



**MORE PEOPLE BIKING
MORE OFTEN**

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Bike Winnipeg would like to thank you for hosting the December 3rd, 2015 Summit on Countermeasures for Distracted Driving & Impaired Driving, and for inviting us to participate in its proceedings. We found the summit to be educational and informative, leading to some excellent and important discussion on the issues. We hope that you will kindly accept and consider the comments that follow as a continuation of the discussion from that summit, with added perspective from those experiencing our roadways from the seat of a bicycle rather than the seat of a vehicle.

Distracted driving

As cyclists, we are very aware of the dangers caused by inattentive drivers.

Unfortunately, cyclists across Canada are aware of Manitoba's tragic record of touring cyclists run over and killed in broad daylight on empty roads in recent years. Although we cannot access the evidence collected at the scene of those collisions, we hear all too often drivers saying they "did not see the cyclist".

Rules

We are concerned that the level of concentration of some drivers at certain times is not up to the level required to be aware of everything that is going on around their vehicle and in the path of their vehicle, and that they do not automatically steer clear. This reflects a combination of;

1. Physical distractions,
2. A lack of concentration on the task of driving safely, some of which is due to a failure to commit their full attention to the task of driving,
3. A lack of automatic reaction to steer clear instantly when drivers encounter an obstacle in traffic

Bike Winnipeg recommends that, in order to address the root of the problem, in addition to dealing with physical distractions, the Province should establish, through regulation or legislation:

1. That requires drivers to maintain a high level of observation when they are operating a motor vehicle, focusing their full concentration on the task of driving.
Although some may suggest this is hard to enforce with current technology, the goal should be to eliminate the "I did not see it" excuse for a collision. It should be reinforced with a lot more training on shoulder checking, mirror checking, and double checking in general. It should also be supported with more signs advising drivers to watch for cyclists, pedestrians, or other types of traffic.
2. A requirement that drivers must always yield to pedestrians and cyclists. In countries where drivers are trained to yield to pedestrians and cyclists, drivers immediately brake and turn to steer clear pedestrians and cyclists, regardless of who they think has the right of way. In Manitoba, drivers hesitate, and sometimes refuse to yield if they think they have the right of way.

Built Environment

Bike Winnipeg recommends that Manitoba revise its road building standards to achieve an environment which encourages engaged driving.

Many roads in Manitoba are designed to make driving easy. Drivers can allow themselves to multitask when they don't feel fully occupied driving. In some other countries, there is so much happening at close quarters on city roads that drivers don't feel they can fiddle with their telephone, GPS, or audio system. Those drivers are focused, because there is a lot to watch out for on the road.

When our roads make driving easy, they give drivers the false perception that they can "multitask". Some leading jurisdictions are modifying road design, narrowing lanes, implementing "road diets", developing "complete streets", creating environments which are more demanding of drivers' attention. We recommend that Manitoba implement such low cost infrastructure modifications to create busier streets, make the streets more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists, and improve flow in existing road corridor space.

If road design facilitates multitasking, limited results can be expected from punitive measures to coerce drivers to change their behaviour. There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that Governments can achieve behaviour change by creating conditions which "nudge" people to do the desired behaviour.

We recommend that Manitoba immediately launch Road Safety pilot projects in collaboration with the City of Winnipeg to test road diets and complete streets in a number of locations to achieve improved driver behaviour and usage of public roadway space. Jurisdictions such as New York City have found that "paint and flower pots" can provide an excellent means of quickly implementing road diets.

Analysis

There are a lot of variables related to distracted driving, and many interesting analyses possible to understand distracted driving. At Bike Winnipeg, we are fortunate to have a team of volunteers with extensive training and experience in multivariate data analysis who would welcome the opportunity to analyze traffic data if it were available to us. There is a trend in many jurisdictions to make government data sets available on the internet without personal identifiers in order to allow researchers outside of government to develop new analyses.

We recommend that the Government make all traffic and collision data sets available for analysis by the public, or at least to academics and active stakeholder organizations.

We also recommend that the Government make available files containing information collected in the investigation of every collision that causes serious injuries or death. Under the present system, this is one of the few jurisdictions where members of the public are unable to learn from such accidents.

Other Road Safety Issues

Beyond issues relating to distracted driving, we offer three recommendations the Province could act on immediately to make roads safer for cyclists:

Safe Passing Distance:

The Highway Traffic Act requires that drivers allow a safe passing distance when they overtake a bicycle. At present, the Act does not define "safe passing distance". As a result, most drivers don't know how much space they should allow. Motor vehicles frequently pass so close that they discourage cyclists from riding in traffic.

This is the most often stated reason for choosing not to cycle in the city. Surveys show that a huge proportion of Winnipeggers would like to cycle, but choose not to because they feel it is not safe.

In Manitoba, with our no fault system, our courts are not developing a common law interpretation of safe passing distance. We need the Province to set the standard.

We strongly recommend that the Government seek all-party consensus to pass the private members' bill that would establish a minimum of one metre as the safe passing distance when overtaking a cyclist. This is a unique opportunity to make an immediate, significant improvement in road safety, and it would be an excellent first step in defining how drivers should behave around cyclists on the road.

Signage

Signs along the roadway provide one of the best ways to educate drivers. Bike Winnipeg recommends that Manitoba join other jurisdictions in eliminating use of "share the road" signs. These signs fail to tell drivers or cyclists what to do, and may be misinterpreted by drivers to mean "cyclists and motor vehicles must share the road, even if there is not enough room in the traffic", or "share the lane".

We recommend they be replaced immediately with signs saying "yield to cyclists", or, where the lanes are narrow, "cyclists may use the full lane". And that the switchover process be accompanied by a campaign to educate drivers about how to drive around cyclists. This too could make a significant contribution toward making Manitoba roads safer for cyclists.

Vision Zero:

A growing number of jurisdictions in Europe and North America are adopting Vision Zero as the framework for road safety. It establishes a government-wide focus on eliminating fatalities and serious injuries caused by roadway collisions. Jurisdictions engaged in vision zero have developed data collecting methodologies designed to understand the causes of fatalities and serious injuries on the road, and remedial measures to change the conditions leading to those causes implemented by a broad range of departments and agencies.

Bike Winnipeg recommends that the Province make a clear policy declaration to establish a Vision Zero program in Manitoba right away. Other jurisdictions have successfully garnered public support and made significant progress in reducing road fatalities and serious injuries by establishing a Vision Zero program.

Health and the Environment

In light of the commitments by Canadian leaders in Paris to reduce carbon emissions, and the growing awareness of costs to the health care system caused by inactive lifestyles, there are significant social and economic beneficial impacts of making roads safer for cyclists for Manitoba. The government must create an environment on our roads that feels safer for cyclists, and build more separated cycling facilities, in order to encourage more people to choose to cycle more often.

Cycling on Highways and rural roads

Bike Winnipeg's mandate is focused on improving cycling conditions in the City of Winnipeg, so as to encourage more Winnipeggers to cycle more often. I have copied this letter to our colleagues at the Manitoba Cycling Association, as they are the organization in the best position to provide you with advice regarding road safety issues affecting cyclists outside the city.

Further collaboration

On behalf of Bike Winnipeg, I congratulate you for taking the lead in road safety in Manitoba. We look forward to ongoing collaboration with you, because road safety is a life and death issue for our members, and a concern for all Manitobans who use the roads.

Yours sincerely,

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