

SEPTEMBER 21-24, 2023 (OTTAWA-KINGSTON-
BRIGHTON-OSHAWA-SCARBOROUGH-TORONTO)

#SafetyRide for People and Planet



**Joel
Harden**
MPP, Ottawa Centre

Executive Summary:

The #SafetyRide took place over a span of four days, from September 21 to September 24. In his capacity as Ontario's Critic for Active Transportation, MPP Joel Harden rode his bike from Ottawa to Toronto to promote his Private Member's Bill, Bill 40, the Moving Ontarians Safely Act. Along the way, he stopped in Kingston, Brighton, Oshawa, Scarborough, and finally Toronto. At each stop, he hosted community consultations to listen to those who are concerned about road safety, active transportation, and environmental change.

This ride was not only a challenge, it was also a fun way to think about how to make our communities safer and more sustainable. The Ontario Legislature has debated the Protecting Vulnerable Road Users Act five times in the last ten years but it has yet to be passed into law. We are hoping our #SafetyRide can inspire this to happen in Ontario's 43rd Parliament, as that same bill enters Second Reading this November 16th in the form of Bill 40. It includes the following measures for those found guilty of road offenses: community service; license suspension; driver re-education; and also requires a culpable motorist to attend court for sentencing and to hear victim impact statements.

At our consultations, we heard from a wide range of perspectives, such as residents of rural and urban areas, cyclist enthusiasts, frontline workers, and concerned parents. Despite their diverse backgrounds, there was a resounding agreement that Ontario's roads are not as safe as they should be and passing Bill 40 into legislation would make them safer. Many residents spoke of close calls and traffic incidents that affected their lives as well as their loved ones, highlighting the prevalence of this issue to residents across the province. Although there is much to be done, Bill 40 was discussed as one necessary step towards the right direction to make better drivers, reduce the number of road victims, and provide them with meaningful forms of justice.

We also spoke about other actions outside the scope of Bill 40 that must be considered alongside Bill 40 to make roads safer. Infrastructure was a recurring topic of discussion as the design of our roads affects the behaviors of drivers and vulnerable road users alike, especially in light of other places around the world where bike lanes are segregated and sidewalks are regularly maintained. Furthermore, more proactive educational efforts that do not only follow road offenses, but reach drivers before they can commit offenses in the first place. The classification of vulnerable road users was contested as other people who use the roads do not currently fall under the bill's definition and would also benefit from the protection of Bill 40.

What follows are remarks from participants of our #SafetyRide consultations in each city.

Kingston

Important conversations around road safety and active transportation took place in Memorial Hall, at the heart of Kingston City Hall. Passionate members of the community provided insightful feedback on Bill 40, as we discussed how Bill 40 can do more and be amended to ensure our roads are safer. This includes addressing the language we use to describe collisions, shifting responsibility away from the individual to the system, and adjusting penalties in accordance with varying levels of risk in different circumstances.

Gerry Brown: Lifetime bike rider and driver

"I support Bill 40 because it will help to protect vulnerable road users and bring more fairness to those users who are injured or killed on our roads. I have witnessed the harm caused to fellow road users in my old Toronto neighborhood by road violence, such as Doug Crosbie, Julia Cawse and Erica Stark. Their friends and families have suffered along with them and that long-term harm is something that we should strive to reduce.

Bill 40 will help to do this by bringing accountability to the process for drivers who cause this harm by breaking rules of the Highway Traffic Act. I think it's especially important that these drivers receive training and understand the harm they have caused, not only to the victim of their actions, but to the friends and families of those victims."



Gustin Chiller: Member of Kingston Coalition for Active Transportation

"A part of the puzzle is changing the way we talk about the issue. Calling a collision an 'accident' implies that there was no intent, we have to move away from using that sort of language that absolves responsibility."

Thomas: Resident

"Moments of stress are during the winter and around construction sites. Changing penalties according to different conditions and locations should be considered in the amendment of this bill. For instance, when there is a snow storm, there should be a higher expectation for drivers to drive safely. In the construction site on the west side of town, cyclists are going through construction sites to avoid cars."

Nico Koenig: Road safety practitioner and researcher

“The leading evidence-based policies across the world are proactive safety measures which target the most effective strategies: those that consider social-demographic issues related to an individual’s risk exposure to vehicle collision, and those focused on the built environment by physically limiting or eliminating the amount of impact and traffic violence that can be caused by a vehicle to a human. While this Bill does not meet those strategies, it does prioritize efforts and language to indicate that pedestrians, cyclists, and non-motorized vehicle users are the most vulnerable road users in a collision with a vehicle, and those users should be considered in the law, which will likely support making policy changes that protect vulnerable road users in the long term in Ontario.”



Brighton

In Brighton we had the chance to connect with Randy Albon, President of the Northumberland Hills Cycling Club and an avid promoter of road safety. The discussion focused predominantly on education, and the need for all road users to be aware of how to safely share the road. The discussion included how Bill 40's requirement for driver reeducation and community service would help educate drivers, and how future pieces of legislation can improve education requirements.

Randy Albon, President of the Northumberland Hills Cycling Club

"Most of our riders, I'd say our demographic is aged 50 and up, we have some people in their teens and very few of them in their 20s, but it's mostly an older demographic. A lot of them, when they first got back on their bike, having been off it for a long time, were afraid, afraid of traffic and such.

We empowered them by teaching them how to take a lane, how to properly signal and make themselves present. And now it's awesome. You see them riding around and they're riding properly. They're following the rules. They know what they're doing and they're doing it. They're riding their bikes and they're confident doing it."



Oshawa

At the Oshawa Community Consultation, we had the opportunity to speak with residents who have been working with their communities, municipalities, and regional governments to make roads safer in Oshawa. We discussed the importance of proactive education to prevent collisions, which includes education not only for drivers, but also for vulnerable road users to use their bikes, e-scooters, and mobility devices safely. Another prominent topic of discussion was infrastructure and road design, and how they can make a big difference in ensuring that all road users can get to where they need without endangering one another.

Mary Boate: Resident

“The education of both the cyclist and motorist are the most important. And how we get that education out to the public is important. We must proactively educate all road users to look out for the safety of one another. Hopefully the passing of Bill 40 will bring this into the public consciousness and make them more aware that they need to be more vigilant of each other.”



Dustin Allen: Former transit worker



“I’ve worked for the TTC for more than ten years and something that needs to be addressed in driver reeducation is that drivers get an itch and cannot wait a few seconds let alone a few minutes while passengers board school buses with lights flashing, same thing with street cars. We need to teach time management. It’s better to be running a few minutes late than the long term impact of causing collisions.”

Anonymous: Teacher

“In downtown Oshawa, the accessibility committee might be asked to say that we need more disabled parking spots, but there is a sidewalk and there may or may not be a bike lane. So where do we put the cars? We need to design better with bike lanes, and places to park. Also, there are lots of areas in Oshawa that do not have sidewalks so everyone is on the road, including kids walking to school, mobility device users, and people walking their dogs. The risks are ridiculous.”

Jim Boate: Member of Clarington Active Transportation & Safe Roads Committee, member of Durham Cycling Coalition

“Micro mobility is making more and more impact. We see more e-scooters, e-bikes, and cyclists. We are advocating to our municipalities that they start restructuring the way we transport around our community. We have seen a lot of what they have done in Europe, they do not share a road as much as we do here, cyclists are on a separated bike highway that is not connected to the road and distanced by at least 30 meters. We can learn from what we’ve seen and best practices around the world that are way ahead on micro mobility.”



Scarborough

Many passionate residents of Scarborough joined us to discuss road safety at Variety Village, who were generous enough to host us. Our conversation highlighted that road safety is a major issue in the Scarborough community that concerns residents from all walks of life, from concerned parents, to cycling enthusiasts, to paramedics. Far too many had devastating stories to share about instances of collisions or close-calls, and we discussed how Bill 40 can be a part of the solution.

Jess Spieker: Member and spokesperson for Friends and Families for Safe Streets

"I was riding my bike to work in 2015 when I was t-boned by a reckless, left-turning SUV driver. The driver broke my spine, inflicted a traumatic brain injury, did immense soft tissue damage, and my injuries caused a massive bilateral pulmonary embolism. I now live with a life sentence of chronic pain and clinically severe depression and anxiety. In return for inflicting a life sentence, the driver was fined a mere \$300 and zero demerit points.



The utter lack of meaningful consequences for the driver was devastating for me. The driver was allowed to continue endangering the public every time she got in her SUV, because her license was never suspended, she did not have to take remedial driver training to learn to look up before making a left turn, nor was she required to do community service related to road safety. The restorative measures in Bill 40 deliver better justice for victims and help rehabilitate dangerous drivers."

Chris Miller: Former paramedic

"I am wrapping up a 9 year career as a paramedic in the city of Toronto. One of the scariest things we have to do on our job is step out of the ambulance for any incident that involves an active roadway as we have to enter into an active lane of traffic to render care. Once, in downtown Toronto, I was loading a patient into the back of an ambulance, when a drunk driver ran into the front of our truck right before we stepped off the curb. If we stepped off a second before, our patient, partner and I would have been hurt badly."



Marvin Macaraig: Doctor, Health Promoter, Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services.



“Based on data from the Toronto Police Service, in 2022, there were 50 fatalities and 250 serious injuries resulting from vehicular collisions in Toronto. These numbers represent real people whose lives, friends, and families have been forever changed. It is also a sobering reminder of how Toronto’s streets are dangerous by design, and improving community safety will require new policy, changes to legislation, and infrastructure improvements.”

As a Health Promoter, a central focus of my work is harm reduction and disease prevention, and if people are getting killed and injured on our streets, we need to address the issue from all angles. I believe Bill 40 will help bring us closer to achieving Toronto’s VisionZero goals.”

Tasnuba Syeda: Scarborough Resident and Affected Family Member of Road Incident



“The implementation of Road Safety and Bill 40 emerges as a crucial step towards preserving human life and reducing the heartache of unnecessary loss, a reality all too familiar for those, like myself, who have endured the agony of losing a loved one in a hit-and-run incident. The passing of my uncle, a victim of such a senseless act, underscores the urgent need for this bill, which proposes stricter regulations and penalties. It serves as a deterrent, ensuring drivers operate their vehicles responsibly, cognizant of the severe repercussions negligent actions hold. It aids in bringing justice to affected families, preventing perpetrators from evading accountability. The bill importantly champions preventive measures, promoting educational programs, and changes, fostering a safer environment for all road users. Through this, we honor the memories of those we've lost, like my uncle, by advocating for systemic changes, striving to ensure that others do not suffer the same fate.”

Dan Medlin: Scarborough Resident



"I believe that the text of this bill should be updated to make sure that the classification of vulnerable road users is expanded to all vehicles other than motor vehicles along with pedestrians. People should not lose protection of this bill just because they ride a skateboard, a kick-scooter, or any other vehicle that is not specifically named in this bill or regulated in MTO regulations."

Queen's Park

The #SafetyRide came to a memorable conclusion as we gathered at Nathan Phillips Square and rolled up to Queen's Park together. At the heart of the province, we spoke about the potential impact of Bill 40 and its implications for drivers and vulnerable road users alike. There was a shared sentiment of hope and expectation that Bill 40 will make roads safer by making better drivers and delivering justice for road victims. While there is still much more to do, residents voiced that these legislative measures are long overdue.

Meredith Wilkinson: Member of Friends and Families for Safe Streets

"Six years ago, I was run over by a driver of a garbage truck and as a result of that collision, I lost my right leg. I really believe in Bill 40 because it is a good example of restorative justice, and it will help make better drivers in Ontario. It will also give some meaningful justice and closure to victims of road violence. As someone who was injured in a road collision, I actually had to undergo driver retraining due to losing my leg and am actively doing community service in road safety. It has only made a better driver so I can only assume that it will do the same for those who seriously injure or kills a vulnerable road user under Bill 40."



Robin: Mother of three



"Our family made a decision a few years ago to limit our driving as much as we could. I used to drive my kids around in an SUV and I've had some close calls where I almost hit people so I replaced my SUV with a cargo bike. There is a feeling among drivers that they could get away with anything, I've had drivers intentionally swerve at us to scare us, I've been screamed at when I'm with my children for biking with them. I hope that this bill can allow drivers to have a moment like I did, where they can realize the potential for harm they hold as drivers. I would like people to think about that every time they go behind the wheel and for more families who want to drive less to feel safer doing it."

Peggy Hawthorne: President of United Senior Citizens of Ontario

“There are about 3 million seniors in Ontario, and we represent the largest growing demographic age group. With that increase in number, many issues come up. Due to the lack of affordability of transit, more and more people are using alternative means of getting around such as bicycles, tricycles, mobility devices and these make quite a few seniors, vulnerable road users.

The situation for vulnerable road users at the present time needs to be fixed. The justice system does not serve proper justice to those who are seriously injured or killed on the road. The punishment that the court can give is not suitable to the crime that is inflicted upon vulnerable road users. We also find that the infrastructure is not suitable as some places do not have cycle lanes, sidewalks are bumpy, and there are poorly lit roads in rural areas. We want to see Bill 40 passed into legislation so that this issue, which has been an issue for quite a few years, can finally be put to an end.”

