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COLUMN



Tory's Toronto

Metro's Matt Elliott, formerly of Ford For Toronto, keeps the light shining on Mayor John Tory's city hall.

Toronto's Twitter bike cop a 'crucial' part of evolution into great cycling city: Elliott

Police need to find a lot more people just like Kyle Ashley, people dedicated to keeping our bike infrastructure clear, writes Matt Elliott.

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Kyle Ashley, a.k.a. Twitter bike cop, has won the support of cyclists across Toronto in his crackdown on people who park vehicles in bike lanes.

By: **Matt Elliott** Metro Published on Mon Jul 10 2017

To be a truly great city for cycling, Toronto needs three things: a lot of cyclists, a network of separated bike lanes and constant enforcement to keep cars out of those lanes.

The city has the first thing in spades and is getting better at the second – though it sure would be nice to see new lanes get installed more quickly.

But Toronto has generally been really, really bad at the enforcement thing.

That's why it has been such a breath of fresh air over the last few weeks to [follow the adventures of parking enforcement officer Kyle Ashley](#) as he busts scofflaws who park in bike lanes. Ashley has posted frequently about his work on Twitter while he's [on a special assignment](#) dedicated entirely to enforcing bike lane laws.

If any of Ashley's bosses at the Toronto Police Service are questioning whether this sort of work is valuable, let me answer with one word: duh.

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Along some routes, cars blocking bike lanes is so common that seasoned cyclists know it's often safer to eschew some sections of the lanes entirely and bike on the roadway.

Those dangerous bike lane blockers end up also blocking people who might otherwise consider taking up their bike as a mode of transportation. In 2009, [a city survey found that concerns about safety was the top factor](#) preventing recreational cyclists from biking for more practical purposes.

It's a simple formula and one that justifies enforcement of the rules. Fewer drivers blocking bike lanes leads to more safety, which will lead to more cyclists. And those new cyclists will bring with them a range of benefits, from lower emissions to reduced congestion for motorists and transit riders.

There should be no concern about the cost of enforcement efforts either. On most days, finding someone egregiously blocking a bike lane is a one-step process: all you need to do is try to ride your bike in a bike lane. With fines set at \$150 per offence, regular enforcement should easily break even.

And if there happens to be any worry about strict enforcement of these laws being seen as some sort of cash grab or part of a "war on cars," let me offer this: in addition to seeing parking enforcement officers issue more tickets to cars blocking bike lanes, I'd also support seeing stepped-up education and enforcement for cyclists who brazenly violate the rules of the road.

It's frustrating for cyclists to see other cyclists blow through red lights or zip down the sidewalk - we know those people are just giving us a bad name.

What won't work is continuing the blitz-style temporary enforcement of past years. Cracking down for a few weeks and then letting up doesn't work - people quickly return to their old habits when the coast is clear.

No, to truly make for safer streets for cyclists, the enforcement must be permanent and widespread.

If Toronto really wants to be a great cycling city, either the police need to figure out how to genetically engineer some Kyle Ashley clones, or they need to find a lot more people just like him - people dedicated to keeping our bike infrastructure clear.

Every other path forward is blocked by some jerk in a car.

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