

# Hills affect Vancouver's bike-friendly rating

## Study finds city third best for cyclists in Canada, after Montreal and Saskatoon

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 16, 2016



Cyclists wait at the Hornby street bike lane in Vancouver. Vancouver's Bike Score was 78/100 in a recent SFU study.

**Photograph by:** Arlen Redekop, Vancouver Sun

METRO VANCOUVER -- The first study to look at the relationship between hills and the number of cyclists has found that biking friendly neighbourhoods can address but not completely overcome topography.

Researchers at Simon Fraser University looked at 24 cities in North America and applied a new measurement of bikeability called a Bike Score. A Bike Score evaluates the friendliness of a city to cyclists based on various criteria including hills, and generates a number between zero and 100. The higher the score, the friendlier a city is to biking.

In Canada, the city with the highest Bike Score is Montreal at 78.8/100. In second is Saskatoon at 78.7. Vancouver's Bike Score puts it in third at 78. Toronto's and Victoria's Bike Scores are 66.9 and 74.3

respectively.

Saskatoon's higher rating might seem like an anomaly until you take into account its flat terrain. The Prairie city has a hill score that's close to perfect at 98.4, compared with hillier Vancouver's at 79.3.

"Saskatoon scores very well in terms of topography," said Meghan Winters, a health sciences professor at SFU, who was part of the research team.

"(Vancouver) is going to have a lot of infrastructure to overcome topography — and topography is important to cyclists."

Winters said that the study found that every 10-unit increase in the Bike Score led to a 0.5 per cent increase in the number of people cycling to work.

"The goal was not to compare Victoria to Vancouver to Saskatoon — although that makes a good idea for an article," Winters said.

"The goal was: can we use Bike Score as an indicator for cycling? To me the study shows that Bike Score can be a useful tool to determine how supportive (city) environments are for cycling."

Bike Score is modelled after Walk Score, a measurement used by city planners to determine the walkability of communities.

Bike Score looks at three areas: bike lanes, including painted bicycle lanes, off-street trails, and cycle tracks but not features such as sharrows (shared-lane routes) and bike parking; hills based on the steepest grade within a 200-metre radius; and destinations and connectivity, which measures walking routes to nearby amenities.

The bike lane score comprises 50 per cent of the Bike Score, with hill and connectivity scores at 25 per cent each.

Winters said the Bike Score of a neighbourhood can be one indicator when deciding where to locate biking infrastructure such as bike lanes.

In North America, the study found that the worst city for cycling is Austin, Texas at 48.3. The best is Fort Collins, Colorado, at 83.6. San Francisco is a city known for its cycling activism but has a Bike Score of 77.8, in part because of its terrain. Its hill score of 53.8 makes it the hilliest of the 24 cities in the study.

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