

TOUR BY BIKE

ONTARIO'S CYCLING TOURISM PLAN



Cover Photo:

Kelso Conservation Area, Milton,
Ontario.

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport

9th Floor, Hearst Block

900 Bay Street

Toronto, Ontario M7A 2E1

Tel: 416-326-9326

Toll Free: 1-888-997-9015

Fax: 416-314-7854

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Tay Township, Simcoe County, Ontario

Minister's Message



As an avid cyclist, I know there is nothing better than riding along a beautiful trail, discovering new towns and regions and spending time being active outdoors. Our province has so much to offer for people looking to explore Ontario by bike.

It's no secret that cycling tourism in Ontario is experiencing rapid growth as more people realize what a fun and healthy form of transportation cycling can be. But we know more can be done. We have heard from our stakeholders that cycling tourism is growing and is an important area for government and industry to work on together.

I am pleased to introduce Ontario's first Cycling Tourism Plan: *Tour by Bike*. Ontario is home to an extensive cycling and trails network that stretches across the province, connects our communities and offers unique views of our urban and rural landscapes. Through this plan, we will work to increase and support these opportunities and promote cycling as a tourism draw in Ontario communities.

The Cycling Tourism Plan: *Tour by Bike* builds on the work we began with the Tourism Action Plan and the *Strategic Framework for Tourism in Ontario*. It will also support #CycleON: Ontario's Cycling Strategy, the government's 20-year vision to encourage the growth of cycling and improve safety for cyclists across the province.

We all have the same goal. We want Ontario to stand out as a destination of choice for travellers. The Cycling Tourism Plan is our next step in realizing this goal.

I am excited to launch our Cycling Tourism Plan, and I look forward to continuing our work to grow tourism in Ontario.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eleanor McMahon'.

Eleanor McMahon

Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport

Executive Summary

Cycling tourism in Ontario is experiencing rapid growth and is increasingly recognized by the tourism industry as a powerful economic driver to the province. Cycling offers health benefits and a unique way of viewing a destination, that make it attractive to active travellers looking for an authentic tourism experience.

From rich natural landscapes to unique communities, Ontario has the potential to be a premier cycling tourism destination. The economic benefits of cycling tourism to the province are already evident. Cycling visitors stay longer in Ontario and spend more than the average tourist. It is important that government and industry work together to take advantage of the potential growth of cycling visitors to the province. While many regions across the province are already experiencing associated positive economic impacts of cycling tourism, additional opportunities can be realized on a wider provincial scale.

In 2013, the Government of Ontario released *#CycleON: Ontario's Cycling Strategy*, followed by *#CycleON Action Plan 1.0* in 2014, led by the Ministry of Transportation (MTO), which sets out recommendations to increase and support cycling tourism opportunities in the province. Since then, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS) has been working with MTO and other partners to make progress on a number of items that advance the Cycling Strategy, including working with the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation (OTMPC) to support cycling tourism marketing efforts and supporting Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) in developing partnerships to advance cycling tourism projects.

Building on the Cycling Strategy, MTCS released the *Ontario Trails Action Plan* in 2015, which set out a vision for Ontario's trails system and a number of key priority issues and opportunities. The Trails Action Plan supports the implementation of *#CycleON*, including developing a provincial tourism cycling route. Following engagement with industry stakeholders to look for opportunities for growth in the tourism sector, the government released *Ontario's Tourism Action Plan* in 2016. It demonstrated the government's ongoing commitment to support the tourism industry by taking action in key priority areas. Building on the Action Plan, in 2016, the ministry released the *Strategic Framework for Tourism in Ontario*, which serves as a guide for government and industry over the next five years, to work collaboratively to support the future growth and success of the tourism sector.

These tools have established a strong foundation for government and industry to work collaboratively towards common outcomes and objectives, by bringing together the collective knowledge and expertise of the tourism sector.

Leveraging the successful relationships and tools already in place and aligning with work currently underway, Ontario's Cycling Tourism Plan sets out a mission and a number of action items that will cultivate the existing potential for Ontario to emerge as a leader in the development of cycling tourism, and establish the province as a strong market, renowned globally for its cycling products and experiences. Both government and industry have a role to play in implementing the Plan by collaborating and building relationships with key partners to maximize the growth of cycling tourism.



Laurentian Conservation
Area, Sudbury, Ontario

Mission

The Government of Ontario understands the important role that cycling tourism plays in building a strong economy and the positive impact it has on the lives of everyday Ontarians. The Premier's mandate letter issued in September 2016 emphasizes cycling as a key priority for the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. The letter commits the minister to working with MTO to support cycling and walking as part of a healthy, active lifestyle, and developing cycling as a tourism and environmental heritage draw in Ontario communities.

Building on the mandate letter, our mission is to increase and support cycling tourism opportunities in the province and promote cycling as a tourism draw in Ontario communities by:

1. Positioning Ontario as a premier destination for cycling tourism;
2. Creating healthy, active and economically prosperous communities; and
3. Working collaboratively to develop and promote cycling tourism products that will enable Ontario to meet or exceed global growth over the coming years.



Georgian Trail, Collingwood, Ontario

Strategic Context

The *Strategic Framework for Tourism in Ontario* highlights future trends for growth in international tourist arrivals to global destinations. Projections indicate continued growth in the coming years and Ontario has an opportunity to capitalize on this growth. Government and industry must continue to work together to adapt to global trends, visitor experience expectations, and evolving traveller needs.

Through the Strategic Framework for Tourism, government and industry will collaborate to build on the strengths of Ontario's tourism sector through marketing, leveraging the regional tourism approach, improving the tourism workforce, and improving the business climate.

The Government of Ontario recognizes that cycling tourism continues to be an economic driver for Ontario, supports healthy and prosperous communities, and contributes to the overall quality of life of Ontarians. Cycling and trails tourism was identified by stakeholders as a crucial area for both government and industry to work together. There is an opportunity to build on existing cycling products, experiences and infrastructure to position Ontario as a premier cycling tourism destination and attract global travellers interested in cycling.



Ottawa, Ontario



Thornbury, Ontario

Economic Impact of Cycling Tourism

Cycling tourism continues to bring economic growth to the province due to its ability to attract visitors that spend more and stay longer.

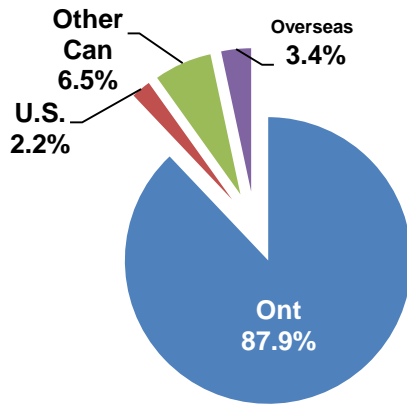


Figure 1: Cycling Visits by Origin
1.7 million

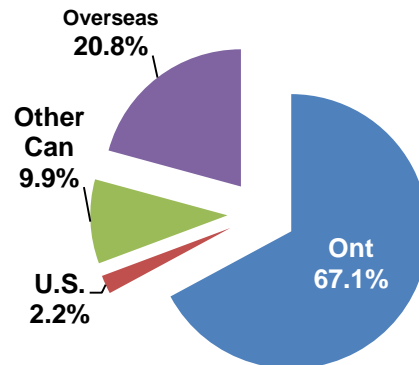
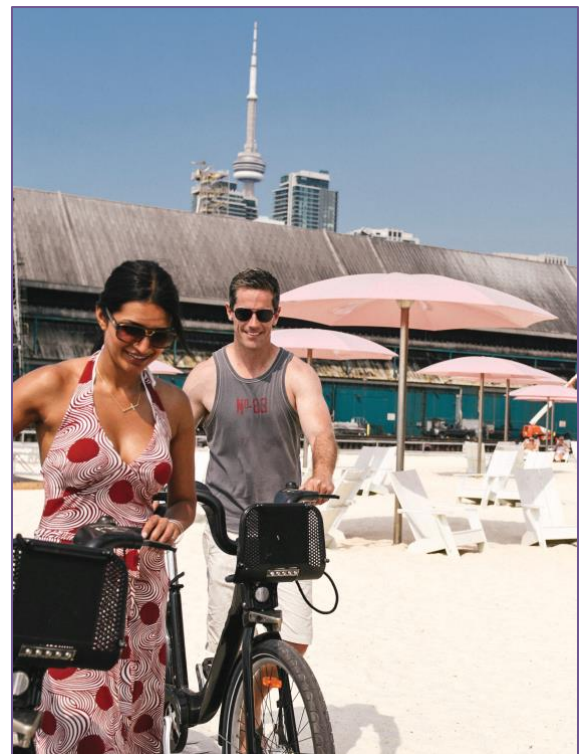


Figure 2: Cycling Visitor Spending by Origin
\$428 million

Cycling is a growing sector in Ontario with 1.7 million cycling visits, accounting for 1.2% of total visits to Ontario. Cycling visitors spent \$428 million, or 1.8% of total visitor spending in Ontario.

Ontario residents accounted for the majority of cycling visits and spending in Ontario. Residents from other Canadian provinces accounted for 6% of visits and 10% of spending, visitors from the United States represented 2% of visits and 2% of expenditures, and overseas visitors accounted for 3% of visits and 21% of spending (see figures 1 and 2).

Cycling visitors generally spend more on average per trip than other visitors, \$255/trip for cycling tourists compared to \$171/trip for total visitors. Cycling tourists to Ontario stay longer than regular visitors and the majority of Ontario visits by cyclists were overnight visits (83%). The average number of nights spent on cycling visits was 3.4, slightly above Ontario's total visitor average of 3.1 nights.

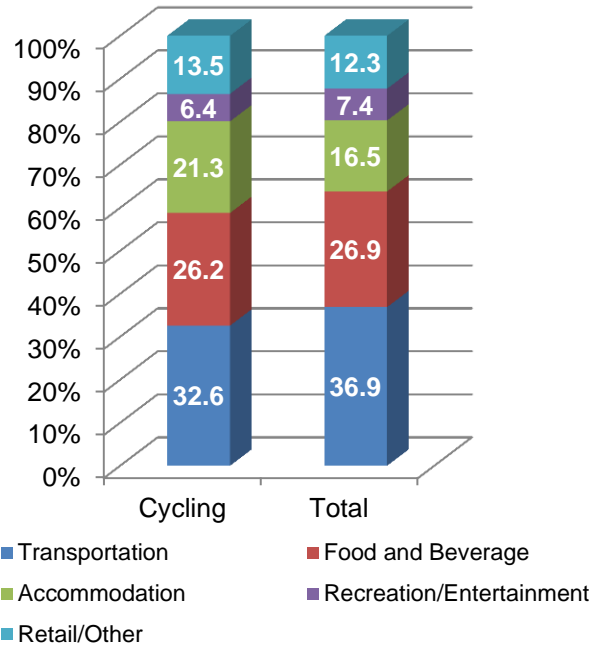


Toronto, Ontario



Orillia, Ontario

Figure 3: Cycling Spending Breakdown



Families and groups tend to be the demographic that frequently visit Ontario for cycling tourism. The majority of cycling visits (50%) were among groups of 3 or more people compared to 25% of total visits. Also it is important to note that 31% of cycling visits included children versus 13% of total visits.

When cycling tourists visit Ontario, they spend most of their money on transportation (33% compared to 37% of total visitors), food and beverage (26% compared to 27% of total visitors), and accommodation (21% compared to 16% of total visitors) (see figure 3). While visiting Ontario, cycling tourists also spend time doing other activities, such as visiting a beach (49%), hiking (38%), boating (37%), camping (28%) and visiting national and provincial nature parks (25%).¹



Lake Simcoe, Orillia, Ontario

¹ 2014 Data from Statistics Canada's Travel Survey of the Residents of Canada and International Travel Survey

Toronto Islands, Toronto,
Ontario



A Foundation for Success

The government recognizes that the success of Ontario's tourism industry and its impressive contributions to Ontario's economy and quality of life are largely due to the productive working relationships between government, its agencies and industry partners.

The ministry and its partners have undertaken a number of significant initiatives to increase cycling tourism opportunities across the province:



Sainte-Marie among the Hurons, Midland, Ontario

Ontario's Agencies' Support for Cycling Tourism

OTMPC's mandate is to market Ontario as a travel destination and to support and assist the marketing efforts of the tourism industry. Its consumer research is shared with tourism industry stakeholders and it identifies key travel motivators including cycling.

OTMPC's Tourism Industry Partners Program provides funding for targeted, innovative programs and marketing tactics that directly generate awareness, interest and tourism revenues.

OTMPC has worked to support cycling stakeholders by assisting with media familiarization tours, photo shoots,

travel shows and marketing via OTMPC's consumer website, www.ontariotravel.net. There are over 200 cycling-related packages, events and listings on OTMPC's website.

The ministry's agencies are also working to support cycling tourism across the province by ensuring their facilities are accessible by bike, maintaining and providing access to bike-friendly trails, on-site bike storage and bike repair stations, and facilitating cycling activities and events.

Regional Approach to Cycling Tourism

Strong partnerships and improved alignment are essential to the continuing growth of tourism across the province. Ontario's Regional Tourism Organizations engage with countless tourism partners including sector associations, municipalities, Destination Marketing Organizations, operators and other organizations on matters of shared interest. Given their leadership role in the industry, RTOs can be vital promoters and facilitators of cycling tourism throughout the province. The RTOs work with local partners to progress trail-related projects by undertaking research to understand the current state and future use of regional recreational trail activity,

including cycling. They assist with trail signage projects, developing cycling and trail experiences and packages, and marketing trail routes and events through integrated marketing campaigns.

The ministry also funds the Ontario Trails Council to improve the capacity of the trails community to increase access to and awareness of trails. The Ontario Trails Council will consult and engage with RTOs, and the broader tourism sector and key stakeholders where appropriate, to develop tourism-supportive website enhancements and other trails tourism supports.

Investing in Cycling Tourism

The ministry's Tourism Development Fund (TDF) and Celebrate Ontario funding program provide support for cycling tourism trail projects, industry capacity building and cycle-related festivals and events in order to enhance and create cycling tourism experiences in Ontario. For example:

- Celebrate Ontario funding has supported the Kingston Bike Festival, Minden Bike Tour, and the Toronto Triathlon Festival.
- TDF funding has supported Bike Train Ontario, the Welcome Cyclists program, Great Lakes waterfront bike route development, the Voyageur Cycling Route, the Georgian Bay Coastal Route, Ontario Bike Summit Conferences and Ontario Cycle Tourism Forums.



Ken Reid Conservation Area, Lindsay, Ontario



Huntsville, Ontario



Albion Hills Conservation Area, Caledon, Ontario

Sport Funding for Cycling Tourism

Hosting the 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games triggered a major investment in new and upgraded infrastructure in Ontario including 10 brand new internationally certified sport venues. One of these new facilities was the \$56 million Mattamy National Cycling Centre (Velodrome) in Milton which now serves as the only velodrome of its kind in Canada and continues to be used as a community recreation facility and a venue for provincial, national and international events.

In addition, the Pan/Parapan American Games Promotion, Celebration and Legacy Strategy Fund provided \$3,350,000 to cycling projects in Ontario. Projects included funding to complete 254 km of gaps for the Trans Canada Trail from Ottawa to Windsor and from Fort Erie to Huntsville, creating a 2,000 km contiguous route and funding to the Waterfront Regeneration Trust to reroute a portion of trail in the Whitby area to a safer route.

The province also provides funding to national and international cycling events through the Sport Hosting Program that continues to build on the legacy of the Pan/Parapan American Games. Through this program, the province has supported numerous events including the 2016 Canadian Track Championships in Milton and the 2016 - 2017 Canadian Road Cycling Championships in Ottawa.

Cycling events and programs will continue to be supported through various sport and recreation funding programs including the Ontario Sport and Recreation Communities Fund (OSRCF) and programs funded through the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

#CycleON: Ontario's Cycling Strategy

In 2013, The Ministry of Transportation released *#CycleON: Ontario's Cycling Strategy*, a 20 year vision to encourage the growth of cycling and improve the safety of people who cycle in Ontario. The strategy identified the following 5 strategic directions that are designed to help make Ontario a more cycle-friendly province:

1. Design healthy, active and prosperous communities
2. Improve cycling infrastructure
3. Promote awareness and behavioural shifts
4. Make highways and streets safer
5. Increase cycling tourism opportunities

The #CycleON Action Plan 1.0 is the first multi-year plan for delivering Ontario's Cycling Strategy. The Action Plan includes initiatives that are already underway, as well as short-term and long-term actions to support the strategic directions of the #CycleON strategy.

As the lead ministry for the #CycleON Strategy, MTO continues to work in partnership with MTCS and other ministries, agencies, municipalities, cycling stakeholder organizations and the public to deliver and support many of the strategy's Action Plan commitments.

Building and maintaining cycling infrastructure is key to promoting cycling tourism; without cycling infrastructure, there would be nothing to attract visitors to come to Ontario to cycle. As part of the #CycleON strategy, in April 2015 MTO began investing \$25 million over three years to create a more cycling-friendly future for Ontario. This includes \$15 million for cycling routes that provide key connections and linkages on provincial highways, such as paved highway



Harrow, Ontario

shoulders and barriers on bridges that separate cyclists from vehicles and \$10 million to help municipalities expand their local cycling routes and connect with provincial cycling routes.

The province is also supporting cycling through the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP), released June 8, 2016. The CCAP commits to improving commuter cycling by accelerating and enhancing the implementation of *#CycleON: Ontario's Cycling Strategy* and its related Action Plan. To help achieve these objectives, the CCAP identifies an intended investment of \$150 million to \$225 million from cap and trade proceeds to support the creation of better cycling networks, more cycling facilities in urban areas, and more bike parking at transit stations and provincially owned, publicly accessible facilities. MTO consulted on a proposed investment program in fall 2016 and is working to finalize program details over the coming months and anticipate that the program will be launched in 2017.

Taking Action to Support Cycling Tourism

To achieve our mission and ensure alignment with ongoing initiatives, Ontario's Cycling Tourism Plan will undertake actions to enhance on and off-road cycling tourism within the following priority areas:

- 1. Products and Experience Development** – Increase collaboration between government and industry partners to develop and enhance products and experiences that support cycling tourism (e.g. heritage trails, trail tourism programs), particularly in rural regions of the province.

Action Item #1: *Identify, attract and support signature cycling tourism festivals and events through the Celebrate Ontario program and/or Sport Hosting program.*

Action Item #2: *Make funding available through Tourism Development Fund (TDF) to develop and enhance products and experiences that support cycling tourism.*

Action Item #3: *Support ministry agencies and attractions to be bike-friendly and accessible by bike.*

Action Item #4: *Collaborate with cycling organizations to promote cycling safety and bike-friendly activities.*



Kingston, Ontario

- 2. Strategic Marketing** – Promote Ontario's unique, market-ready cycling tourism offerings and improve the coordination and impact of marketing efforts related to cycling tourism.

Action Item #5: *Launch a Tourism Cycling Marketing plan in partnership with OTMPC and RTOs to support global recognition of the world class cycling in Ontario from the Great Lakes to the Greenbelt to the Great North.*

Action Item #6: *Explore options to support a more central repository of provincial cycling tourism information, itineraries and networks.*

Action Item #7: *Showcase and celebrate future Trails of Distinction that promote cycling tourism in the province.*

3. Advancing the Tourism Sector – Increase awareness of the economic and social benefits of cycling tourism and support the cycling ecosystem by building and enhancing industry capacity for cycling tourism development.

Action Item #8: Make funding available through Tourism Development Fund (TDF) to support the cycling ecosystem including organization capacity building, education and networking.

Action Item #9: Support cycling trail organizations to facilitate and enhance the interconnectivity of cycling routes and trails through ministry funding.

Action Item #10: Provide funding to support community celebrations across Ontario, as part of Ontario 150, that increase awareness of cycle-friendly communities and the positive economic impact of cycling on the province.



St. Jacobs, Ontario

4. Making Evidence Based Decisions – Better utilize data and research tools to track economic impact of cycling tourism for performance measurement and tracking of industry goals and targets.

Action Item #11: Utilize the Tourism Research Economic Impact Model to analyze the economic impact of cycling tourism in Ontario.

Action Item #12: Utilize the Tourism Research Community of Practice as a platform to share cycling tourism-related data and raise awareness of the importance and economic impact of cycling tourism in Ontario.

Conclusion: Taking Action Together

The Government of Ontario is committed to working with the tourism industry to support cycling tourism in the province, attract a greater share of global travellers, and bring increased economic growth to the province. While there are a number of initiatives and partnerships that have formed a strong foundation for cycling tourism in the province; Ontario's Cycling Tourism Plan presents several opportunities to build on the strengths of the tourism sector and position Ontario as a premier cycling destination.

The ministry will continue to work with its government and tourism industry partners, ensuring collaboration and alignment of on-going initiatives where possible, to promote and increase cycling tourism across the province. This includes continuing to work with inter-ministerial partners, such as the Ministry of Transportation, to deliver and support the #CycleON commitments. Industry is encouraged to continue to collaborate and build key partnerships in order to maximize the growth of cycling tourism.



Haliburton, Ontario

Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario

