

# Barr: Cycling debate shouldn't pit some groups against others. We all want to get home safe

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Is it possible to lessen traffic fatalities with both trucks and cyclists on the road? (Photo: Darren Brown/Ottawa Citizen) Assignment 124656 Darren Brown / Postmedia

It all started with a call from CFRA on the day a truck driver was charged in the tragic death of a cyclist in downtown Ottawa. I suggested I would look forward to working with the cycling community to help make Ottawa streets fatality-free for drivers, bikers and pedestrians alike. I also mentioned that I did not think trucks and cyclists mixed well together on our roadways. At that point, hell broke loose.

Since then, I have become the focus of both the “for cyclists” and “against cyclists” debate, including the enormous infrastructure our tax dollars have paid for. I have been bombarded with calls from as far away as New Brunswick, and from cyclists and citizens in this city. I do not think bike lanes work on certain roads in Ottawa, and further, I believe that we, the ones who pay for these expensive infrastructure projects, have been lulled into accepting a system that is dangerous.

Many support my comments, including a retired OC Transpo driver who wrote, “I played leapfrog with cyclists for too long.” An individual from Smith Falls wrote, “I commend your efforts to educate ... they don’t get the danger of encounters with mass!” A concerned e-mailer wrote, “You are 100 per cent right ... Cyclists have too much power on the road and they go out of their way to make sure they alter traffic to get the right of way.”

I also received many e-mails calling me a bigot and dangerous. If speaking up against something you don’t subscribe to makes me a bigot, then I will wear the tag confidently. When you speak

against a group like the cycling community, you become a target. One cyclist wrote to me saying cyclists didn't need to speak up, as I was doing it all. That's when Mayor Jim Watson picked up the ball and became the cyclists' spokesperson.

On radio, he suggested Ottawa truckers are always complaining. What nonsense. Then, in what I can only call a "cheap shot," Mr. Watson retweeted a six-month-old Facebook post about my support for U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump. I was conversing with a few associates at the time when "the Donald" won his party's nomination.

I do stand by my view of Trump. But this is about the safety of all in Ottawa, and I refuse to have serious issues on our roads overshadowed by a tweet. At the end of the day, we all want to get home safe. I am going to lead the pack to ensure that my Greater Ottawa Truckers Association members meet the highest standards of safety and respect on the roads, and I hope that will be reciprocated by all parties, despite personal opinions.

***Ron Barr** is president and General Manager of the Greater Ottawa Truckers Association (GOTA). He is active provincially with the Ministry of Transportation dealing with the industry and also is a member of the Public Advisory Committee for a study that will update the 2006 City of Ottawa Transportation Impact Assessment Guidelines.*