

October 29, 2024

Hon. Prabmeet Sarkaria  
Minister of Transportation of Ontario  
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To Minister Sarkaria,

We are writing to you with deep concern about Bill 212, Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, 2024. This bill would negatively affect the future of mobility in the Province of Ontario. Slowing or reversing the installation of bike lanes will have an adverse impact on children's health and the environment. We are Ontario's Green Communities, a group of community-based non-profits that work with schools and provide environmental programming in communities in 52 municipalities and 3 first nations across Ontario.

### **An Epidemic of Inactivity**

According to the Government of Canada, only 37.6% of children aged 5-17 are getting the minimum 60 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous activity recommended by Health Canada. Across Ontario, fewer kids are using active modes of transportation (e.g., walking, cycling, rollerblading, scootering and rolling for wheelchairs or other mobility devices) for their school journey: 22% of kids walk to school and 4% cycle, whereas 74% travel by motorized transport. Bicycle lanes are important for kids who currently ride their bicycles, but also for reversing these trends.

Driving kids to school has led to several serious impacts:

- 1) **More inactivity.** Kids miss the opportunity for much-needed physical activity, fresh air, and quality interaction with parents, caregivers, and friends.
- 2) **Less focus.** Students are less focused in class, contributing to poorer academic outcomes.
- 3) **Worse congestion.** An estimated 25-40% of vehicle congestion during morning rush hour is related to school drop-off.
- 4) **Riskier roads.** 78% of Ontario parents reported witnessing unsafe driving behaviours in school zones.

Moreover, evidence shows that creating more car-centric lanes and roads ultimately leads to even more congestion. Reducing congestion and creating safer, healthier roads requires creating additional bike lanes and encouraging people who are able to switch from driving to cycling. Clearly, we need more safe routes to school – not fewer – to get children and families walking and cycling to school safely.



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High quality networks of protected bike lanes on main streets are critical to providing safe routes to school and supporting higher rates of physical activity. By design, Ontario communities do not generally have side streets that run parallel to main streets for long distances. In suburban communities, they are designed to discourage traffic, and in urban communities like Toronto and Ottawa, they are often fragmented, with designated one-way sections that prevent traffic. While neighbourhood streets are important for bike lanes, main streets are the major connectors providing direct routes for students to get to school.

## **Climate Crisis**

Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions are rising: in 2022, they rose to 2017 levels after a pandemic-induced reduction. Road transportation is the largest source of pollution in the province, responsible for more than a quarter of all of Ontario's emissions. While we acknowledge that the intensity of Ontario's emissions reduced as Ontario's population and economy grew, we are concerned that emissions from road transportation continue to rise and that we are not on track to meet our 2030 climate goals.

Protecting the health and safety of our communities, while also reducing congestion and fossil fuel pollution, requires that we do as much as we can to encourage cycling. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is unequivocal: "Targets to reduce carbon emissions by 2030 in line with the 1.5-degree limit for global warming cannot be achieved without a systematic increase of cycling."

According to research, a standard vehicle releases around five metric tons of carbon dioxide a year. Choosing a bike instead of a car just once a day cuts an average person's transportation-related carbon emissions by 67%.

Ontario contains the most densely populated areas in the country and is home to 40% of Canada's population. We urgently need the government of Ontario to demonstrate leadership that provides its residents with more – not fewer – opportunities for achieving a sustainable, safe, and prosperous future.



## Building for the Future

We worry that the legislation will jeopardize most future developments of safe, protected bike lanes in Ontario, reducing transportation options for children and families and contributing to higher rates of collisions, physical inactivity, and pollution.

We strongly encourage you, Minister Sarkaria, to reverse course on this legislation and instead encourage municipalities to continue building networks of high-quality protected bike lanes on major streets. Our collective future depends on it.



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Green Communities Canada

## Signatories:



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## Resources:

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[accounts-for-nearly30-of-morning-traffic-in-london/](https://airqualitynews.com/2022/05/06/school-run-accounts-for-nearly30-of-morning-traffic-in-london/)

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(2023). <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/active-transportation-how-children-getting-school.html>

