

Workshop touts ‘bike friendly’ economic benefits

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LINDSAY – The City of Kawartha Lakes has been assessed by a local cycling club representative as a location of great potential for the growing industry of cycling tourism, but he rapped the council for spinning its wheels.

“Council sees us as a special interest group,” Art Hornibrook, vice president administration of the Kawartha Cycling Club, told a workshop held at city hall on June 5 by Welcome Cyclists Network. He said cyclists, from children to aging boomers, are a huge demographic in the city and should not be sidelined with a ‘special interest’ tag.

He said the club made a presentation to council two years ago seeking safer riding conditions on roads, including adding paved shoulders, and were told a road standards task force would be formed, which hasn’t happened.

“There’s a lot of talking, but no action,” Hornibrook said. “There’s no city vision.”

He noted the great potential the city has for cycling tourism, with its rolling countryside, lakes, quiet country roads, Kawartha Trans Canada Trail and historical attractions. Hornibrook said the club is now working with the city’s manager of policy planning, Michael Benner, to create cycling route maps and supporting the local health unit’s grant application for Share the Road signs.

In contrast, Northumberland County tourism coordinator Cori Arthur told the group of about 20 that the county has a Cycling Master Plan and a cycling advisory committee. The region has embraced cycling and the local businesses have benefitted, she said.

Northumberland has a marked waterfront trail and a section of the Trans Canada Trail, which Arthur said made it ideal for cycling tourism.

The county is a founding member of the Welcome Cyclists Network, which is part of Transportation Options. The network was launched in 2008 in the Niagara area in response to the need for cycling tourists to have safe storage facilities for their bikes. Business owners were educated on how to be bike friendly and the network grew. It currently includes Niagara, Hamilton, Halton, Peel, York, Durham and several other regions.

Tuesday’s workshop was its first foray into the CKL and Peterborough area. Transportation Options projects director, Louisa Mursell, told the audience that the basic idea is to help businesses, particularly in accommodation and food service, to meet minimum industry standards to be certified by the network as bike friendly. The network offers an information package and will send decals to businesses that register, which can be done online at www.welcomecyclists.ca or by calling 1-866-333-4491.

To be certified, a business will meet minimum requirements for their industry. For example, accommodations would have: covered and secure bike storage, cycling information including routes, staff able to direct cyclists to information such as local bike shops and hours, an on-site basic bicycle repair toolset, healthy local food if served on-site, and all frontline staff informed that the business participates in the Welcome Cyclists Network.

Vivien Leong from the network said that cyclists stay longer and spend more than other tourists. She explained that there are different kinds of cyclists: leisure and family, recreational, touring, race and competitive, and mountain bikers.

Mursell explained why communities should actively welcome cyclists, by noting that cycling is big business throughout the world and the economic impact is increasing every year. She said in Ontario in 2010 there was \$391 million in cycling activities. She said in Toronto, 54% of the population cycle and bike lanes are increasing. Durham Region, she said, is actively pursuing cycling tourism.

Leong said the trend is toward a greenshift in the tourism industry that includes active adventures in vacations close to home.

Hornibrook said that although the city currently isn’t especially bike friendly, “it can be a destination for active retired boomers. It has great potential.”

About the Welcome Cyclists Network:

The Welcome Cyclists Network is a project of Transportation Options, a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering sustainable mobility and tourism solutions across Ontario.

For more info, visit www.transportationoptions.org. Other Transportation Options projects include the Bike Train Initiative and Parkbus. (www.biketrain.ca and www.parkbus.ca).

The network's funding partners include:

- Ontario, Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport, www.ontario.ca
- Ontario Trillium Foundation, www.trilliumfoundation.org
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