



Options for Improving Cycling along Somerset St E.

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Introduction and Overview

With the recent completion of the Adàwe crossing the use of Somerset St. E. as a cycling corridor will hopefully increase significantly. Fortunately existing cycling conditions are reasonable along the corridor as it is currently a low traffic level road for cars and speeds are generally lower than the existing 50 km/h speed limit. (An August 2015 speed survey conducted by the City midway between Blackburn and Goulburn reported that the median speed was measured at 39 km/h and 85% of cars were travelling at 43 km/h or less).

As a result, Somerset St E. was not included as an investment priority in the 2013 cycling plan and so no significant infrastructure spending has been identified to fund further cycling modifications over the next few years.

However, Somerset St. E. is designated as an east-west bikeway in the plan and has been labelled as Route 3. In recognition of this, the City has proposed a plan of minor changes to the street for implementation in the spring of 2016. This primarily involves adding cycling specific signage and the painting of both regular sharrows and 'super sharrows' at specific points on the roadway.

Beyond this, further discussions are planned for identifying more significant upgrades to the cycling infrastructure as part of the next update (2018) of the Cycling Plan

Constraints

Before describing the spring 2016 proposed changes it is worth clarifying other constraints (in addition to funding) that exist along Somerset St. E. The primary of these is the width of the roadway. Somerset St requires 2 travel lanes and a parking lane. In order to be able to implement bike lanes, either physically segregated or on-street, the on-street parking would need to be removed. This would require a lengthy public engagement to weigh the different points of view in the community, something that usually has significantly diverse points of view. The City is not prepared to embark on such a process in the short term. Removing parking also would have the effect of giving

the road a much wider and more open visual feel which studies have shown typically lead to an increase in driver speed. This could perhaps be alleviated by adding speed humps but this also requires a higher capital investment than is currently allocated.

Another constraint on Somerset St. E. is that it is currently used by bus route #16 and the City's design guidelines require slightly wider traffic lanes on these roads, thus making it more difficult to find the width needed for dedicated lanes for cycling.

2016 Proposal

In the spring of 2016 the City proposes to make the following additions to Somerset St E.

- adding signs that indicate it is part of the City's bike route network
- adding signs that notify drivers to share the road with cyclists
- painting sharrows on the roadway repeating them each block
- painting more visible 'super sharrows' in green boxes at certain intersections (Henderson, Nelson) which are considered to have the potential for more conflict between cyclists and cars.

Details of exact proposed placements can be observed in the [accompanying pdf file](#).

Incremental Options

Following are some examples of other measures that might be possible to add to the 2016 plan but which are currently not under consideration by the City. These would require significant support from the community to have a chance of being added:

1. Painted parking buffer zone

There may exist sufficient roadway width to add a 1-2ft wide painted buffer zone next to the parking zones on the north side of the street. This encourages cyclists to stay further away from the cars as well as contributes visible queues to drivers of the presence of cyclists on the roadway. Because this is a low cost option it may be worth adding to the list of spring 2016 initiatives. If you are in favour of this, it would be good to let the councilor know.

2. Ensuring parked cars keep safer distances from intersections

There have been some reports that drivers crossing Somerset St E. in the southbound direction sometimes have trouble seeing around the row of parked cars on Somerset St in order to ensure there are no cyclists coming westbound. In order to make this safer, we could ask the City to also more clearly delineate using paint on the pavement the limits of where cars are allowed to park near these intersections (Chapel, Blackburn, Goulburn, and Marlborough)

3. Implementing on-street bike lanes on the subset of blocks where there is no parking on either side of the street.

Although these blocks would have the physical space to allow bike lanes, the net effect for a cyclist moving along the street is alternating between sections with bike lanes

(fewer) to sections without (the majority of blocks). This is generally not seen as desirable or good planning.

4. Changing the on-street parking to alternate sides of the street

This could have some effect on further traffic calming on the street since by sighting down the street a driver would have less of a sense of a wide open street. It would also mean that on every other block (the ones without parking on them) a cyclist could feel some improved buffer as there would be a block's worth of parked cars on the block behind them and on the block ahead of them. This change could potentially be implemented also more easily as there would be no overall net loss of parking on the street resulting in a lowered need for a drawn-out public consultation process.

5. Posting 40 km/h speed limit signs on the street

Generally other measures are required in association with a speed limit change before a material impact can be made on the speed of vehicles on the street so it is unclear if just a signage change would have much effect. It should also be noted that according to the speed survey recently performed by the City that 85% of the cars were already travelling at 43 km/h or less (measured midway between Blackburn and Goulburn).

Longer Term Options

Following are some additional possibilities beyond the 2016 plan. None of these are currently under consideration by the City. They are listed here as potential items for discussion when the Cycling Plan is renewed in 2018.

1. Adding an on-street bike lane in 1 direction only (Eastbound):

The physical width of the road may allow this to be possible however it is not considered a good choice because it has the side effect of reducing the remaining road width which then makes cycling more uncomfortable for westbound cyclists who need to share the road with cars overtaking them while also cycling past parked vehicles (parking is on the north side of the road). This tends to result in cyclists passing closer to the parked vehicles, which increases their risk of being 'doored'.

2. Opening up the existing 'bulb-outs' on the south side:

The south side of Somerset St have numerous 'bulb-outs' that were implemented to narrow the road at intersections as a means to calm traffic. These have the unfortunate side of effect of squeezing cyclists together with cars raising the stress level and risks for cyclists. It is potentially possible to leave these bulb-outs in place but open up the concrete curbs in the path of cyclists so that cyclists can go over them rather than around them. This involves more capital costs but may be 'low enough' that with concerted effort on the part of the community and councillor some money could be 'found' to make this possible. If you are in favour of this, it would be good to let the councillor know.

3. Implement a special intersection treatment at Chapel and Implement a north-south cycling route on Chapel to connect to Beausoleil:

Chapel is one of the busier cross streets as well as being situated near the mid-point of the section between Range Rd and King Edward. By implementing a more unique intersection here (e.g. raised intersection) it could have the effect of further calming Somerset E. (and potentially Chapel as well). It could also be useful to establish this as a starting point to implement a cycling connection north to Beausoleil.

4. Make Somerset St. E. into a 30km/h street

Specific design changes could be implemented along Somerset St intended to lower vehicle speeds further and generally establish a higher priority for cyclists along the street. This could potentially be positioned as a pilot project for the City's first 30 km/h street.

5. Change Somerset St E. to 1-way, thus enabling implementation of on-street cycling lanes:

By reducing 1 lane of traffic this would free up the lane width needed in order to be able to implement bike lanes, however it would lead to a reasonably large change in car circulation patterns within this section of Sandy Hill. Significant public consultation would be required and there is a reasonable chance that sufficient consensus of all affected residents would not be attainable. It would also impact the routing of bus route #16 and require this bus in one direction of travel to use another street (Templeton or Osgoode). Adding a bus route to a street often draws opposition from residents living there (noise, vibration, etc).

6. Any other possibilities?

If you have other ideas beyond the ones listed here and would like to let us know about them, then contact the councillor, mathieu.fleury@ottawa.ca and ASH at info@ash-acs.ca.