



## Low-speed cars deserve fast-track approval

August 11, 2008

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Low-speed electric cars are illegal to drive on Ontario roads, even those streets with speed limits of 50 km/h or less.

Take away the protective shell of these cars and two of their tires and what do you have? You pretty much have a scooter or Moped – and you can drive those on the roads, no problem.

Now, also take away the electric motor and you've reduced this machine to a bicycle, which is also allowed on the roads.

What's wrong with this picture?

Ontario Transportation Minister Jim Bradley recently said, "We want low-speed electric vehicles on our roads, and we are looking at how it can be done safely."

But the fact is we already have low-speed vehicles on our roads and, for the most part, people aren't dying any more than the cellphone-carrying SUV drivers who don't pay attention to stop signs and traffic lights.

In 2006, the Ontario government, somewhat caving to public pressure, launched a five-year pilot project to study low-speed vehicles in provincial and municipal parks across the province.

But how does such a pilot can address the urban context? Is the aim of such a study to see how the vehicles behave when they slam into a moose or run over a chipmunk?

Last month, Bradley – responding to even more public pressure – announced yet another study to help determine safety standards for the vehicles, which Transport Canada maintains are not safe enough for any public road. The department maintains this position, despite the fact that most U.S. states have approved low-speed electric vehicles such as the Canadian-made ZENN Motor Co. car to drive on certain roads with low speed limits.

In July, the Quebec government started allowing low-speed vehicles on some roads as long as an orange triangle denoting the vehicle's slower speed is placed on the back. British Columbia also allows this.

Do these provinces or states simply not care as much as Ontario about the safety of their

drivers?

Some members of the public are growing impatient. Barry Taylor, a disc jockey at Toronto radio station 102.1 The Edge, has for the past three weeks been encouraging his listeners to demand answers from Bradley.

"For 21 days, thousands of e-mails and telephone calls have been sent to Mr. Bradley in an effort to have him take a five-minute phone call, anytime at his convenience between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. to explain his stance," Taylor wrote last Thursday in his blog. "He has yet to accept the offer."

Bradley keeps saying he wants the cars on the road, but the province keeps dithering. As Conservative Leader John Tory says, "Ontario is dragging its feet and throwing red tape and obstacles and studies (in the way) instead of doing something that's good for the environment and good for people."

On the topic of safety, one of the fears cited by both the province and Transport Canada is the ability of low-speed vehicles to blend with faster traffic. It's certainly a valid concern, but it ignores the fact that cyclists and scooter drivers do this all the time.

It also ignores the benefits that lower-speed vehicles can bring to city streets, such as traffic calming. If you have a few thousand of these vehicles driving on city streets it may be that other drivers won't speed as much.

As traffic pacers, low-speed vehicles can reduce gridlock and encourage safer traffic flow – not just for other drivers, but for cyclists and pedestrians.

Ontario doesn't need to pay for another commissioned study to find out what other jurisdictions, including Quebec, already know. If the province is serious about the environment and about giving relief to drivers being hit with high gas prices, then it's high time it stops dithering.