



# Five Years of Markham Cycles:

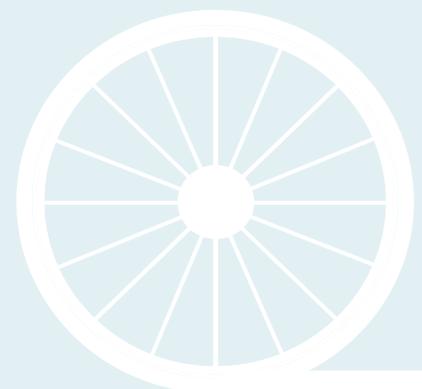
*Reflections on Incubating Suburban  
Cycling Through Community Bike Hubs*





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# Introduction

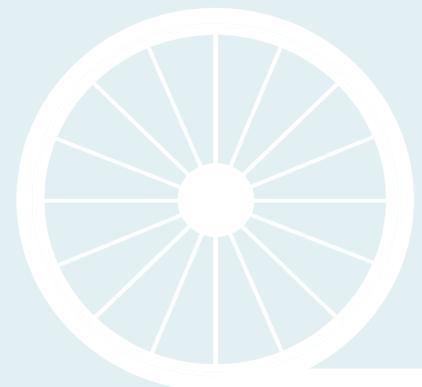


## Executive Summary

Over the last five years, The Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT) has operated Markham Cycles as part of an organizational effort to [increase walking and riding bikes in suburban communities](#). Launched in 2019, Markham Cycles is Markham's community bicycle hub and was the first of its kind in York Region. Today, it boasts [two public bike hub locations](#), located at Milliken Mills Community Centre and Markham Centennial Community Centre.

Markham Cycles was created to address the maze of non-infrastructure barriers to cycling in Markham, including accessing a working bicycle and learning how and where to ride safely. Markham Cycles sought to build a community of passionate cyclists who would not only increase visibility around cycling in Markham, but also become champions of cycling in their local community and one day, participate in advocating for infrastructural change as those opportunities arose.

With five years of operating Markham Cycles under our belt, this report seeks to investigate how successful the program has been at achieving its goals, and what aspects require further investigation.





## Key Findings

**There is significant demand for Markham Cycle's services.**

In 2023, 100% of participants said that they were made to feel welcome at Markham Cycles and that they received help when they needed it. Not only do participants repeatedly have positive feedback for their experience at Markham Cycles, but participation has also been growing consistently from year to year, with 1,434 in 2021, 1,558 participants in 2022, and 3,647 participants in 2023.

**Markham Cycles has helped participants get and stay active.**

Becoming more active and improving one's health is the number one reason why people are driven to participate in Markham Cycles. Through providing low-barrier ways of engaging in cycling activities, Markham Cycles has helped hundreds of families and individuals become more active and healthier.

**Markham Cycles has helped participants cycle more often, especially for recreation.**

Based on testimonials and qualitative feedback, the main type of cycling that has increased among Markham Cycles participants is recreational cycling. When Markham Cycles participants were surveyed after participating in programming, 62% of 2021 respondents said that through Markham Cycles, they have gotten more experience riding a bike and 100% of 2022 respondents said that after participating in Markham Cycles, they will choose active transportation more often.



**Markham Cycles has had limited impacts on influencing bike trips for transportation and commuting.**

There is some evidence to suggest that Markham Cycles has helped participants increase the bike trips they are taking for transportation. That being said, the lack of safe infrastructure in Markham plays a major role in why most of the increase in cycling trips among Markham Cycles participants, remain trips for recreation.

**Markham Cycles has grown participant knowledge and confidence around performing bike maintenance.**

When asked “How has Markham Cycles changed things for you?”, many participants recounted their newfound ability to fix their own bike, often emphasizing how much money this has allowed them to save. Overall, there is strong evidence to suggest that Markham Cycles has helped hundreds of people learn about bike maintenance and started breaking down this barrier to biking in Markham.

**Markham Cycles has increased access to bikes, particularly for BIPOC and newcomer residents.**

Markham Cycles lent out 835 bike and bike-related items through the Markham Public Library system, and given away 266 free refurbished bikes, many of which were received by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and other People of Colour) Markham residents and newcomers. In the Recycle to Ride post-activity survey, 88% of clinic participants, all of whom would have received a free refurbished bicycle, self-identified as being a BIPOC individual. Additionally, 40% of these respondents said that they have been in Canada for only 3 years or less.



**Markham Cycles has helped some participants and program partners become champions of cycling in their local communities.**

It is challenging to pin down the mode shifts that have occurred as a direct result of Markham Cycles, and the precise role that Markham Cycles has played in the evolving landscape of cycling in the City of Markham since 2019. However, some survey responses suggest that Markham Cycles serves as an avenue to introduce people to cycling advocacy and in cases of deep participant involvement, results in champions of cycling. Two powerful examples are the stories of Jackson Ching— the now Founder of Bikes Gospel and CICS, who went from being a program partner in 2020 to taking over and independently running Markham Cycles in 2024.

**Provide participants with opportunities to learn how to connect with local officials and advocate for cycling.**

For Keenan, the biggest barrier to taking action when it comes to cycling is the vast disconnect between residents and Council. Many participants are passionate about cycling but unfamiliar with the potential ways to advocate for cycling locally. In the future, Markham Cycles could consider offering educational sessions on how to do so, or partner with a local advocacy organization to offer these sessions.

**Expand Markham Cycles's locations and opening hours.**

Over the years, Markham Cycles has received several emails requesting hubs in additional neighbourhoods across the City of Markham. Many survey respondents also requested that Markham Cycles expands its services to additional neighbourhoods and broaden its hours of operation.



**Expand Markham Cycles's e-bike rental services and continue to adapt programming as demand for micro-mobility grows.**

Several survey respondents recounted that they like the inclusion of e-bikes in the Bike Lending Library however it is often hard to get access to these bikes as they are expensive, available in limited quantities, and thus in high demand. As micro-mobility grows in the City of Markham, it will be important to ensure that more people have accessible ways of riding e-bikes.

**Improve outreach and promotional initiatives to move from a somewhat niche audience to a larger, broader audience.**

Over the years, Markham Cycles has received several emails requesting hubs in additional neighbourhoods across the City of Markham. Many survey respondents also requested that Markham Cycles expands its services to additional neighbourhoods and broaden its hours of operation.





## Project Context

### What is Markham Cycles?

[Markham Cycles](#) is a community bike hub that serves as a critical piece of Markham's cycling infrastructure, and a key driver in getting more Markham residents excited and knowledgeable about biking. Markham Cycles's goal is to build bike culture in Markham by removing barriers, providing education, and making it easier for people to start and continue cycling.

For five years, Markham Cycles has offered [free programs and workshops](#) to anyone who is interested. Markham Cycles was founded by [The Centre for Active Transportation \(TCAT\)](#) and is currently operated by the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services (CICS).

### Who is TCAT?

TCAT was formed in 2006 as a grassroots coalition to give a unified voice to the many groups working for a better cycling and pedestrian environment in Toronto. In 2008, TCAT became a project of [Clean Air Partnership \(CAP\)](#) and now guides the active transportation work at CAP. TCAT is a respected and credible leader in active transportation research, policy solutions, and evidence-based programming within Ontario, Canada, and beyond.

### What are community bike hubs?

Community bike hubs are welcoming spaces where people can learn more about cycling, meet other people who cycle, and go cycling together. Increasingly common in urban cores, they offer a variety of programs and services intended to address the non-infrastructure barriers to cycling adoption. Common program types include do-it-yourself (DIY) bike repair sessions where



knowledgeable staff or volunteers help participants fix their own bikes, workshops, group bike rides, and bike giveaways.

### Why community bike hubs in the suburbs?

In early 2015, with cycling on the rise in Toronto's urban core, TCAT partnered with Access Alliance, Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre, CultureLink, and Cycle Toronto to investigate how they could [build bike culture beyond the downtown core](#). This work was catalyzed by a growing appreciation for cycling's untapped potential in Toronto's suburbs. In communities like Etobicoke, Scarborough, and North York, 1.5 million trips that were 5 km long or less were being made each day; given the right conditions, these short trips could be cycled.

Despite this potential, people are often hesitant to try cycling in the suburbs because the environment is so unsupportive. Wide, high-speed roads and a lack of safe bike infrastructure can make getting around on a bicycle feel uninviting and unsafe. At the same time, it is difficult for city staff and politicians to build bike lanes — particularly those that re-allocate road space away from motor vehicles — when so few people cycle. This is what we refer to as the “chicken-and-egg scenario” — where a lack of safe infrastructure leads means few people ride, which in turn leads to a lack of investment in safe infrastructure. Breaking this cycle became a driving force behind TCAT's efforts to create suburban community bike hubs and build a community of riders who could push for long-term infrastructural improvements.

### Why the City of Markham?

In 2021, the City of Markham's adopted its [Active Transportation Masterplan](#). In the years leading up to the plan's adoption, Markham was looking at how it could invest in active transportation and its numerous community benefits — from healthier and happier populations to improved environmental outcomes. As part of these efforts, Markham was looking to support programs that helped to establish a strong culture of active transportation and help normalize walking and cycling



for everyday trips. As a large, diverse, suburban community with supportive city staff, Markham was an ideal candidate to create a community bike hub.





# Markham Cycles Programming



A lack of access to a working bicycle, lack of confidence in cycling knowledge, and social and cultural norms that treat cycling as a dangerous or abnormal activity present significant challenges when it comes to low cycling rates in the suburbs. As such, every program that Markham Cycles delivers was designed with the goal of breaking down the maze of sociocultural barriers that inhibit people from cycling. Through its programming, Markham Cycles seeks to:

1. **Access** — Increase access to bikes, bike accessories, and repair tools.
2. **Skills and Knowledge** — Teach people the skills to bike confidently, navigate routes, and perform simple fixes and maintenance on their own bike.
3. **Community** — Provide people with opportunities to meet people who cycle, support them in their cycling journey, and make it feel like a fun, normal way to get around.





## *What types of programming does Markham Cycles offer?*

Markham Cycles's programming can be understood in three broad categories:

- 1. Public Programming** — Open and free to all residents.
- 2. Newcomer Programming** — Delivered in partnership with the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services.
- 3. School Programming** — Delivered in partnership with the York Region District School Board.





## Public Programming

### DIY Bike Repair

DIY Bike Repair is Markham Cycles's flagship drop-in program. During DIY Bike Repair hours, anyone can visit the hub to learn how to perform simple fixes on their own bike using free tools and spare parts, and the help of staff and volunteers. **Markham Cycles has fixed 2,765 bikes since 2019.**

### Bike Lending Library

Operated in partnership with the Markham Public Library, anyone with a Markham Public Library card can borrow a bike, e-bike, and other bike accessories for free. Items are borrowed for two weeks and are first-come first-served. **Markham Cycles has lent out 835 items since 2019.**

### Group Rides

Group rides are leisurely, family-friendly rides that last up to 15 kilometers. They provide riders with an opportunity to build confidence on their bikes, meet other people who ride, and learn about Markham's quiet neighbourhood streets, infrastructure, and local trails. **Markham cycles has led 49 group rides with 446 participants since 2019.**

### Workshops

Hosted in partnership with the Markham Public Library, Markham Cycles offers public workshops where participants can learn about a variety of cycling-related topics. Topics for these hands-on workshops have included fixing a flat tire, biking in the winter, and roadside bike repair. During the pandemic, these workshops were hosted virtually. **Markham Cycles has hosted 19 workshops with 610 in-person or live attendees since 2019.**



**2,765  
Bikes Fixed**

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**835  
Bike Items  
Loaned**

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**610  
Workshop  
Attendees**



### Pop-Up Community Bike Booths

Pop-up booths take place at various locations across the City of Markham during festivals, City events, and events for community partners. At these booths, Markham Cycles offers full-service bike repair including safety checks and assessments, adjusting seat height and the fit of a bike, pumping tires, tightening brakes, oiling chains, and fixing flat tires. **Markham Cycles has hosted 52 pop-up community bike booths across the City of Markham since 2019.**

### Bike Giveaways

Since 2019, Markham Cycles has collected community bike donations at its bike hub locations. Markham Cycles staff and volunteers then worked together to strip these bikes for parts to use during DIY Bike Repair sessions or refurbish them to give away to community members in need. **In 2021, Markham Cycles gave away 62 bikes and in 2022, Markham Cycles gave away 87 bikes.**

In 2023, Markham Cycles formalized its approach to bike giveaways through the Recycle to Ride program — a program delivered in partnership with York Region Solid Waste. Through Recycle to Ride, Markham Cycles continued to collect community bike donations, while also gathering discarded bikes from York Region's waste depots on a bi-monthly basis. Markham Cycles then refurbished them back into working order to give away to community members in at public clinics throughout the summer.

In 2023, Markham Cycles gave away 179 bikes. In total, Markham Cycles has given away 266 free bikes since 2019.

Markham Cycles has engaged 5,862 participants and hosted 412 events since 2019.



52

**Pop-up Bike  
Community  
Booths**



266

**Free bikes**



**Engaged  
5,862  
Participants**



## Newcomer Programming

### Cycle the City

Developed and run in partnership with the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, Cycle the City program is a youth program that provides newcomer youth aged 12-25 with access to refurbished bicycles for the summer, as well as education through group training sessions. Youth participants are given a refurbished bicycle, lock, helmet, and repair kit to keep. Throughout the summer, they participate in weekly in-person sessions about cycling in the city and group rides around Markham streets and trails. **Over 244 youth have participated in Markham Cycles's Cycle the City program.**

## School Programming

### School Booths

Markham Cycles works closely with the City of Markham, York Region District School Board, and York Catholic District School Board to promote active school travel at elementary schools across the City of Markham. We provide assembly-style lessons on basic bike safety, handout accessible cycling information, and set up pop-up booths to offer free bike repair to students and families. **More than 2,350 students have participated in Markham Cycles's School Booths.**

### School Streets

In 2022, the first ever School Streets program in Markham was initiated by York Region District School Board (YRDSB) in partnership with the City of Markham to test out an innovative approach to encouraging active travel to school called School Streets. Markham Cycles supported the evaluation efforts for this program. Students, parents/guardians, school staff, residents impacted by the road closure, and Markham residents, in general, were surveyed both before and during the School Streets program. Results were analyzed to find trends in feedback across the respondents. **Read the Markham School Streets Program Final Report [here](#).**



**Hosted 412 Events**



**244+ Cycle the City Participants and 2350+ School Booths Participants**



**Evaluated School Streets Pilot Program School Booths**



# Evaluation Methodology



The question of how cycling adoption occurs in the suburbs and what role non-infrastructure interventions can play in cycling adoption remains under-researched and largely unanswered. Markham Cycles's evaluation strategies were designed with this in mind and driven by the goal of trying to understand whether community bicycle hubs can tackle the chicken-and-egg scenario that they originally set out to address. Through the evaluation, the Markham Cycles team sought insight into questions such as:

- To what extent will Markham Cycles participants increase their cycling?
- What kind of cycling will increase among participants (for transportation, for recreation, etc.)?
- To what extent will Markham Cycles participants increase their repair skills?
- How do participants transition from low cycling to everyday cycling, to becoming champions of cycling in their community?

## Methodology

Two main evaluation methods were used to analyze Markham Cycles' impacts: participant surveys and interviews.

### Participant Surveys

#### Pre-Survey

Administered at the beginning of every season since 2021, the Markham Cycles pre-survey was designed to capture a snapshot of who is participating in our public programming at their first point of contact. In this survey, we were primarily interested in capturing demographic information, the participants' existing familiarity with and exposure to biking and bike repair, and the goals that led participants to seek out Markham Cycles. 260 participants

responded to Markham Cycles's pre-surveys. Of those respondents, 136 responded





responded to Markham Cycles's pre-surveys. Of those respondents, 136 responded to the pre-survey administered in 2023.

### **Post-Survey**

Administered at the end of every season since 2021, the Markham Cycles post-survey was designed to capture outcomes of Markham Cycles's by targeting those who participated in public programming. Respondents were asked to provide demographic information and specify which program they participated in, what they liked about it, and what they thought could be improved. We also asked questions to try to understand if Markham Cycles played a part in leading participants to be more active, learn something new, feel more confident riding or fixing a bike, and meet new people, among other things. 279 participants responded to Markham Cycles's post-surveys. Of those respondents, 214 responded to the pre-survey administered in 2023.

### **Post-Activity Survey**

In addition to the general pre- and post-surveys, Markham Cycles also administered post-activity surveys to understand the specific outcomes of a single program. Post-activity surveys were administered for Cycle the City and Recycle to Ride and were geared at understanding if these programs were meeting their goals and how they could be improved for future years.

### **Stakeholder Interviews**

In November and December of 2023, we conducted a series of interviews to supplement the pre- and post-surveys. After doing a preliminary review of our survey findings, many questions remained around whether Markham Cycles had successfully created local champions of cycling, influenced the local landscape of cycling, and helped to create an environment where it would prove easier to advocate for infrastructure change.



To capture those impacts, we spoke to a series of people who had been highly involved with Markham Cycles in different capacities; as staff, volunteers, and municipal partners. Those who we interviewed were:

- Keenan Mosdell – Program Coordinator at Markham Cycles
- Jackson Ching – Volunteer at Markham Cycles
- John Mok – Volunteer at Markham Cycles
- Loy Cheah – Senior Manager, Transportation at The City of Markham
- Fionn Ho – TDM Coordinator at The City of Markham
- Samson Wat – Manager, Transportation Policy and Strategy at The City of Markham





# Markham Cycles's Impact



***There is significant demand for Markham Cycles's services.***

Markham Cycles is consistently ranked by participants as an excellent program delivered in a welcoming environment by knowledgeable staff. In 2022, 95% of participants ranked Markham Cycles programming as "excellent". In 2023, 100% of participants said that they were made to feel welcome at Markham Cycles, that they received help when they needed it, and that they were treated with respect during their visit. When asked what they liked about the programming, participants shared:

- "Very helpful, friendly staff."
- "Keenan is extremely helpful."
- "Friendly and inclusive environment."
- "The friendly smiles."
- "Excellent staff who provided free services to the Markham public during the summer."

The excellence and sustained demand for Markham Cycles's programming are further reinforced by the fact that participation has been growing consistently from year to year.

Year	Total Participants
2021	1,434
2022	1,558
2023	3,647

In part, the large jump in participation numbers between 2022 and 2023 can be attributed to the 2,350 participants that Markham Cycles connected with via 3 assembly-style School Booths hosted in partnership with York Region District School Board.



## Markham Cycles helps participants get and stay active.

One of the most main takeaways from the Markham Cycles evaluation is the driving role health plays in attracting participants to Markham Cycles. When completing the pre-survey, 2021, 2022, and 2023 Markham Cycles respondents selected “improving my health and well-being” or “being active” as the most important potential benefit for participating in Markham Cycles. Across all three years, health indicators played a larger role in attracting participants to Markham Cycles than gaining experience riding a bike, learning how to fix a bike, and meeting new people.

When surveyed after participating in Markham Cycles programming, increased physical activity was repeatedly mentioned as a critical outcome of Markham Cycles:

- *“Markham Cycles made my family more active.”*
- *“Markham Cycles gave me opportunities to be more active.”*
- *“Markham Cycles has made me more active because I can borrow bikes. It increases my frequency of cycling and makes me more healthy and fit.”*

In addition to these testimonials:

- 62% of 2021 respondents said that they improved their health and well-being through participating in Markham Cycles.
- 78% of 2021 respondents said that because of Markham Cycles they intend to cycle more.

## Markham Cycles helps participants cycle more often, especially for recreation

When Markham Cycles participants were surveyed after participating in Markham Cycles programming:

- 62% of 2021 respondents said that through Markham Cycles, they have gotten more experience riding a bike.



- 31% of 2021 respondents said that through Markham Cycles, they have driven less.
- 100% of 2022 respondents said that after participating in Markham Cycles, they will choose active transportation more often.

Based on several testimonials, as well as qualitative feedback received through the stakeholder interviews, the main type of cycling that has increased among Markham Cycles participants is recreational cycling. While there are several reasons for this, it is likely that COVID-19 played a large role, since people were fervently seeking out safe, outdoor, family friendly activities in during lockdowns, while at the same time, the rise of telecommuting reduced the need for commuting. Staff at the City of Markham recounted that since COVID-19, there were significantly more cyclists and pedestrians on the trails, and more people showing up at events that align with active transportation, including Open Streets.

***Markham Cycles has had limited impacts on influencing bike trips for transportation and commuting.***

There is some evidence to suggest that Markham Cycles has helped participants increase the bike trips they are taking for transportation. For example, one parent recounted that Markham Cycles opened her kids up to the possibility of bike commuting and 72% of Recycle to Ride post-activity survey respondents said that after attending a Recycle to Ride clinic, they will choose biking as a form of transportation more often.

That being said, the lack of safe infrastructure in the City of Markham still plays a major role in why most of the cycling trips we see in Markham at large, as well as the increase in cycling trips among Markham Cycles participants, remain trips for recreation.



Further, in both 2021 and 2022, when participants were asked to recount all the trips that they have taken in the week prior to filling out both the pre- and post-survey, there was no significant change in the amount trips taken by bike for transportation purposes.

The primary barrier to participants increasing their cycling trips for transportation is crystal clear; when participants were asked what would help them cycle more, the most frequently — and almost exclusively — mentioned barrier is lack infrastructure, such as protected bike lanes and a functional connected bike lane network:

- *“More bike lanes in the neighbourhood”*
- *“BIKE LANES PLEASEEEEEEE”*
- *“Protected bike lanes on busy roads.”*
- *“Having more bike lanes would make cycling safer, which would be a more appealing option”*
- *“Protected bike lanes on major streets like Markham Road!”*
- *“Bike lanes”*
- *“Having more routes that I can bike on and having access to a bike similar to Toronto’s Bixi bikes.”*

While the non-infrastructure interventions that Markham Cycles offers plays a pivotal role in providing people with a free place to learn about biking, get help when needed, and find people to ride with, mode shift will always be limited without a safe and expansive cycling network.

These sentiments were similarly echoed in the stakeholder interviews conducted with Keenan Mosdell (Program Coordinator at Markham Cycles) and transportation staff at the City of Markham. When asked what needs to be done to transition people from low cycling to regularly cycling for transportation, Keenan said “It’s just infrastructure — it’s really the main thing people need. Even as a cycling advocate, the lack of infrastructure encouraged me to get a car last year. Getting infrastructure built is a bureaucratic process and it feels like nothing gets done.” City of Markham staff shared “Riding a bike without a safe network puts peoples’ lives at risk, so it’s very easy for individuals to say no. We need to create infrastructure that helps people can embrace cycling.”

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**“Having more bike lanes would make cycling safer, which would be a more appealing option”**

**“BIKE LANES PLEASEEE”**

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## **Markham Cycles grew participant knowledge and confidence around performing bike maintenance.**

When asked “How has Markham Cycles changed things for you?” in the post-survey, many participants recounted their newfound ability to fix their own bike, often emphasizing how much money this has allowed them to save:

- “I learned a lot about bike maintenance”
- “Watching and learning has helped me fix problems on my bike.”
- “Markham Cycles has allowed me to educate myself on bikes and fix bikes free of cost.”
- “Markham Cycles has helped me offset repair costs for minor maintenance.”
- “I learned to do basic bike repairs, met new people, and received a refurbished bike that I can use to commute places. It’s been a great experience.”
- “Markham Cycles saved my family time and money.”
- “Markham Cycles is a fun community group that is very helpful for novice bikers who need bike advice or maintenance. They are always willing to assist and able to provide parts and repairs that are unaffordable at regular retail stores or bike shops.”
- “I fixed my kids’ 3 bikes. They started to learn this summer and are now all able to ride.”
- “Markham Cycles has changed things for me for the better, thank you. The staff at Markham Cycles helped me fix my bike so I didn’t have to buy a new one.”

Information gathered from the Recycle to Ride post-activity survey, administered in 2023, indicated similar findings:

- 74% of respondents who attended a Recycle to Ride clinic said that they learned something new

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“**Markham Cycles has allowed me to educate myself on bikes and fix bikes free of cost**”

“**Markham Cycles saved my family time and money**”

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- 67% of respondents who attended a Recycle to Ride clinic said that after attending, they feel more confident performing simple maintenance on a bike

Overall, there is strong evidence to suggest that Markham Cycles has helped hundreds of people learn about bike maintenance and started breaking down this barrier to biking in Markham.

***Markham Cycles increased access to bikes, particularly for BIPOC and newcomer residents.***

Markham Cycles lent out 835 bike and bike-related items through the Markham Public Library system, and given away 266 free refurbished bikes, many of which were received by BIPOC Markham residents and newcomers. In the Recycle to Ride post-activity survey, 88% of clinic participants, all of whom would have received a free refurbished bicycle self-identified as being a BIPOC individual. Additionally, 40% of these respondents said that they have been in Canada for only 3 years or less.

***Markham Cycles helped some participants and program partners become champions of cycling in their local communities.***

It is challenging to pin down the mode shifts that have occurred as a direct result of Markham Cycles, and the precise role that Markham Cycles has played in the evolving landscape of cycling in the City of Markham since 2019. However, some survey responses suggest that Markham Cycles serves as an avenue to introduce people to cycling advocacy and in cases of deep participant involvement, results in champions of cycling. For example:



- 38% of 2021 respondents said that because of Markham Cycles, they intend to advocate for better cycling conditions (bike lanes, trails, etc.).
- 58% of 2021 respondents said that because of Markham Cycles, they intend to convince their family and friends to try cycling.

During the stakeholder interviews, Keenan (Program Coordinator at Markham Cycles) also shared that while most Markham Cycles participants simply come to Markham Cycles to participate in programming, learn, and receive services, he has witnessed those who are involved regularly, such as volunteers, get inspired and ultimately become champions of cycling in their community. Two powerful examples are the stories of Jackson Ching — the now Founder of Bikes Gospel and CICS, who went from being a program partner in 2021 to taking over and independently running Markham Cycles in 2024.



## Jackson Ching's Journey: From volunteering for Markham Cycles to opening his very own Bikes Gospel



*"I was on sabbatical and had more time than usual and really wanted to learn how to repair bikes. After reaching out to Markham Cycles, Keenan suggested that I should come to a DIY Repair session and help repair bikes for bike giveaways. I'm not a handy person and I didn't know how it would go, but I absolutely love it. I've gone to Markham Cycles twice a week for the last 5 months.*

*There's lots of new immigrants from Hong Kong in my neighbourhood so I've been posting them on local Facebook groups for newcomers. They will come to my house to pick them up. I've given away 40 bikes this summer.*

*I recently started my own company called Bikes Gospel. I'm inspired to do what Markham Cycles does, but at a smaller scale. I tune up bikes for free, host free workshops, and give away bikes. Markham Cycles inspired me to contribute to my community."*





## The CICS Story: From having no experience in offering community cycling programming to taking over Markham Cycles

CICS has been serving immigrants to Canada for 54 years. They provide a variety of services to children, youth, women, older adults, and lower income residents with clients hailing from all over the world, but primarily South and East Asia. Before becoming a Markham Cycles bike hub partner in 2020, CICS had no prior experience in offering community cycling programming. Over the course of 4 years, CICS worked with Markham Cycles to deliver the Cycle the City program and host youth bike giveaways at their Markham location and Immigrant Youth Centre. The goal of these programs was to break down the financial barriers around accessing a bike and providing newcomers with the skills to perform simple repairs so that if a bike breaks down, it won't stop them from continuing to cycle.

For newcomers and recent immigrants, cycling holds so much potential for wellness, mobility, and settling into their new environment. Research shows that most newcomers coming to Canada tend to see their health decline after their arrival; decreased levels of physical activity and increased social isolation are major factors in this decline. Riding a bike can help increase levels of recreational activity, connect newcomers to other people who ride, and serve as an affordable and environmentally friendly form of transportation. Through working together, CICS staff and community members not only deepened their knowledge of cycling-related programming but also saw first-hand, the value of prioritizing mobility as a part of newcomer settlement services.

As part of the [four-step model of incubating cycling in suburban communities](#), CICS will take over Markham Cycles's operations in 2024, with the goal of sustaining Markham Cycles long-term. With a strong community of existing clientele, immense local knowledge, and newly acquired experience in community cycling programming, CICS is well positioned to do so. In just 4 years, CICS evolved from having no experience with community cycling programming to independently running Markham Cycles's two community bike hub locations.



# Lessons for Markham Cycles and Other Community Bike Hubs



***Provide participants with opportunities to learn how to connect with local officials and advocate for cycling.***

For Keenan, the biggest barrier to taking action when it comes to cycling is the vast disconnect between residents and Council. “There are a lot of people who are passionate about cycling and care about advocating for it, but they aren’t familiar with government processes or how to connect with elected officials. It could be helpful to sit down with participants and show them how to write letters to local Councillors together, if they are interested in learning.”

In a similar vein, if participants were to do one thing to help instigate change, City of Markham staff shared that:

*“We want participants to tell local Councillors that people need a viable alternative to cars. Micro-mobility and cycling are growing, and we need to provide for it or else more people are going to get hurt.*

*We value Markham Cycles so much and see the benefits of your contributions in the community. It is hard to measure the effects, but we know we need constant education and messaging so that when the infrastructure is ready, we can really push cycling culture forward. We need to ensure that as we do that, we have an informed and educated population that can become supporters and champions for improving the implementation of our infrastructure.*

*We see Markham Cycles's role as helping to create the conditions where we have that informed and educated group of residents that will not only help promote cycling among their friends and families, but also help promote political action that leads to infrastructure.”*



Many participants are passionate about cycling but unfamiliar with the potential ways to advocate for cycling locally. Markham Cycles could consider offering educational sessions on how to do so, or partner with a local advocacy organization to offer these sessions. This will also allow Markham Cycles to continue supporting the City of Markham as infrastructural investments grow.

### ***Expand Markham Cycles's locations and opening hours.***

Over the years, Markham Cycles has received several emails requesting hubs in additional neighbourhoods across the City of Markham. Many survey respondents also requested that Markham Cycles expands its services to additional neighbourhoods and broaden its hours of operation.

City of Markham staff shared that "In the future, there should be a network of bike hubs where regardless of what kind of active transportation you are using, you can be certain that along your ride, if you run into problems, you can get some support." They also shared that they'd hope to see additional locations in areas of intensification such as the Yonge corridor and Markham Centre.

### ***Expand Markham Cycles's e-bike rental services and continue to adapt programming as demand for micro-mobility grows.***

Several survey respondents recounted that they like the inclusion of e-bikes in the Bike Lending Library however it is often hard to get access to these bikes as they are expensive, available in limited quantities, and thus in high demand. As micro-mobility grows in the City of Markham, it will be important to ensure that more people have accessible ways of riding e-bikes.



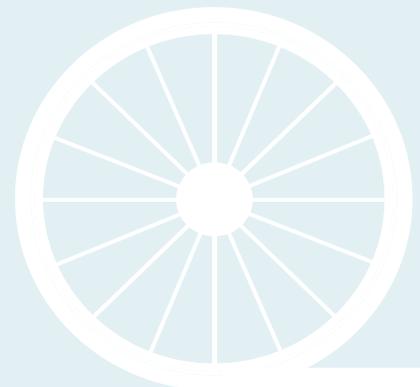
This sentiment was similarly shared by staff at the City of Markham who said that “micromobility is growing and we need to provide for it.”

**Improve Markham Cycles’s outreach and promotional initiatives to move from a somewhat niche audience to a larger, broader audience.**

An area for improvement that was commonly mentioned in survey responses was better outreach. Participants shared:

- “Publicize more!”
- “Need to make more people aware of the programs offered, and when they are available.”
- “More promotion”

Staff at the City of Markham also hope to see Markham Cycles’s outreach initiatives expand and improve, to ensure that the programming is consistently reaching new audiences each season. They believe that it’s extremely beneficial to have Markham Cycles present at major City events such as Markham Cycling Day and Open Streets to help raise awareness of the bike hubs. However, they noted that the group of people that is interested in Markham Cycles is still relatively niche and anecdotally tends to attract many of the same people year after year.





# Final Reflections



At the outset of this evaluation, we were curious to discover if Markham Cycles has successfully helped participants increase their cycling, increase their repair skills, and nurture local champions of cycling in the City of Markham. Overall, the answer appears to be a qualified yes. While the vast majority of participants simply come to Markham Cycles to increase their physical activity through biking and learn about basic bike repair, some of those people who are regularly involved with the hubs use Markham Cycles as a site of inspiration to ultimately champion cycling in their community. Phenomenal examples include the stories of Jackson Ching of Bike Gospel and CICS, who have recently taken over Markham Cycles operations at the beginning of 2024.

There is still much more work to be done and significant room for growth. The key next steps for Markham Cycles will be to continue working with the City of Markham on how our programming and program participants can help leverage support from local officials, and in turn, support residents as they increase the number of bike trips that they are taking for transportation.



