



Bike to the Future

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April 3, 2012

Premier of Manitoba, Greg Selinger
Minister responsible for Active Transportation, Ron Lemieux
Minister of Conservation, Gord Mackintosh
Minister of Education, Nancy Allan
Minister of Healthy Living, Jim Rondeau
Minister of Health, Theresa Oswald
Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, Steve Ashton
Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Flor Marcelino
Minister responsible for Manitoba Public Insurance, Andrew Swan

118 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Premier and Ministers:

On January 12, the Minister of Conservation (Dave Chomiak) wrote to the Chair of the Active Transportation Advisory Group (ATAG), Janice Lukes, thanking the group for its work in producing the report *Taking Strides: Taking Action on Active Transportation* http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/pdf/atag_report6.pdf. The letter stated that the Government is looking at developing a provincial Active Transportation policy to support and encourage AT, appointing a provincial director responsible for AT and establishing an on-going stakeholder advisory committee.

On February 13, my MLA, James Allum, confirmed by email that Minister Lemieux is responsible for Active Transportation issues. Bike to the Future has a meeting scheduled for April 16 with the Minister.

On March 19, news media reported that Provincial Healthy Living Minister Jim Rondeau was seriously considering introducing an amendment to the *Highway Traffic Act* that would make it an offence for cyclists who do not wear helmets.

On March 21, we received a letter from the Premier advising us that Minister Lemieux is the lead Minister for coordinating the implementation of the Government's commitment to move forward on key recommendation in the ATAG report.

On March 23, Bike to the Future received an email from the Director of Legislative and Regulatory Services Branch of Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation inviting Bike to the Future to a discussion on April 4 about amending the *Highway Traffic Act* to make it an offence for cyclists to bicycle while operating electronic devices at the same time.

I am writing on behalf of Bike to the Future.

We are concerned that while the Government of Manitoba publicly muses about imposing new laws and tickets on cyclists, it makes no such public statements about other ways to protect the safety of cyclists, and to promote the health benefits of cycling. We are concerned about the numerous Ministers who seem to have some responsibility for cycling-related issues and the apparent lack of focused attention this represents.

Getting more people to cycle more often saves the Government money and supports local businesses.

Getting more people to cycle more often is one of the best possible ways to improve the fitness of all Manitobans and to reduce the public health risks and very real costs associated with a population that is not active.

Getting more people to cycle more often reduces wear and tear on our streets and roads, thus saving very real infrastructure costs.

Getting more people to cycle more often reduces the amount of money that Manitobans send to foreign oil companies and increases the amount of money they are able to spend on local businesses.

Making cycling more desirable in Manitoba will increase tourism – both from out of province and “stay-cations”.

We believe the Government should be asking, to echo the words of the Minister of Conservation in his letter of January 12, “what can we do to support and encourage AT” and “what measures are most likely to promote safety for cyclists”?

Bike to the Future has neither formally called for nor opposed calls for mandatory helmet legislation. Bike to the Future knows that a person who hits their head (in any context) will be safer if they are wearing a helmet than those who do not. We suspect that data would show that we would reduce far more head injuries if occupants of motor vehicles were required by law to wear helmets than if cyclists are required to. Has the Government carefully reviewed the research here: <http://www.cyclehelmets.org/> and here: <http://www.sharetheroad.ca/research-s11714> and here: <http://www.cyclehelmets.org/papers/c2014.pdf> ?

Wearing a bike helmet is an important way for cyclists to take responsibility for their own safety, as is wearing bright clothes during daytime, reflective clothes at night and ensuring there is a front and back light on bicycles. Bike to the Future encourages cyclists of all ages to wear helmets and supports any efforts to educate cyclists of the benefits of wearing helmets, having properly equipped bicycles and making themselves visible to motorists. Bike to the Future would support any initiative by the Government to implement cycling education in the grade school curriculum and to promote school cycling excursions.

At the same time, Bike to the Future is aware that some people are concerned that mandatory bike helmet laws could have the effect of discouraging potential cyclists, could imply that bicycling is inherently dangerous and something to be afraid of, could impose extra costs on low-income cyclists and that most jurisdictions have not enacted such a law. It is interesting to bicycle in European countries where many thousands of cyclists ride happily and safely without helmets every day.

Go to any city where cycling is a major part of the transportation culture, and especially those cities that have bike-sharing programs: you will find more bike lanes, more dedicated bike paths, more people cycling and many people cycling without bike helmets. Bike-sharing programs are intended for a population that is allowed the freedom to choose to ride a bike on an impulse, without having pre-planned by bringing their helmet from home and without carrying a bike helmet around with them just in case they decide to bike from point A to point B by bicycle. Has the Manitoba Government considered the impact of mandatory helmet legislation on potential bike-sharing programs in Manitoba?

Bike to the Future asks if the Government of Manitoba's primary concern is for cyclists' safety and promoting public health then:

- What is the Government doing to create more bike paths to keep cyclists and motor vehicles separated from each other?
- What is the Government doing to promote reduced speed limits (30 km/hr) on residential streets, bike boulevards and designated bike routes?
- What is the Government doing to plan and promote safe routes for school children to take to school? See www.saferoutestoschool.ca.
- What is the Government doing to implement cycling education and cycling excursions in grade schools?
- Will the Government make it mandatory that driver education courses include a segment on driving safely in proximity to cyclists?
- Will the Government introduce "share the road" license plates as many other jurisdictions in North America have done?
- What is the Government doing to promote cycling in Manitoba through Tourism Manitoba, creating a web site dedicated to informing people about the best and safest places and routes to cycle in Manitoba, and promoting cycling in Manitoba's various fairs, festivals and trade shows throughout the year?
- Will the Government adopt a formal policy requiring it to analyze opportunities and impacts for active transportation associated with every new infrastructure project (such as CentrePort)?
- When will the Government announce concrete action to implement the June 2011 report of the Provincial Active Transportation Advisory Group: [*Greater Strides: Taking Action on Active Transportation?*](#)
- Will the Government amend the *Highway Traffic Act* to define what "passing at a safe distance" means? Twenty jurisdictions in North America have enacted legislation to define a safe distance as being at least one metre (three feet) away from the cyclist.
- Will the Government amend the *Highway Traffic Act* to expressly require motorists to take cyclists into account and drive with due caution, care and attention when around cyclists? There is an express requirement in the Act for cyclists and pedestrians to take with due caution, care and attention when entering, crossing or proceeding into traffic but no similar express requirement for motorists in relation to cyclists.
- Will the Government amend the *Highway Traffic Act* to clarify that the requirement of riding as close to the curb as practicable allows cyclists to ride a safe distance away from the curb (at least one metre from the curb) and to allow the cyclist to ride in a manner that makes the cyclist visible and predictable for motorists (rather than weaving towards and away from the curb as hazards, including parked cars, present themselves)?

The Government of Manitoba must not make the mistake of framing the question of public health and cycling as being limited to bike helmets and handheld devices. There are other ways to promote public health and cycling which potentially will have much greater impact. The above list has items that relate to the responsibilities of each of the Ministers to whom we are sending this letter.

Bike to the Future is very pleased to read that the Government of Manitoba is concerned about the safety of cyclists. We ask our Government to take a full look at what legislative, policy, and infrastructure changes may be desirable to promote greater public health and safe cycling on Manitoba streets and roads.

Tom McMahon
Bike to the Future, Co-chair
biketothefuture.org