

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Main Street

From: Matthew Higginson
Sent: Monday, May 9, 2022 11:58 PM
To: clerk@hamilton.ca
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Hi There,

I am writing with regards to the motion by Councillor Wilson and Councillor Nann around the Main Street 2-way conversion study.

First let me just applaud the leadership and vision that these two councillors have put forward - which shows courage and openness but more than anything demonstrates they are paying attention to what the majority of Hamilton is demanding and willing to respond with more than rhetoric.

Is it enough? No. A study, a committee, a consultant - I have seen too many of these situations fizzle out or get lost. We can't let this happen here. The motion is one important step, but what you do next - what concrete, material action you put up - that is what will change and save lives. And that is the leadership and action we are tired of asking for.

I have delegated for years now on this topic of safer streets. I have shared research and reports, data and examples from other similarly situated jurisdictions that have saved lives. I have read the vision zero reports, and the city's transit master plan. I have spoken to neighbours, teachers, students, trustees - your own staff. I have called you directly mr. Mayor. And through all of this, I've watched headlines roll in, I've screamed, I've hugged my children close, I've cried. I can't keep doing this.

I saw a dump truck today on my street. As my kids played with bubbles and yelled with their friends across the street, several 37 tons of steel pounded the pavement. The driver waved at me and To be clear, I smiled back - I hold nothing against the worker who is following the design that suggests nothing is wrong with the picture. Even if he spit at me my issue could not be with him personally. Because the problem is not drivers behaving badly or bad actors breaking rules - our system of design puts the most vulnerable road users next to killing machines. We have to say that part out loud.

If we choose to do nothing, we are complicit.

The streets as they are are wildly dangerous. We can try to normalize it, we can get used to the chaos. But it doesn't have to be this way. And it wasn't always this way. These designs were imagined. They were seen to be the most effective way to move the most traffic, but is that the only measure of all our city can be?

We need to stop seeing ourselves as drivers stuck in traffic, and see ourselves instead as people who deserve to move freely, safely, and collectively. As people waiting for a bus that just isn't on time, or doesn't go where we need it to, or is too expensive, or late, or not frequent enough. As people waiting for it to feel safer to bike to work. As people who would walk or roll if we had just something to separate us from the things that weigh 25 times more than us and move 20 times faster.

Democracy requires the people to have strength of information and critical analysis. If you shut down 2 lanes - made it more pedestrian friendly, added a dedicated bus lane on and a bike lane, what impact would that have? How many more people could move? How many deaths would be prevented? How much cleaner would the air be? How much less stress would the population experience? Share these answers. Have a meaningful conversation about them. And maybe

we can move away from the dramatics of the decade old “war-on-the-car” rhetoric? The cars won. We tried it out. It’s been a disaster. It’s time to try something new. Something that works for everyone.

We can find new ways to imagine crossing the city - or spending time in it. I hate being stuck in traffic! It’s no fun! If you told me I would never have to sit in traffic again I would be filled with glee. But that would mean I could get groceries in my neighborhood, and not have to wait around for public transit schedules that don’t work with my own. It would mean I would need alternatives that meet me where I’m at. And that means different options for my neighbours that also work for them too. Because right now the only choice a lot of us have is to drive. And that isn’t much of a choice. Especially with astronomical gas prices, broken infrastructure, dodging potholes and losing community members. Even one single death is too much. That is the point of vision zero, a pledge that is up all over city hall.

And it’s the reason why mornings are so stressful - we are all hyper vigilant in the school zone during drop off and pickup. Going to play is stressful - because of the fact that we can’t calmly cross to walk through Gage. Doing the “personal responsibility” side of the climate change fight is stressful because of the honks I get when I’m biking and taking the lane because I don’t want to get sideswiped by a passing driver. The design of the road currently makes us all out here competing with one another like we are fighting for our lives. That is not a situation anyone can afford to lose.

We can’t fly alone, but together we built the runways, the wings, the landing gear, and the engines and collectively we were able to achieve flight. We can’t keep fighting these streets alone - together we can make it safer to be a pedestrian, to pick up groceries, to get a snack, to run and chase each other, to stay active - and for real, to achieve vision zero. All of this open highway through the city situation just puts us further from where we need to be - to avoid catastrophic climate change, to avoid kids in hospital for saving their sibling, to avoid rage and anger for our neighbours.

But if you make it harder to drive, you know what? People will find another way around. If you plant more trees and open up the streets to other ways of moving, businesses will thrive and people won’t just treat the neighbourhoods as places to pass through, but destinations to hang out in. That is a vision for the city that support everyone. And it is one that will truly allow us to raise kids and age gracefully. I love this city but lately when I’m on King or Main, I feel like it doesn’t love us back. Let’s work together to change that.

Thank you for your time,

Matthew Higginson