent to saying that ‘university education costs money and has no known benefits’
- Morris-University Avenue project:
 - Is there no **benefit** to this project?
(**there are:** <https://cape.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/08-01-2025-CAPE-letter-to-HRM-Council-re-Morris-St-bike-lanes.pdf>)
 - Is this like smoking?
 - Isn't it more like going to university to learn important knowledge, skills?



ADMISSION OF FLAWED APPROACH

CAO Cathie O'Toole said it would be **impossible** for municipal staff to provide a cost-benefit analysis on bike lanes

Source: S. Rent. Halifax council passes Tony Mancini's bike lane motion after thoughtful, productive debate. Halifax Examiner, 25 June 2025.
<https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/government/city-hall/halifax-council-passes-tony-mancinis-bike-lane-motion-after-thoughtful-productive-debate/>

UNACCEPTABLE

- Decisions about the physical separation of car and bike lanes are not informed by the totality of evidence
 - Separation of people cycling from people driving is treated just like smoking – a cost
 - Yet, protection of people cycling by bike lanes separated from motor vehicle lanes has many financial **benefits**, both for individuals and the society
 - Benefits due to more people cycling safely and less people driving – improved safety for **all** road users
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THESE BENEFITS INCLUDE

- Better physical health
 - Better mental health
 - Reduced isolation
 - Affordability
 - Reduced emissions
 - Better air quality
 - Reduced noise pollution
 - Reduced road wear & tear
 - Reduced traffic delays
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BENEFITS CAN BE MEASURED

- It is **possible** to quantify the **benefits** in monetary terms
- It is possible to compare these benefits against monetary costs

(necessary but not sufficient for evidence-informed decisions: Councillors must also prioritize safety and value these benefits, which we think they do)

BENEFIT-COST ANALYSIS

- Like a decision about university education
 - costs time and money, but
 - has many benefits (and *beyond* financial benefits)
 - Why is it ‘impossible’ for HRM to conduct cost-benefit analysis?
 - We know that it can be done and is done routinely in other jurisdictions (e.g., California Department of Transportation’s BCA tool)
 - It is unethical to continue to ignore the **benefits of safe cycling**
 - HRM **should** conduct benefit-cost analysis to meets its stated priorities (road safety, modal shift, and climate change)
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WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

- Benefits of safe cycling infrastructure exceed financial costs
- Return on investment is estimated to exceed 2:1
- Halifax: 2.1-4.9:1

Sources: Sælensminde (2004); Brown et al. (2016); Whitehurts et al. (2021)

HCC STRESSES THAT

Benefits are only fully realized when Halifax builds a comprehensive, connected, comfortable, safe bikeway network that allows journeys to all destinations including schools, hospitals, playgrounds, stores

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the TSC request a staff report on a rigorous benefit-cost analysis for infrastructure projects and require that all ‘separated bike lane’ network projects include a comparison of financial costs and **benefits** (including safety, health, environmental, and societal benefits)

WILL HRM CONTINUE TO

Treat safety of people cycling by separating bike and motor vehicle lanes

➤ just like smoking with no known benefits



OR

like university education
with known individual
and societal **benefits?**

RECOMMENDATION

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THANK YOU

Halifax Cycling Coalition advocates for a Halifax where all our road users feel very safe and comfortable. Everyone, weather young or adult, deserves to ride their bicycles safely.

Happy to answer any questions you might have

REFERENCES

Brown, V. et al. (2016). A systematic review of economic analyses of active transport interventions that include physical activity benefits. *Transport Policy*.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tranpol.2015.10.003>

Sælensminde, K. (2004). Cost–benefit analyses of walking and cycling track networks taking into account insecurity, health effects and external costs of motorized traffic. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2004.04.003>

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<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0246419>
