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News / Toronto

Toronto's Twitter bike cop forced to tone it down, but bike lane campaign could get a boost

Parking enforcement officer Kyle Ashley has become a hero to the city's beleaguered cyclists, but there are signs his blunt talk about bike lanes ruffled feathers.

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TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Toronto parking enforcement officer Kyle Ashley took to social media, asking cyclists to alert him to vehicles parked illegally in bicycle lanes.

By: Torstar News Service Published on Thu Jul 06 2017





Toronto police are considering dedicating more officers to crack down on drivers who block bike lanes, even as the parking enforcement unit's highest profile cycling advocate is being steered into a less vocal role.

Since mid-May, [Kyle Ashley, an affable 29-year-old parking enforcement officer](#), has been racking up plaudits from cyclists, politicians, and city officials for his social-media-savvy efforts to keep bike lanes clear of cars.

By soliciting suggestions from the public about trouble spots and posting shaming pictures of vehicles he's ticketed, Ashley, who goes by the Twitter handle [@TPS_ParkingPal](#), has quickly become a hero among the city's two-wheeled travellers.



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PEO K. Ashley 
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9:06 PM - Jun 27, 2017 · Toronto, Ontario

 52  144  699

The fine for stopping in a bike lane is \$150. As part of a blitz that coincided with Bike Month in June, Ashley estimates that he's written between 15 and 35 tickets each four-hour shift, the majority of them for bike lane infractions.

"The community's now got somebody they feel is in their corner," Ashley explained in an interview this week.

He said his online engagement has helped give a voice to a group "that didn't feel like they were being represented or listened to before."

That's why there was concern in cycling circles Sunday when Ashley tweeted that this would be the final week for the bike lane campaign.

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But in an interview Tuesday, Ashley's boss said that the officer was merely being relocated to work out of one of the parking enforcement unit's two facilities in the north end of the city, instead of police headquarters downtown.

Brian Moniz, officer-in-charge for parking enforcement, said Ashley's duties won't change. He will still patrol the same downtown area where bike lanes are concentrated, and will continue to tweet about his work.

Moniz also confirmed that the unit is looking at assigning additional parking officers to target bike lanes.

Ashley has been "extremely successful," Moniz said, and the positive response to his work "shows that there's a need to put more enforcement into the bicycle lanes."

Moniz said he didn't yet know how many additional officers could be deployed, but predicted they could hit the streets within a month.



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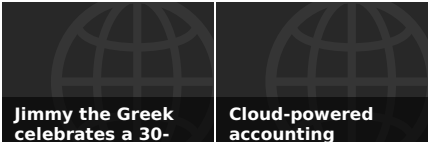
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Kyle Ashley is one of the only Toronto police officers to call out moving companies, delivery trucks, construction workers, etc. who all often clog up dedicated bike lanes.

He said the new officers will also be encouraged to use social media, and like Ashley they won't be judged by how many tickets they write.

That would be a significant change. Parking enforcement officers are normally evaluated against what's called the "peer average" — the average number of tickets that other officers write in the same area.

But in what Moniz described as an "unprecedented" move, "there was no expectation on Kyle" to meet those targets. That allowed him to focus exclusively on bike lanes instead of on other locations that might attract a higher number of parking violations.

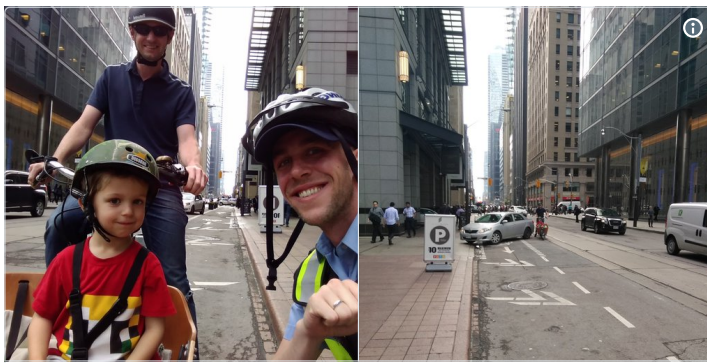
But while the parking unit is contemplating adding more officers to build on Ashley's work, there are signs that his outspokenness has rubbed some higher-ups the wrong way.

In previous interviews, Ashley has openly criticized what he considered Toronto's insufficient cycling infrastructure, and said the city needs to build more robust barriers to prevent drivers from encroaching on cycling lanes.

But this week before his interview with the Star had even begun, Ashley made clear that any questions about cycling infrastructure would have to be referred to city officials.

And while during the past month he's worked under the supervision of the corporate communications branch at police headquarters, his redeployment to the parking enforcement facility next week means he'll be less directly involved with the department that fields media requests.

Asked whether the parking enforcement unit believes Ashley had overstepped his bounds in the past, Moniz replied: "Kyle is performing duties in parking enforcement and his social media engagement must be focused and centred around parking and safety issues related to the enforcement of bike lanes...opinions on cycle infrastructure should be reserved for the chief city planner and her department."



PEO K. Ashley ✓
@TPS_ParkingPal



This is exactly why I do my job. It isn't glamorous. But... I am keeping precious cargo 🚲👶👦 safe... #BikeTO and #WalkTO be safe out there

10:44 PM - Jun 29, 2017 · Toronto, Ontario

11 replies 61 retweets 265 likes

Moniz said Ashley will continue to have the same level of engagement on social media “if not more” and that his assignment to the communications branch was for mentoring purposes and was always temporary.

Jared Kolb, executive director of advocacy group Cycle Toronto, said Ashley’s bike lane blitz has been a “shot in the arm” that has “restored lot of people’s faith in enforcement.”

But he warned that unless the effort is kept up drivers won’t change their behaviour and will continue to dangerously obstruct the lanes.

Kolb said he hopes that each downtown police division, of which there are four, will get a dedicated bike lane enforcement officer.

“We need more Kyle Ashley’s,” he said.

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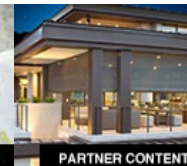
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