

Safety & Education – 2010-2011 Annual Report

by Dave Elmore

Again this past year we have seen some progress on the safety and education front, but are still a long way from having an effective and sustainable program of cycling safety and skills in Winnipeg. This past year we have submitted another 2 proposals to Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI), the most recent of which may just get funded. On other fronts we are still working on the new educational video which seemed to fall between the cracks at MCA.

What is needed is a sustainable program of cycling safety and skills and this won't happen without funding. The safety of cyclists is constantly talked about, however the solutions are almost always related to infrastructure. While we need to continue to support the development of more and better infrastructure, we cannot lose sight of the fact that cycling skills development is needed. The fact is that it will take billions to develop new infrastructure that would totally separate cyclists from cars and this is not likely to ever happen. Cyclists will always need to use the roads for transportation and education is the key to keeping them safe when they share these spaces with motor vehicles.

With a new majority provincial government with a 4 year mandate, it may be time to push education as a cost efficient way to promote cyclist's safety on the roads. MPI and the City of Winnipeg should also have an interest in the safety of cyclists and if we can convince the 3 parties to actually work together we could move this program forward.

Background

Bike to the Future (BttF) remains committed to the Can-Bike safety and skills program. We currently have limited resources in terms of instructors:

- 3 certified Can-Bike 2 instructors (Dave, Curt, Jeremy)
- 1 Can-Bike 1 instructor (Cara Fisher from the WRENCH)
- 1 Can-Bike National Examiner (Howard Skrpnyk).

The Can-Bike program is fairly extensive and time consuming and so the Safety and Education committee has developed a 3 module course which parallels the Can-Bike theory and practice. The modules are designed to allow cyclists to select a level/course that is appropriate to their skill level and knowledge. The 3 modules include:

- Module 1 - Basic safe cycling & road positioning
- Module 2 - Road positioning and multi-lane, arterial riding
- Module 3 - Understanding and maintaining your bike

These modules have also been piloted twice to groups of Bike to the Future members to confirm their effectiveness. We also developed a 4 hour module designed for new or inexperienced cyclists to learn the basic skills that they need to begin commuting. This has been piloted twice as well through a course offered in the City of Winnipeg Leisure Guide.

Bike to the Future in partnership with Green Action Centre (formerly Resource Conservation Manitoba) and Manitoba Cycling Association (MCA) submitted a proposal to MPI in 2010 to offer a full Adult Cycling Education program. This was discussed at length with MPI but not accepted. MPI went on to hire Bike to the Future (Dave Elmore) to help them develop website content on cycling safety. Since that original proposal BttF has submitted 3 further proposals offering various components of the original proposal and/or specific services that MPI was requesting.

Until recently our efforts have been less than effective in obtaining MPI's support and have in fact been always countered with more specific MPI needs or wants. The most recent proposal was again somewhat based on MPI's needs or wants, however BttF took a firm stand on both what we felt was possible based on our limited resources and feasible based on what we felt could be achieved. Dave Elmore has subsequently met with MPI and we are at this time still awaiting a final decision on this proposal.

The Past Year at a Glance (a long glance)

Provincial government funding was provided back in 2009 for Manitoba Cycling Association (MCA) to develop a Winnipeg specific cycling safety video based on Can-Bike principles. The plan for this video was slow in developing and so has been the actual production. The video has been developed based on 3 to 5 minute segments which parallel the Can-Bike 2 training course. At this point we have received the draft segments and several have been reviewed and comments provided. Unfortunately even the review of the video segment has been slow in developing and so there is still much to do. Based on current reviews the video work also needs significant work as there are numerous areas that are not well represented by the video footage. Recently MCA has once again renewed its commitment to the video and will be working towards completion in the spring of 2012. This will of course depend on BttF's volunteer commitment to the review of the current draft video and providing needed cyclists for new video footage come spring

Once again this past spring BttF provided a cycling skills course as part of the 2011 Leisure Guide. The City appears at this point to be happy with our initial pilot program and in fact approached MCA/BttF to provide the 2011 courses. Courses were scheduled for the spring and fall, however again the fall courses were cancelled due lack of registration. While the Leisure Guide receives wide distribution, the placement of the program in the guide remains poor. Feedback from those that attended the course was very positive, however the stumbling block appears to be a lack of Winnipeggers knowing that the program exists.

During the summer of 2011, MPI developed a cycling safety handbook. This was initially developed by their communications people based on the web content without any consultation with BttF. Fortunately prior to its distribution MPI contacted BttF and through a detailed review avoided numerous errors and some omissions. Unfortunately MPI had already made a decision as to the length of the document and as such some information that BttF felt was important for clarification was not included. In the end however the final document was a reasonable compromise and certainly useful for those cyclists that actually read the information included. The booklet was to be distributed through bike shops etc, however it is not known exactly how these were distributed or how many were in fact distributed.

MPI also had their communications staff develop a cycling safety training presentation and trainer information package based on their website information. These were developed without consultation with BttF or any other Can-Bike instructors. Based on a cursory review they are lacking in both content and accuracy. These packages have already been distributed to schools throughout the province and thus our input at this point may be of little use. We were recently provided with a copy of the content and given time we will review it. The key issue here is consistency with Can-Bike theory. MPI indicates that they hope to use this as part of a training package that can be distributed to "workplace champions" so that they can then provide education to staff. This ties to the proposal and potential funding that Bike to the Future may receive to develop additional Can-Bike instructors. (see below)

Based on MPI's desire to develop the "workplace champions" and several meetings with MPI management, BttF submitted a proposal to develop instructors that could train these so called champions. We were successful in convincing MPI that these individuals would need to be trained before they could be effective at delivering training themselves within their workplace. Based on this BttF submitted another proposal to train 12 new Can-Bike 2 riders (Can-Bike 1 instructors). The intent was that these new instructors along with the current resources could be used to provide the needed training. As part of this proposal BttF would also develop a roughly 8 hour cycling skills program that would be delivered to "workplace champions" through a program run by MPI. MPI would be solely responsible for finding the workplace champions, negotiating with Can-Bike instructors for their time/services, and coordinating the training. We would only develop 12 new instructors and the course content for them to deliver.

MPI subsequently responded asking that BttF take on the training of 60 Can-Bike 2 riders. The BttF Safety and Education Committee reviewed this request and it was decided that we did not have the time/resources to take this on and so we declined and resubmitted a revised proposal based largely on the original proposal to train 12 instructors. We met with MPI recently to clarify some of the specifics and are awaiting their response. While the development of workplace champions is a long way from what we would like to see (or what is really needed) it does allow us to develop some additional resources should a program of education move forward in the future. A baby step, but a step none the less!

The Safety Committee for Active Transportation (SCAT) has spent the better part of the last year developing key messaging related to the safe use of the new infrastructure in Winnipeg. SCAT hired Jeremy Hull and Cara Fisher to develop an initial document detailing the information needed. SCAT has then spent a ridiculous amount of time trying to massage this information into key messaging that can be accepted/adopted by all. The committee to a large extent is made of various levels/departments of government and so things move horribly slow. Now that this document is in its final stages, we are moving onto a broader task, cycling education (cyclists and drivers) and how it could/should be done.

Going Forward

Winnipeg has seen a somewhat unprecedented growth of its active transportation infrastructure in the last couple of years. BttF of course wants to see this continue, however realistically we are not going to see this kind of development or funding again any time soon. We continue to see growing numbers of cyclists on City of Winnipeg streets and paths and this trend will likely continue. So too will the need for educating cyclists and motorists on how to co-exist on the roads.

The importance of education always seems overshadowed by infrastructure when it comes to discussing cyclist's safety. The need for education appears understood, however because it lacks the appeal and newsworthy nature of new infrastructure, it sees little if any real support from the City, Province or MPI decision makers. BttF has always been committed to making cycling skills training available to Winnipeggers, however we need to do more to promote its development. We need to raise the profile of cycling safety education from the background to the forefront.

We need to continue to push for funding to support such a program. The fact is that without financial support, we will never have a sustainable program. All levels of government should be interested in this and we need to help them understand the importance. Regardless of how the City, Province or MPI portray themselves, it is abundantly clear that it will be a significant challenge to get them to work together. In the past year:

- MPI has developed it's website content, cycling safety handbook, and school training manual/program
- The City has undertaken a campaign to promote the new infrastructure
- The Province has done nothing

All of this was done without any real collaboration. They are all headed in their own separate directions and clearly don't want to share the spotlight (good or bad) on anything they achieve. We need to bring them together to help us take cycling education beyond the passive informational campaigns that bureaucratic organizations are famous for. We need to lobby the provincial government to get involved and try to get MPI, the City, and other possible partners to the table as well.

In the meantime we will continue to provide courses in the spring through the City of Winnipeg Leisure Guide. Our current plan is to expand and extend our offerings (assuming that the MPI proposal is accepted and we can expand our resources) to different levels and other areas of the city. Course content is currently being developed so that we can offer both a beginners course and a commuters (intermediate level) course. The beginners course would include only a minor amount of content related to riding on busier streets while the commuter course would aim to provide participants the skills they need to ride confidently on busier streets. As the Leisure Guide courses are not well promoted by the city, BttF will have to work on developing a strategy to make Winnipeggers aware that these courses are being offered.

Should MPI come through with the funding to develop additional resources we will undertake this as well, however the time required to run these courses in the spring of 2012 could thwart efforts to expand the reach of the Leisure Guide courses. Our current limitation is our limited resources and so clearly this program would have to take precedence over the Leisure Guide courses.