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To: clerk@hamilton.ca

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Subject: In response to City of Hamilton Motion: Deferral of Bike Facilities Crossing Red Hill Valley Parkway Project

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Dear Mayor Horwath and Members of Council,

Please find below a response for Council's consideration regarding the Motion: Deferral of Bike Facilities Crossing Red Hill Valley Parkway Project, framed through the lens of children's health, household affordability, and long-term governance responsibility.

The submission draws on 16 years of local experience through Bike for Mike and the Daily School Route, and focuses on the role of safe street design in supporting children, families, and the city as a whole.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mark Chamberlain

Executive Summary

Safe cycling infrastructure is not a discretionary transportation choice, but a **public health, affordability, and governance decision**. Children provide the clearest indicator of whether streets are working as intended. Daily, outdoor, self-directed movement is essential to children's physical, mental, social, and emotional development, yet unsafe street design increasingly prevents it. Designing streets "for children" does not mean granting independence; it means building **safety margins** so inevitable human error does not result in serious harm—an approach already standard in vehicle safety, drinking water, and playground design.

Experience from Bike for Mike and the Daily School Route over the past 16 years demonstrates that **access to bikes and education alone are insufficient**. Over 2,400 bicycles were distributed to elementary students, yet riding did not increase because parents did not perceive streets as safe. Today, the Daily School Route works on behalf of approximately **65,000 elementary students in Hamilton**, helping families adapt to unsafe conditions. However, community organizations cannot substitute for safe

infrastructure. Education and encouragement only succeed when street design does its part, and only the city can deliver that.

Protected bike lanes are therefore not recreational amenities but **essential safety and affordability infrastructure**. They determine whether children can safely use a bike they already own, reduce household transportation costs, and prevent more expensive downstream costs related to congestion, collisions, and health.

Children do not vote or delegate to council, but they live longest with the consequences. Designing and building streets that work for them is prudent, affordable, and responsible governance—and results in a city that works better for everyone.

Council's role is not to represent the loudest voices. It is to protect the interests of those who cannot yet speak for themselves. A city that chooses to design for its most vulnerable children chooses a better future for everyone.

That is the choice before you.

Prioritizing the health and developmental needs of our children

Gus is my five-year-old grandson.

Right now, Gus has one job: **to grow up healthy**.

That means supporting his physical health, mental health, social development, and emotional resilience. One of the strongest contributors to all of those outcomes is **daily movement**—especially movement that is outdoors, self-directed, and embedded in everyday life rather than scheduled, programmed, or supervised at all times.

Cities are not neutral backdrops to childhood.

They are **active participants** in shaping developmental outcomes.

Designing for children is about safety margins, not independence

When people hear “designing for a five-year-old,” some assume it means giving children full independence or expecting them to navigate the city alone.

That is not the argument.

Designing streets that are safe enough for young children is about **building safety margins**, not autonomy. It means creating environments where mistakes—by drivers, cyclists, pedestrians, or children—do not result in serious harm.

This is already how we design critical systems:

- Vehicle safety systems
- Drinking water standards
- Playgrounds and schoolyards

We do not design these systems for ideal users.
We design them so **the most vulnerable survive error.**

Streets should follow the same logic.

When streets are predictable and forgiving enough for children, they become:

- Safer for seniors with slower reaction times
- Less stressful for parents and caregivers
- More legible and predictable for drivers
- More reliable for people trying to get to work

Children are not the risk factor.

Speed, unpredictability, and street design that prioritizes throughput over safety are.

What Bike for Mike taught us

Sixteen years ago, we focused on kids access to bikes.

Through Bike for Mike, more than **2,400 elementary school students**—mainly from families who could not afford bikes—received one in the program’s first six years.

On paper, that should have created 2,400 new riders.

It didn’t.

Parents overwhelmingly would not let their children ride—not because of a lack of interest or motivation, but because **the streets were not safe.**

That experience revealed a fundamental truth:
you cannot program your way around unsafe infrastructure.

At the core of safe infrastructure is a connected network of **safe, protected bike lanes.**

Why the Daily School Route exists

That realization led to the creation of the Daily School Route, which now works on behalf of the approximately **65,000 elementary school students in Hamilton.**

DSR focuses on education and encouragement, including:

- Helping families make incremental changes, such as dropping children a few blocks from school instead of at the door
- Teaching children how to navigate journeys to school that are often still dangerous
- Embedding active travel into school culture and learning

But education can only compensate so much.

Community organizations like the DSR have spent years asking children and caregivers to **adapt their behaviour to unsafe streets**—because the streets themselves have not yet adapted to children.

Only the city can do that work.

The core issue: community groups can't substitute for safe streets

This is the key point for council to understand:

Education and encouragement only work when infrastructure does its part.

Bike for Mike and the Daily School Route have spent years mitigating risk that should not exist in the first place. That is not a sustainable model.

It shifts responsibility onto:

- Children
- Parents
- Caregivers
- Schools
- Volunteers

Instead of where it belongs: **on the design of the street itself.**

Why bike lanes matter in this context

Protected bike lanes are not about recreation or preference.

They are about whether a child can safely use a bike they already own.

Without safe infrastructure:

- Access programs underperform
- Health benefits go unrealized
- Independence is withheld
- Parents default to driving—not by choice, but by necessity

At the stroke of a pen, council can reduce investment in infrastructure that took years of community trust-building to establish—despite the fact that those most affected will never appear as delegations.

Children do not organize opposition.

They simply lose freedom.

Affordability: the hidden cost of not building cycling infrastructure

Council often frames decisions about bike lanes as affordability questions, usually in the context of tax increases.

That framing misses the larger affordability picture.

The cost of cycling infrastructure is modest compared to:

- Road widening and long-term road maintenance
- Collision response, enforcement, and emergency services
- Long-term healthcare costs associated with inactivity
- Household transportation costs driven by car dependence

When cycling infrastructure is delayed or removed:

- Parents drive short trips they would otherwise not need to
- Families face higher vehicle ownership, fuel, and insurance costs
- Congestion worsens, increasing operating costs for the city
- Pressure grows for future tax increases to fund larger, more expensive fixes

A small tax increase to fund safe cycling infrastructure often **reduces total household costs**, especially for families that can shift even a portion of trips away from driving.

Failing to build that infrastructure quietly **locks in higher costs**—for households and for the city—year after year.

From an affordability perspective, bike lanes are not a luxury. They are a **cost-containment strategy**.

A city designed for Gus is a city designed for everyone

Infrastructure that is safe enough for Gus is also:

- Safer for his three older sisters
- More usable for his parents
- More accessible for his grandparents
- Less stressful for drivers

This is not a niche benefit.

It is how inclusive, resilient cities are built.

When we design for the most vulnerable user, we don't exclude others—we improve outcomes for all.

The governance question before council

This is not a debate about bicycles.

Council is being asked to decide whether the city:

- Continues to shift risk and cost onto families and caregivers
- Or completes the job that community organizations cannot do alone

When investment in cycling infrastructure is slowed or stopped, the result is predictable:

- Fewer children ride
- More parents drive
- Health, congestion, and affordability pressures increase
- Years of quiet, effective community work are undermined

Why elevating children's voices matters

The ease with which commitments to safe cycling infrastructure can be removed is not accidental.

It is easy because the primary beneficiaries—children—have no vote and little voice.

That is why efforts to **elevate the status of children in city building** matter.

A city that asks whether a street works for a five-year-old will make better decisions for everyone.

Final Statement

This is not fundamentally a budget issue.

It is a **prioritization issue**.

Council is not deciding whether to spend money.

It is deciding **where the city withdraws protection and investment first** when pressures arise.

Too often, the simplest path is taken:

to pull back from infrastructure that supports health, affordability, and independence—especially when the primary beneficiaries are children, families, and seniors who do not organize delegations or speak loudly in the council chamber.

Children do not vote.

They do not lobby.

They do not submit budget amendments.

But they live with the consequences of these decisions longer than anyone else.

The question before council is whether it will continue to balance budgets by quietly reducing infrastructure that serves the most vulnerable—or whether it will choose to represent them deliberately and visibly.

Because every time we slow or stop investment in safe cycling infrastructure, we are not making a neutral choice.

We are choosing:

- Higher household costs over affordability
- Reactive healthcare spending over prevention
- Congestion over independence
- Short-term simplicity over long-term responsibility

Council's role is not to represent the loudest voices.

It is to protect the interests of those who cannot yet speak for themselves.

A city that chooses to design for its most vulnerable children chooses a better future for everyone.

That is the choice before you.