



Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
Office régional de la santé de Winnipeg
Caring for Health À l'écoute de notre santé

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May 17, 2012

Tom McMahan
Co-Chair, Bike to the Future
3rd Floor – 303 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg MB R3B 2B4

Dear Mr. McMahan,

Thank you for your letter dated May 9th regarding promoting safe cycling. We are pleased to hear that we share a common goal of promoting safe cycling and that you welcome efforts to work together with the WRHA on these issues.

As you identify in your letter, the WRHA is responsible for the treatment and rehabilitation of cycling-related head injuries and is committed to reducing the risk of brain injury in cyclists. Helmets are one of the research-proven strategies to do this, and are always promoted in the context of a multi-pronged approach including driver and cyclist education, engineering and environment strategies (e.g. traffic calming, infrastructure improvements), and enforcement of road safety legislation. The WRHA Injury Prevention Program (IMPACT) has been reviewing historical and emerging evidence in this area for almost two decades, and in particular have monitored evidence regarding effective interventions, ridership and companionship (i.e. the impact of helmet use on cycling companions). In summary, the strongest impact on injury reduction has been found with helmet legislation, in jurisdictions with comprehensive safe cycling programs. There is no evidence to support that ridership has decreased in North America where helmet laws have been introduced, and there is strong evidence that helmet use in children is significantly influenced by the helmet use/nonuse of adults they are cycling with. There is also growing evidence that all ages legislation is associated with the highest rates of helmet use and the lowest rates of hospitalization for cycling-related head injuries. Head injuries, as compared to other cycling injuries, have a much higher rate of disability (physical, cognitive, and behavioural) and death, and require every strategy to be maximized, including helmet use.

However, as summarized in our safe cycling position statement, we also promote cycling for its many health benefits, and we have supported a broad approach to safe cycling for many years, including supporting active transportation, advocating for infrastructure improvements and strategies targeting speed reduction, driver and cyclist training and education. In the 1990s IMPACT co-chaired a Winnipeg safe cycling committee which developed a broad safe cycling strategy, and since then have had the opportunity to work with many community partners including Bike to the Future on a variety of initiatives, including advocacy for active transportation and substantial infrastructure funding. More recently, we have been co-chairing the Safety Committee for Active Transportation (SCAT), which has been addressing many of the issues you identify in your letter. Bike to the Future members have contributed to these discussion and to the key messages document now being finalized. Just last week one of the region's e-newsletters for employees featured several items on cycling promotion, and a number of upcoming cycling events are posted on the WRHA community calendar and Winnipeg *in motion* websites. Of note, BITF is one of the only links on our ride2win.ca website, on the page "for families" which promotes cycling and links to Winnipeg cycling routes and paths.

You will be pleased to hear that we have already sent a letter to Minister Ashton regarding the recent

bill introduced to allow municipalities to lower speed limits in school zones. Our position is that a broader approach to speed reduction would be more effective, including school and playground zones, as well as consideration of a reduced residential speed limit of 40km/hr. These measures have been shown to be most effective when combined with traffic calming measures.

We also support the definition of a “safe passing distance” as a minimum of 1m. While we have not been able to identify published research that evaluates the impact on injuries or collisions, many North American jurisdictions have successfully implemented these laws. This strategy is consistent with evidence that separation of cyclists and vehicles (in this case, by a 1m distance) is one of the more effective strategies for reducing collisions. This would also facilitate driver education and behaviour change, by providing clarity on the definition of a safe passing distance.

We hope that Bike to the Future will continue to advocate for safer cycling, and we will endeavor to work together with your members on these issues, toward the common goals of cycling promotion and reduced cycling-related injuries.

Sincerely,



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Cc Ron Lemieux, Minister responsible for Active Transportation
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Kevin Chief, Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities
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Mr. Mark Robertson, Director, Healthy Living & Populations, Manitoba Healthy Living,
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Jason Carter, President, Manitoba Cycling Association
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