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i Opinion

It's time to bring Scarborough's Danforth Avenue and Kingston Road into the 21st century

Complete Streets are safe for everyone, writes Marvin Macaraig

BY MARVIN MACARAIG TORONTO.COM

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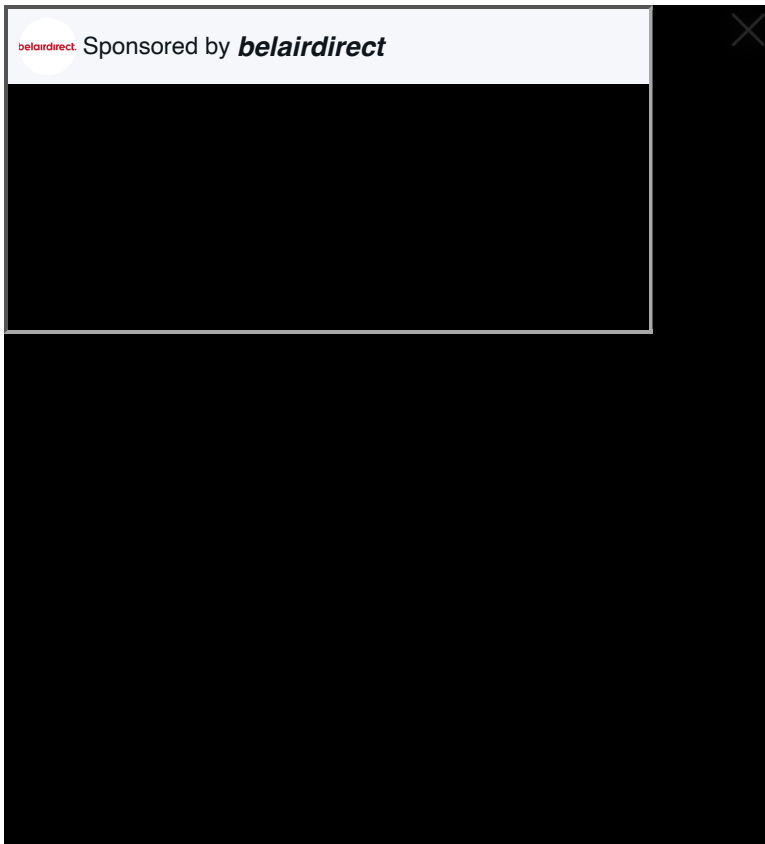
Marvin Macaraig is Scarborough Cycles coordinator at Access Alliance. - Marvin Macaraig photo

This year, the City of Toronto launched the Danforth-Kingston Complete Street Extension project. The project area runs from Danforth

Avenue (at Victoria Park Avenue) along Kingston Road to Scarborough Golf Club Road.

One goal is to make travel safer for everyone. Improving community safety is a significant issue for the neighbourhoods along this corridor.

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Based on city data, between 2017 and the first quarter of 2022, there were 1,786 collisions, including 357 injuries and five fatalities in this study area.

These statistics are lower than reality considering how many incidents are not reported to the police and are a sobering reminder of how Scarborough's streets are dangerous by design. They represent real people whose lives, friends, and families have been directly impacted by the current state of Danforth Avenue and Kingston Road.

At Access Alliance, we work in the communities most impacted by systemic inequities. As a community health centre, the central focus of our work is harm reduction and disease prevention. If people are getting killed and injured on our streets, we take it seriously and collaborate with relevant stakeholders to improve safety.

Through my work, I have had the privilege to speak to thousands of residents in Scarborough, and the No. 1 barrier preventing them from walking or cycling more often is a concern for their safety.

If the current road configuration prioritizes driving as the de facto mode of transportation and actively suppresses walking and cycling (due to personal safety concerns), this is not equitable.

Scarborough is changing due to intensification, and our streets, many of which have not changed for the past 50 years, need to be improved to accommodate everyone. As we welcome more people, we need to provide them with options to get around.

This means investing in infrastructure that prioritizes safety that encourages people to walk, cycle, or choose public transit.

Advancing road safety and equity starts with a Complete Streets approach to designing road networks. Complete Streets are streets that are safe for everyone regardless of their ability, age, socioeconomic status, or mode of travel.

Reconfiguring and reallocating space create streets that are more organized, more predictable, and less chaotic. Complete Streets also include improvements to the public realm. This means more places to sit and socialize, better sidewalks, and more public art, all of which have been studied and proven to be better for businesses. In Toronto, they have been successfully installed mostly in the downtown core, but not nearly enough in Scarborough.

This project is not a temporary pilot. It will be permanent, and resident and stakeholder feedback will directly inform ongoing improvements after the installation.

Public consultations are planned for fall 2023, with installation (hopefully) to begin in spring 2024. The time is now to reimagine Danforth Avenue and Kingston Road. Let's upgrade these streets for the 21st century and let's remake them to a higher standard of safety, equity, and livability.

Dr. Marvin Macaraig is a health promoter and the Scarborough Cycles co-ordinator at Access Alliance.

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