



Bike to the Future

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May 9, 2012

Arlene Wilgosh, President & CEO
Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

Lynne Warda, MD FRCPC
Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics and Child Health
Injury Prevention and Child Health, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

Dear Ms. Wilgosh and Dr. Warda:

Promoting safety for cyclists on public roads

Bike to the Future would like to thank Dr. Warda for meeting with us on April 26, 2012 to discuss safe cycling.

As we discussed, Bike to the Future (BttF) shares the WHRA's interest in promoting safe cycling efforts to

- develop safer cycling environments
- provide cyclist and driver education
- increase cycling rates for general health benefits.

http://www.wrha.mb.ca/healthinfo/preventinj/files/Cycling_PS.pdf

We understand the benefits of wearing a helmet in the event of an accident. However, research shows that the best way to maximize the health impact of bicycling is to encourage more people to choose to ride their bicycle as often as possible, and to make sure that ride is safe

We are concerned with the prominence the WHRA gives to “decreas[ing] cycling injuries through all-age provincial bicycle helmet legislation”.

As a group of concerned cyclists, many of whom commute by bike year-round in Winnipeg, ride and tour throughout Manitoba by bike, and often travel to other cities to bike in those cities, we have studied and observed the issues related to bicycling safety extensively, both on the road and in the published research.

We believe that a combination of better cycling infrastructure and better road user behaviour will create a safer cycling environment that will, in turn, encourage more people to become active. By creating an environment where there is a lower probability of accidents, more people will want to participate.

We respect the feeling that people in the health system must experience when they treat accident victims who have suffered head injuries that could have been avoided or lessened by wearing a helmet. However, from a population health perspective, legislating helmet use could have negative consequences; it would discourage some people from riding some of the time, and it would give police the duty to stop and ticket people who are travelling on a bicycle without a helmet. We have recently sent to Dr. Warda a listing of various medical journal articles that discuss the issue of the effect of helmet legislation and other factors on overall cycling rates.

We believe that legislative action, public education and enforcement resources should be applied to measures that reduce the probability of injury from an accident. Preventing accidents from happening is the key, in our view, to increasing active transportation.

The most urgent legislative changes to emphasize prevention are, in our view, the following:

1. Lower speed limits in areas of high public concentration

Allow municipalities to analyze their own local traffic flow and lower speed limits where they know there is a concentration of cycling and pedestrian traffic that is a risk of injury or death. Research shows that speed limits affect both the number and severity of accidents.

Bill 3 was recently introduced into the Manitoba Legislature to make it easier for municipalities to designate slower speeds in "school zones". BttF believes Bill 3 should go even farther: allow for slower speeds on streets where there is concentration or where a municipality wishes to create more cycling and pedestrian traffic. This corresponds with a movement in many European and North American centres to implement reduced speed zones for the safety of cyclists and pedestrians.

2. Define "safe passing distance" in the HTA as a minimum of one metre

Safe passing distance is already required in the HTA; however, we all know that many drivers often pass a cyclist within an inch of their lives. Several cyclists have been killed in Manitoba in broad daylight by vehicles passing too close, including Arne Johnsrud, a very experienced cyclist run over from behind and killed on March 19, 2012 near St. Anne (while wearing his bike helmet). People choose not to bike because they are afraid for their lives.

There is a movement in North America to implement the "three foot" rule. Twenty US states and the Province of Nova Scotia have enacted amendments to their traffic Acts to define a safe passing distance as being at least three feet. Nova Scotia has already followed suit, and the municipality of Ottawa has also passed such a provision. A private members Bill in Ontario has been introduced to establish a similar rule for the entire province.

3. Create an express duty of care for motorists with respect to cyclists and pedestrians

Without significant civil penalties for negligence that results in harm to cyclists, too many accidents are happening without accountability. Deterrence has become meaningless for motorists who drive in Manitoba. Yet the HTA already imposes an express duty on cyclists and pedestrians in relation to motorized traffic, but not the other way around. Legislation that emphasizes a duty of care to cyclists would become an important part of driver education.

There are many other legislative and policy solutions that are in place or proposed in other jurisdictions as well. We ask you to think about our collective experience as cyclists, our interest in trends in other jurisdictions, and our years of experience in researching and debating these issues. We believe the above points are feasible legislative changes which would have the greatest impact on ridership and safety. Because Manitoba is so far behind other jurisdictions in creating a safe cyclist/pedestrian environment, Manitoba can "lead from behind"; we can, with your help, leverage the best ideas from legislation in many North American jurisdictions that promote public health through human powered activity.

The WHRA and BttF share a common goal: more active people, with fewer accidents that have less severe impacts. Without prejudice to your position on helmets, would the WRHA be willing to partner with Bttf to support amendments to the *Highway Traffic Act* that seek to prevent accidents from occurring in the first place? Can we help each other to increase bicycle ridership while reducing the probability of accidents and injury?

I think there are many ways we could benefit by working together. I would welcome your views on how we could do so.

Given the legislative time table, time is of the essence. Please call or e-mail me at your earliest convenience to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

Tom McMahon
Co-chair, Bike to the Future

cc.
Ron Lemieux, Minister responsible for Active Transportation
Steve Ashton, Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation
Theresa Oswald, Minister of Health
Jim Rondeau, Minister of Healthy Living
Jason Carter, President, Manitoba Cycling Association