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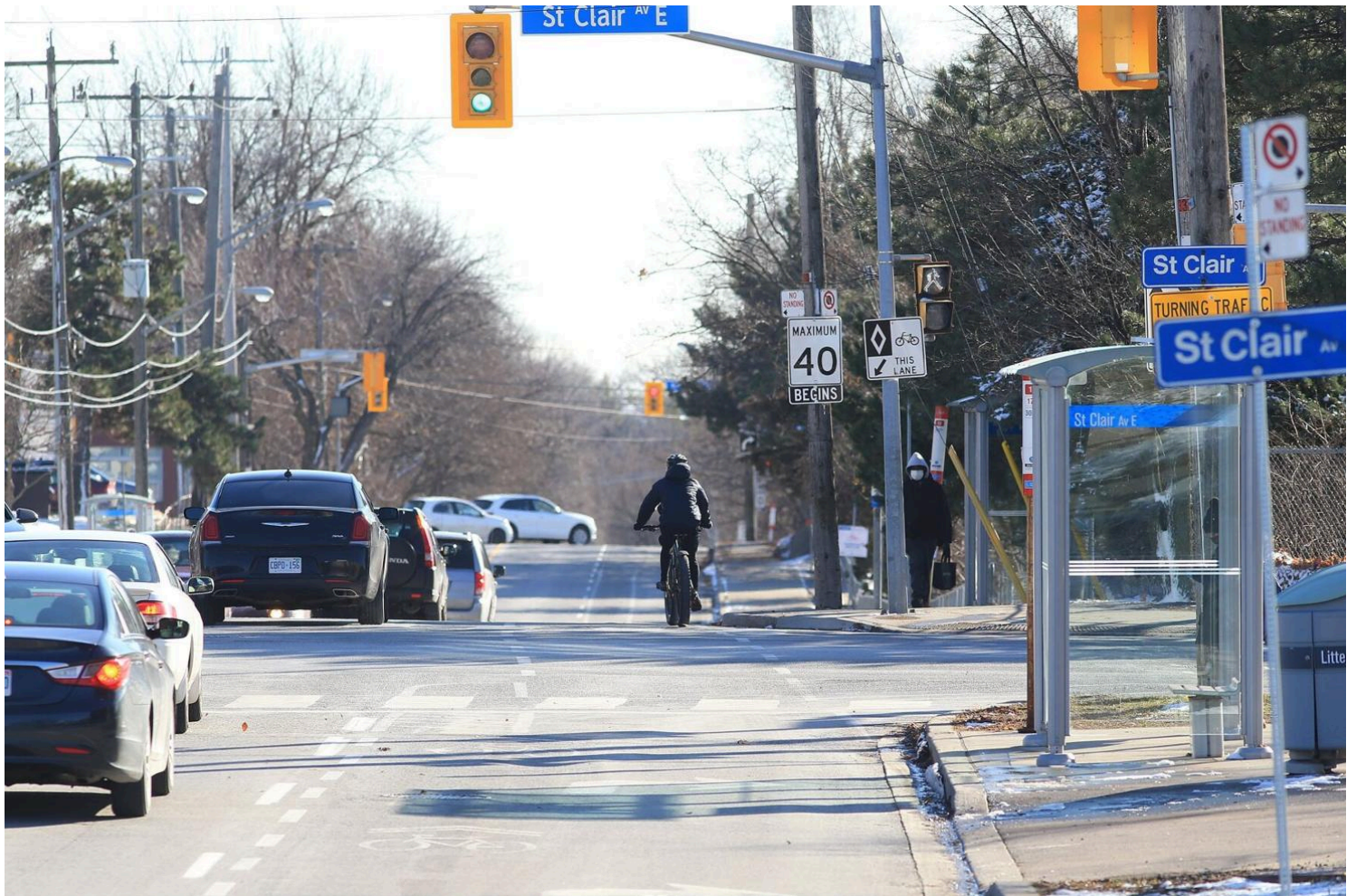
# 'These aren't accidents': Second cyclist death in Scarborough sparks anger over lack of bike lanes

Second cyclist killed within a month sparks anger in Scarborough about lack of investments in cycling infrastructure.

By **Mahdis Habibinia** Staff Reporter

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City council installed a bike lane on Brimley in 2020, then five months later removed them.

R.J. Johnston

A 47-year-old cyclist who died earlier this week after a collision on a busy Scarborough road during rush hour has sparked anger in the community about a lack of investments in local cycling infrastructure.

In Monday's accident, the cyclist, who has yet to be identified, was struck by two cars as he rode east on St. Clair Ave E. near Birchmount Road at around 5:30 p.m. No one has been charged in the collision.

"These aren't accidents," said Marvin Macaraig, a road safety advocate and health promoter with Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services. "An accident is a bolt of lightning hitting a tree: we don't know that's going to happen. We know (cyclist deaths) will happen and where."

The man was the second cyclist in the past month to be killed on Scarborough's streets, which has historically accounted for a disproportionately high number of pedestrian deaths. Arterial roads funnel the main traffic because residential streets are difficult to navigate. Multi-lane roads such as Birchmount, St. Clair, Kingston and Midland then become direct routes for both cyclists and drivers to travel — most of which do not have separated bike lanes. The area's wide roads are also dominated by fast-moving traffic.

It's unclear what factors led to the collision earlier this week, but what is clear to many residents and advocates is that this will happen again if the city doesn't build better cycling networks and protected bike lanes in the east end.

"Whatever the city is doing, we needed more of it yesterday. Many of Scarborough's roads haven't changed in the last 50 years," said Macaraig, who lives in the area. "It's a matter of political will."



Over the years, that will appear to have been lacking. In 2011, council voted to remove bicycle lanes on Birchmount Road from Kingston to St. Clair. In 2020 the city installed bike lanes on Brimley Road, only to turn around and remove them five months later. A report from the University of Toronto Scarborough in 2021 called the city's attempts to build cycling infrastructure in Scarborough an "abject failure."

Population growth has added more cars than its streets can handle and more cyclists in Scarborough than before, noted Jonathan Schmidt, a long-time road safety advocate with Toronto East Cyclists.

A large number of condo developments are proposed along St. Clair Avenue E. as well, "but the city has no plans to address how people will get around," he said.

Dave Shellnutt, a lawyer whose firm helps injured cyclists, said his firm's cases typically come from incidents where cyclists are not within protected infrastructure.

The city's Vision Zero to cut traffic fatalities makes for "a great hashtag," he added, but otherwise proves to be "just paper" year after year.

Last year, Toronto lost 45 lives to fatal collisions, down from 50 in 2022 and 60 in 2021, according to Toronto police data. While the majority of deaths were pedestrians, the number of cyclists killed has remained steady at an average of two per year for the last several years.

Ryan St. Pierre, who was driving in the opposite direction when Monday's fatality occurred, said he pulled over and called the police. Almost immediately after he got out of his own vehicle to cross the street to help, he saw a second car drive over the cyclist and stop on top of him.

"It was awful. That's going to haunt me for the rest of my life," said St. Pierre.

Both drivers involved stayed at the scene.

Coun. Paul Ainslie (Ward 43, Scarborough-Guildwood) said he was "shocked" when he heard about Monday's fatality, especially that it involved two cars.

"We really need to move toward a comprehensive, protected bike network that's connected in Scarborough," he said.

Parthi Kandavel, councillor for Scarborough Southwest, the ward where Monday's collision happened, was unavailable for comment.

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Advocates are also calling for basic road maintenance so cyclists aren't forced to dodge obstacles, reduced speed limits, a change in both driver and cyclist behaviour, and a shift away from thinking about Scarborough as a car-first neighbourhood.

"Having a car to get everywhere as quickly as possible has infected the culture there to the extent where something like a lane reduction gets people's backs up," said Joey Schwartz, member of Advocacy for Respect for Cyclists (ARC).

According to Ainslie, residents tend to fall into two camps: those who don't want bike lanes because "they won't be used in the winter" and those "chomping at the bit for it."

But when they're installed and maintained, "you'll be quite surprised at how well they get used," he said.

Earlier this month, a 60-year-old cyclist also died in hospital after a collision near McNicoll Avenue and Brimley Road in late January. Toronto police said they have laid charges under the Highway Traffic Act, but said they could not disclose details because it was a provincial offences charge.

ARC members have organized a memorial ride for Sunday. A bike painted white, known as a ghost bike, will be chained near the intersection of Monday's incident as a memorial site.



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