

MacDonald Bridge – A cycling headache
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One of the most important and busiest routes for cyclists in the HRM is the designated cycling path along the north side of the MacDonald Bridge. The 1.3km path is the only direct route available to cyclists commuting between Halifax and Dartmouth. However, only the most confident bicycle commuters glimpse the stunning vistas of Halifax and Dartmouth from high above the Bedford Basin from this bike path. Accessing this cycling path is unfortunately too cumbersome for the average cyclist.

The main complaints cyclists have about this route are related to the convoluted entrance/ exit ramp on the Halifax side. Getting on/off of this ramp entails circling steeply downwards and underneath the bridge and then immediately thereafter climbing steeply back up. Exiting into Halifax, for instance, cyclists must descend down to Barrington St, make a sketchy crossing at the North St off ramp to reach the sidewalk (even though it is deemed illegal to bike on sidewalks) that ascends steeply back up. Cyclists must then again cross North St only to arrive back, disheartened and exhausted, to the level where the bike path off ramp re-directed them down and away from the route along North Street in the first place. Cyclists heading to Dartmouth must do the reverse.

One of the most dangerous sections is towards the bottom of the path that swoops under the MacDonald Bridge. At this bend, the path narrows slightly as it runs up against the concrete support of the bridge. This creates a very dangerous blind corner. There is no signage or convex mirrors, such as those in parkades with similar blind corners, to warn cyclists. The current arrangement is begging for a tragic collision between a speeding cyclist heading down the ramp and cyclist heading up.

It is no wonder so many potential cyclists opt instead to drive instead of cycling this route.

A multi million dollar upgrade involving re-painting and repaving of the McDonald Bridge is currently underway. One of the goals of the Halifax Harbour Bridges authority that operates the bridge is to become a recognized leader in sustainable transportation demand management (TDM). Vehicular traffic is becoming more congested around the MacDonald Bridge as the HRM population rapidly grows, making sustainable TDM particularly pertinent. Encouraging cycling commuting by improving infrastructure ought to be a key component in pursuit of any sustainable TDM program.

If Halifax Harbour Bridges and the HRM are serious about this commitment to sustainability, the MacDonald Bridge bike path must be reworked, along with bridge upgrades, to make it safer and more bike-friendly. Only then will drivers opt en masse for the more environmentally friendly option of leaving their cars at home in favor of commuting between Halifax and Dartmouth by bicycle.

So far, neither I nor my fellow cycling peers that I have consulted has received a response from the Bridges authority to our written requests for upgrades and complaints about this key cycling route.