

May 22, 2020

Mayor Eisenberger and Members of Council,

Hamilton's bike share system is a vital part of our transportation network and an essential mode of transportation for Hamiltonians every day. Over the past 7 years this system has grown to have 26,000 active members who have collectively taken 1.6 million rides and travelled over 2 million kilometres by bike. **The bike share system that you have helped to build has had city-wide benefits to residents and visitors and we are writing to you today to urge City Council to ensure the ongoing operation of our bike share system.**

On Friday, May 15th, Uber notified the City of Hamilton that they were terminating their contract early and winding down SoBi Hamilton operations as of June 1, 2020. Like you, we were frustrated and disappointed by this announcement. Along with over 5,800 people who have [signed our petition](#)¹ in just 4 days, we are calling on Uber to honour their contract. Our petition also calls on the City of Hamilton to ensure the ongoing operations of bike share beyond the contract with Uber because the residents of Hamilton depend on it.

As outlined by City staff on May 19th, bike share systems rarely generate a profit. Other Canadian cities like Toronto and Montreal provide public support for their bike share operations as it is a mode of transportation for many residents, just like public transit and roadways which receive municipal funding support.

Regardless of when our contract with Uber comes to an end, we are calling on the City of Hamilton to provide financial support to bike share in Hamilton as an essential part of our transportation network.

A recent staff report estimated that annual operating costs of bike share to be \$700,000. It should also be noted that this amount can be significantly offset by user and membership fees and sponsorship. With 26,000 active members, the required public funds could be significantly lower.



change.org



Save Bike Share in Hamilton

5,825 have signed. Let's get to 7,500!

*Signatures as of May 22, 2020



¹ <https://www.change.org/p/hamilton-city-council-save-bike-share-in-hamilton>



Hamilton's bike share directly aligns with many of Council's priorities, including Climate Change, Multi-Modal Transportation, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, and Integrated Growth & Development. It also plays a direct and meaningful role in making Hamilton the best place to raise a child and age successfully.



According to a [survey of SoBi members completed by Civicplan](#)², over half of members used SoBi to commute to work or school. 44% "reported driving their vehicle less often (34%) or much less often". 20% of bike share members reported using bike share for dining out and 24% used it for errands and meetings.

Bike share in Hamilton provides an accessible mode of transportation, reduces congestion on roads, improves air quality and supports economic development. Bike share in Hamilton has worked hard to provide a mode of transportation for residents who need it through projects like the Everyone Rides Initiative, and a [study of North American bike share systems](#)³ found that Hamilton was the only Canadian city

where bike share access was greater in lower socioeconomic areas of the City.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 300 new members have signed up and the system operates as an essential service. This growing membership reflects global trends that show an [increase in cycling](#)⁴ as people look for physically distant ways to complete their essential trips and exercise. The most recent [travel survey](#)⁵, indicates approximately 40,000 individuals do not have a vehicle in their household for personal use. With reduced public transit capacity as a result of the pandemic, ensuring that Hamiltonians have access to reliable and healthy transportation options is vital.

Bike share should also be seen as an important tool in planning for our pandemic recovery as it provides a low-cost mode of transportation for both the City and residents. Bike share can support the HSR and is a great solution to alleviate pressure on the HSR where overcrowding may occur. Bike share also connects users to local businesses who need our support.



² <https://planlocal.ca/sobi-2018/#1521642517930-30984650-45b0>

³ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0361198118783107>

⁴ <https://www.eco-compteur.com/en/covid19-dashboard/>

⁵ <http://dmg.utoronto.ca/transportation-tomorrow-survey/tts-introduction>



Public health authorities—including the World Health Organization—[have also expressed their support for cycling to support mental wellbeing and to help residents get essential exercise](#)⁶. Hamilton's bike share system has been essential to residents over the past 7 years and Hamiltonians need it to continue as a critical piece of the transportation network during Hamilton's recovery from the pandemic.

For the above reasons and many more, bike share in Hamilton is an integral piece of our city and our community; one whose impact and reach continues to grow. We are calling for leadership and support by our City Council to ensure the continuity of bike share in Hamilton.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Krause".

Jay Krause
Chair, Cycle Hamilton Board of Directors

Voices from the community:

As part of our recent petition, people were able to share the many reasons why they support saving bike share in Hamilton. Below are a few of Hamilton's bike share stories:

Lynn says, "It's an affordable mode of transportation for many people; and environmentally friendly!"

Franciska is a frequent visitor to the city and agrees, "I come to Hamilton often and use the SoBi bikes. A great system that makes my time in Hamilton so much better."

Rachel shares similar thoughts "I think the bikes have offered me an opportunity to get places while exercising and have been great options for people coming to visit me to get out for bike rides! Really need this for this city. So appreciative of the bike share."



⁶<https://who.canto.global/v/coronavirus/s/MFSQ0?viewIndex=1>



Jade notes how bike share supports council priorities of equity, “These bikes are vital transportation for our low income population in the community. They also provide access to exercise for those who don’t have a bicycle and can’t purchase one due to lack of storage space.”

Nicholas says, “SoBi is a vital part of the life in the City of Hamilton. The City knows this because it has highlighted bike share in its own Economic Development and Tourism publicity!”

Jim sees the potential of bike share moving forward, “Bike share is essential to a people oriented city, and anything that alleviates car traffic is going in the right direction. The air quality has improved everywhere as a result of Covid19. Must we reverse the inadvertent gains made during this crisis?”



Krista says “I joined SoBi in 2015, in the first two weeks it began in Hamilton and have used it ever since. When my car broke down for good later that year, I felt secure that I could live in the city, get back and forth from work, buy food and visit family, using SoBi and integrated with Community Car Share and public transit. Because of these choices not only am I healthier but I am able to live more environmentally. Not having a car means I was able turn my city driveway into a vegetable garden and to invest time in a lower-paying artistic endeavour that contributes to the city’s culture. In other words, the spin-offs of having a bikeshare program have had a multiplier effect across my life and others.”

Myron shared, “Getting hit by a car was just about the first thing that happened to me when I moved to Hamilton. I’d been in the city for less than a month when I was struck by a minivan illegally turning across a protected bike lane. This resulted in an inoperable comminuted fracture of my left clavicle — a health issue I will carry for the rest of my life. That was my rude awakening to infrastructure and road culture in this town.

As someone who has been a dedicated bike commuter for my whole adult life, I spent my first winter in Ontario in pain and no small degree of fear that I’d ever feel safe to cycle again. Several times a week I would watch HSR buses with “SORRY — BUS FULL” signs blast past as I shivered miserably at my bus stop and hoped I’d get to work on time. The city’s approach to transit seemed actively hostile; this was the same winter that Hamilton destroyed its only dedicated bus lane. As a non-driver, I felt so unwelcome here!

So when spring rolled around, I was so excited to see that a bike-share network was launching. I’d never used one, but my own bike was still in dire need of repairs and I wasn’t mentally ready to face commuting on a zippy road bike yet. The SoBi bicycles, by contrast, were easy to ride, reassuringly heavy, easy to spot, and effortless to check out



and return. They provided me a way back into riding, for which I can never be grateful enough. Later that spring I met my spouse, and we rode SoBi together on some of our first dates. Those memories remain special to me.

Fast forward five years, and SoBi has become one of my favourite things about the city — a uniquely Hamiltonian success story. To my great surprise, it turned me into a winter bike commuter, because it turns out the winters here AREN'T so bad to ride in as long you have a safe bike. Even though I've switched back to my zippy road bike for summer commuting, SoBi is my favourite way of getting around the city. It's safe, environmentally friendly, good exercise, and having a quick and accessible autonomous mode of transit has dramatically increased the amount of time and money I spend in local businesses downtown. It makes having fun easy; it makes life better."