

Why not Winnipeg?

Report from a forum held October 15, 2008 at the University of Winnipeg

Bike to the Future
biketothefuture.org



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Introduction

Bike to the Future's third annual Fall Forum, held at the University of Winnipeg's Bulman Centre on Wednesday, October 15, capped off another stellar year for the volunteer organization that advocates for commuter cycling rights in Winnipeg. We organized a wildly successful Bike to Work Day and celebrated two key infrastructure initiatives: the upcoming Bus Rapid Transit corridor from Queen Elizabeth Way to the University of Manitoba that will include bike paths alongside brand-new busways; and the soon-to-be-built bike and pedestrian-only bridge near the Disraeli Freeway.

But we want to keep up the momentum, and make sure our local leaders know that we're serious about continuing to advocate for commuter cyclists. To that end, we invited four key civic decision-makers to sit on a panel at our third annual fall forum, and asked the mayor to speak directly to our members and supporters. We're extremely pleased that Sam Katz and other high-level guests joined us for the evening to share their opinions and best wishes.



New members of Bike to the Future

But the panel and the mayor's speech were just two of the items on our packed agenda. Before the panel, we showed a series of short videos that illustrate unique cycling initiatives in other cities. As well, a group of local actors entertained the crowd with an original sketch that imagined the origins of cycling projects in Winnipeg. After the panel, we all broke out into small groups to debate and discuss of issues that are important to city cyclists.

As well, Bike to the Future sold dozens of popular new T-shirts with our slogan on the front and the words "Share the Road" on the back. We signed up new members and invited like-minded organizations and individuals to set up information tables at the event. Everyone who came enjoyed tasty snacks and desserts from a local grocer.

Roughly two hundred people attended the forum, our biggest crowd ever, and according to evaluation surveys that we passed out at the end of the night, the evening was considered a success. We're pleased to share this report, which summarizes the views and ideas expressed by panelists as well as break-out group members.

Greetings from the mayor

The first guest to speak at the forum was Winnipeg’s mayor, Sam Katz. He expressed his excitement at seeing so many people who are passionate about cycling in the city. After listing some of Winnipeg’s recent announcements regarding cycling (including the Bus Rapid Transit plan and the Disraeli bridge project), he said he wished that past city planners had done a better job incorporating cycling routes into Winnipeg’s infrastructure. He assured everyone at the forum that improving infrastructure is one of his top priorities, and that he and his administration are eager to listen to – and act on – cyclists’ ideas and concerns. Katz finished his speech by encouraging Bike to the Future to continue speaking out at City Hall.



Mayor Sam Katz giving an introduction

“Why Not Winnipeg?” Panel

After the mayor spoke, a trio of actors performed a short comedy sketch, then the audience watched four “visionary videos” about how the need for better cycling infrastructure is revolutionizing other cities. Topics included a valet parking service for bikes at Giants games in San Francisco, and a so-called “bike box” at traffic lights that allows cyclists to get a head start on cars. Perhaps the most interesting video focused on “bike boulevards” in Berkeley, California. It described how designated bike routes have been transformed over time into a system of bicycle-friendly streets that make people feel comfortable cycling around the city. The videos created a noticeable buzz among the audience.

After the videos, local reporter Bartley Kives arrived to moderate a panel discussion with four city decision-makers:

Marilyn McLaren, President and CEO of Manitoba Public Insurance;
Kerri Irvin-Ross, Minister of Healthy Living;
Justin Swandel, Deputy Mayor;
Staff Sergeant Mark Hodgson, Winnipeg Police Service

The theme for the panel was “Why not Winnipeg?” and thanks to some great questions supplied by Bike to the Future members and supporters, the panelists explained their positions on everything from traffic laws to bike-only lanes. At the end of the panel, Councillor Swandel summed it up by saying it was a great opportunity to learn how much Winnipeggers care about the issue of commuter cycling.

Here’s a summary of the fast-paced question-and-answer session.

Do you ride your bike to work? If not, why not?

McLaren: Rides her bike to work at least three times a week when the weather is good.

Hodgson: Doesn’t ride his bike to work due to an active, busy family life.

Swandel: He lives in St. Norbert, which is a long commute to City Hall. Plus, it would mean riding down Pembina Highway, which he considers too dangerous.

Irvin-Ross: Doesn’t ride her bike due to being too “fearful” of cars on the road. But she’s committed to doing the CAN-BIKE program next spring, and wants to overcome her apprehensions about commuter cycling.

What can Winnipeg do to make cycling a more viable transportation option for its citizens?

Swandel: After listing some recent bike projects, he said that politicians should continue engaging with community groups like Bike to the Future and the Winnipeg Trails Association.

McLaren: She admitted that MPI doesn’t do much for cyclists, since its priority is insuring cars and drivers. “Right now we don’t have the answers,” she said. But then she joked, “Send back your rebate cheques and we’ll put it towards cycling.”

Irvin-Ross: She said the province is making cycling a priority, especially when it comes to connecting existing trails, paths and routes. Education and encouragement are key, she added. Also, she said the province should continue working with organizations like Bike to the Future to make specific cycling-friendly changes to the Highway Traffic Act (HTA).

The Manitoba Highway Traffic Act has a number of references to bicycles that cover rules for driving on roads, passing, riding on sidewalks, required lights and reflectors, and other matters. The Highway Traffic Act is available from <http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/ho60e.php>. A summary of the Act as it relates to bicycles can be found on the Bike to the Future site: <http://biketothefuture.org>.

Hodgson: Education and law enforcement are the two main tools of the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS), he said, and the cops' bicycle unit is more accessible than ever.

What role do you believe we have in teaching HTA rules to cyclists?

Hodgson: The WPS's bike unit conducts education and safety seminars in schools.

Swandel: Public education is key, especially public service announcements. He said the city should work directly with the WPS to create more education programs.

Irvin-Ross: Agreed that public service announcements are important, also reminded everyone that 44,000 low-cost bike helmets were recently distributed to schoolchildren across Manitoba. As well, Irvin-Ross said that the province should continue to make sure that car drivers understand that cyclists have the right to use the road, too.

McLaren: MPI helped create the share-the-road program that teaches drivers to respect cyclists. It also supports the CAN-BIKE program. San Francisco has a culture of private bike trainers who teach people how to be confident commuter cyclists, she said, adding that MPI should support entrepreneurs who start classes like that.

If the bus rapid transit project from Queen Elizabeth Way to the U of M isn't complete until 2015, cyclists will have to keep competing with car traffic on Pembina Highway until then. Is there a safe cycling alternative in the meantime?

Swandel: There's no easy solution, except for adding diamond lanes to Pembina Highway. He noted that the sidewalks along that thoroughfare are wide and could be used as bike lanes, but only one side of the road at a time, and only if pedestrians are adequately accommodated. He suggested that the city could inquire about developing trails along the Red River, but it would involve expropriating private property and spending a lot of money to stabilize the river bank. Finally, he said he liked the idea of bike boulevards as illustrated in one of the visionary videos, and would consider that as an option for Pembina Highway.



Moderator Bartley Kives posing the panelists a question

Do the police have an alternative to ticketing cyclists who ride on sidewalks attached to bridges and underpasses, as a result of being scared of dangerous car traffic there?

Hodgson: The HTA makes it pretty clear that sidewalks are for pedestrians, not bikes. However, he said that cops are discretionary about when they hand out tickets, and suggested that cops don't target cyclists on sidewalks as long as they're not threatening to pedestrians. As for changes to the HTA to accommodate cycling on certain sidewalks, he said he would leave that up to politicians.

Has the province ever considered amending the highway traffic act to make it more cycling-friendly?

Irvin-Ross: There is a committee that studies proposed changes to the HTA on an ongoing basis. The committee considers how to keep cyclists and sidewalks safe.

In Minneapolis, the municipal government pays for 50% of the cost of bike racks in front of businesses, as long as those businesses cover the other half. Would Winnipeg consider the same idea?

Swandel: Under new zoning bylaws, new businesses are required to provide a certain number of parking spots for bikes.

Driver training is supposed to include information about cycling safety, but there's very little info in the student handbook and nothing for on-the-road training. Are new drivers being adequately prepared to navigate the same roads as bikes?

McLaren: The high school curriculum is adequate, but it might not be taught in a consistent manner across the province. She said that most motorists aren't cyclists, so they can't visualize what it's like to be on a bike. However, she said that young people are the most likely ones to use both modes of transportation – car and bike – so they are primed for the message. MPI needs to make sure they get it.

Instead of giving traffic fines to cyclists, would it be possible to force them to take a safer cycling workshop, instead?

Hodgson: Giving tickets to cyclists isn't a high priority for police. He noted that cyclists make up 0.7% of road users, as well as 0.7% of all traffic ticket recipients, so he feels that enforcement for both cars and bikes is proportional.

Swandel: Judges might be willing to do that, but the city doesn't make changes to provincial laws.

Irvin-Ross: Enforcement is important but education is the province's top priority. She said that the province would continue to use the carrot approach, rather than the stick approach, to enforce cycling laws.

Would the Manitoba government consider creating a map of bike routes across the province?

Irvin-Ross: She said it's a great idea and would pass it on to Ron Lemieux, the province's minister of transportation.

Do you feel safe when riding on a sharrow?

Swandel: Sharrows help educate drivers, he said, but he doesn't feel safe on them. He said he would consider the possibility of bike boulevards, like the kind that will be unveiled soon on Assiniboine Avenue (near the Manitoba Legislature).

Many other cities are committed to making commuter cycling a top priority. Why not Winnipeg?

Irvin-Ross: There is a group of people at the provincial level who are constantly reviewing what's happening in other jurisdictions. She said cycling will be a top priority when all the stakeholders (including the ones on the panel) work together.

Swandel: He urged everyone to look at the city's capital budget, which is providing \$3.2 million for active transportation programs in the next year. He said it won't be long before Winnipeggers are celebrating our city as one of the most cycling-friendly in the country.

McLaren: She said she is proud to live in a province that is committed to Kyoto targets, and said that sharrows are worth it because it helps imprint in motorists' minds that bikes belong on the road, too.

Break-Out Groups – Key Points And Recommendations

After the panel, forum participants enjoyed a 15-minute break to meet each other and talk informally about cycling issues. Then everyone broke out into nine pre-defined groups to share specific ideas about bike-related topics. Here are the key points that were discussed in each Breakout Group.

Winnipeg Transit

Bike racks on buses are a great idea. The idea should be expanded beyond buses on the #60 Pembina route.

If Winnipeg Transit expands its service beyond the perimeter (to East St. Paul and Birds Hill Park, for instance) it should consider ways to put bike racks on those buses, too. Current bike racks are considered unsafe for highway use.

Winnipeg Transit should create an awareness campaign that teaches cyclists how to put their bikes on the racks.

Diamond lanes should only be considered a temporary measure to speed the flow of bikes and buses, since those two types of vehicles together in the same lane are a potentially dangerous combination.

Winnipeg's Park n' Ride lots, including the soon-to-be-opened one at the Hydro Building on Taylor Avenue, should feature fully-enclosed bike lockers. Preferably, the bike lockers should have a double-locking system that includes a U-lock inside the locker. The group facilitator, Jonathan Borland of Winnipeg Transit, said that the city would be testing out two bike lockers in the near future, one at Confusion Corner and one at St. Vital Centre.



A bike rack on a Winnipeg Transit bus

Protecting your asset (preventing bike theft)

The cyclists in this breakout group said they would be willing to pay a modest fee for security guards to watch bikes at places like the Forks.

Valet parking for bikes (like the type illustrated in the visionary videos) is also a great idea, especially for destinations like CanWest Park, CanadInns Stadium and the University of Manitoba.

New schools and workplaces should build indoor areas for bike parking.

More parking poles are needed downtown, now that new parking meters have been installed.

Local businesses should start encouraging cyclists to bring their bikes inside, rather than parking them outside.

Winnipeg should consider 50/50 cost-sharing for bike racks with new businesses, like Minneapolis does.

Bike vendors should do a better job educating the public about what types of locks to buy.

Back to basics (bike mechanics)

If you're buying a bike for the first time, consider getting one from a thrift store. That way you can see what you like before you invest in a new one. Just make sure none of the parts have been seized (like seatposts and the stem).

In order to winterize your bike, get rid of the gears, because they collect dirt and wear out quickly.

For winter riding, get an easier gear ratio, due to slower riding conditions. Also: Put on wider, knobbier tires. Don't brake hard on the ice and don't make sharp turns.

Sealed cartridge bearings are a good idea.

In order to keep your bike up to speed, lube your chain regularly and keep the tire pressure up.



Don't become a stat (bike safety)

If certain changes are made to the HTA, cycling could be safer. For instance: Legislating how much road space drivers should allow for cyclists.

There should be more public awareness campaigns to teach people about HTA rules, maybe included with mailouts like hydro and water bills.

MPI's driver testing handbook only includes one page on cycling and that's not good enough. Many people in the group felt that driver training instructors fail to teach their student drivers how to deal with bikes on the road.

The group acknowledged that up to 2/3 of all car-bike collisions can be at least partly attributed to cyclists riding on sidewalks, passing on the right and breaking other rules of the road. Cyclists and motorists should be taught (through programs like CAN-BIKE) that cyclists are safest when they're treated like other vehicles on the road.

Cyclists should make themselves more visible with bright clothing during the day and reflective material at night, with lights on the back and front of their bikes.



In the sharrow lane?

Sharrows should be a temporary way to publicize cyclist/motorist partnership, not a permanent solution to the lack of bike lanes in Winnipeg.

More work needs to be done to determine how sharrows can be effective if cars are parked on them.

Some people feel that sharrow symbols should be painted in the middle of the road, not by the side of the road.

Sharrow-painters should look for dangerous pavement breaks before creating sharrows (because of liability reasons).

In winter, the city should clear sharrow lanes first because it's also a potential liability issue.

Bike boulevards (like the kind shown in the visionary videos) should be created but we need to make sure they're done right – and then used.

Bike boulevards should be mapped so that the public knows where they are. Highest priority for bike boulevards should be high-usage routes. Skateboards should be allowed on bike boulevards, too.

Wide sidewalks like the ones on Pembina Highway should be used (at least partly) as bike lanes.

Why not Winnipeg?

Partnering with the province

MPI should consider re-testing drivers to raise their awareness and understanding of cyclists.

The Manitoba government should give specific grants to cities like Winnipeg for cycling endeavours, with specific details on how the money should be spent. In order to maintain transparency, information about the funding agreements should be available to the public.

When advocating for cycling initiatives to the province, we need to make sure we're targeting the right minister. Ask opposition politicians what their party is doing to influence the government on cycling issues. Thank the government when it does something good for cyclists. Develop good relationships with civil servants because change can happen from bottom-up rather than top-down.

Bike trails and routes

In order to create better bike routes, we need to name them and improve signage. Maybe the new names should be incorporated into existing street signs. Also needed: wider streets and curb lanes; more direct routes that are connected to each other; and safe crossings where cyclists don't have to dismount.

Cycling maps should be improved by adding distances to major destinations; numbering routes; providing safe cycling tips; identifying traffic speeds and separate lanes; and providing textboxes. If possible, cycling maps should also be weatherproof.

Cycling evangelism (how to promote cycling)

Visual presentations have a significant educational impact and should be used whenever possible. For instance, at Lunch & Learns in the downtown area where there are numerous people working in office buildings.

Develop a 12-step program to help people become commuter cyclists.

Target drivers with a pro-cycling bumper sticker campaign.

Rules of engagement (cyclists and the law)

Cyclists should take some ownership of enforcement of the road, and as such we should be responsible for educating each other.

A clearer understanding of the HTA for both police and cyclists was noted as an area of need.

The Osborne Bridge incident, and safety on these structures in general, was a topic of discussion. An officer in the group suggested that there is clear signage encouraging cyclists to dismount for that short period. The infrastructure deficit was noted, and most agreed that proper infrastructure would be a better long-term solution to ticketing cyclists who ride on bridge sidewalks.

The Arlington bridge was brought up as an example of a bad situation for cyclists, as there is little shoulder, suffocating guardrails, and one lane of traffic each way. It was asked how police could make people safer in these situations, and the officer said it was up to each individual officer to use their discretion - there is no specific policy about bicycle safety in the Winnipeg Police Service. This was viewed as problematic by most of the cyclists, and frustration was expressed at having a law that was to be interpreted by both parties.

The officer in attendance stated that he has pulled over cars for being unsafe around bicycles, but admitted it would be hard to 'stake out' that kind of activity, as police would have to observe a specific time when a bicycle was passing by and a car passed unsafely.



The officer in attendance admitted that there were only eight bicycle police officers in the whole city, and they were only active between the months of March and October. Group members felt that this was totally inadequate, and this led into a point about how bicycle police are useful for more than just enforcing laws on cyclists, but could also have a more 'on the street' presence when on patrol.

The question was raised of who cyclists can contact in the police department when they want to report a problem. They were directed by the officer in attendance to two routes: Community office in the specific area and, if it's an incident with a motorist, record as much info as possible and take it to the community office where a charge can be laid with your testimony. Many people stated that they have not had success with this route.



Thank you

Volunteers gave hundreds of hours. Thanks to Todd Andres, Jackie Avent, Jen Beirnes, Cory Bellhouse, Jonathon Borland, Janice Briggs, Ron Brown, Caroline, Claire, Mark Cohoe, Rob Cosco, Fanny Drouet, Dave Elmore, Don English, Liz Erickson, Mary Fisher-Smith, Matt Gemmel, Ken Gerrard, Ben Goldstein, Toby Hughes, Curt Hull, Jeremy Hull, Tim Hunt, Bartley Kives, Jessie Klassen, Karen Kliever, Kathy Knowles, Mark Loepky, Janice Lukes, Beth McKechnie, Coral Maloney, Kevin Miller, Orla Nazarko, Bev Peters, Holly Poklitar, Debbie Shkolny, Howard Skrypnyk, Jared Spier, Anders Swanson, Roger Suss, Anna Weir, and Anna Zonneveld.

Thank you to the panelists and the mayor for participating, to Bartley Kives for moderating, to our major sponsor Manitoba Conservation who provided a \$5,000 grant under the Sustainable Development Initiatives Fund and to the University of Winnipeg who provided the facilities.

For sponsorship, prizes, and donations, thank you to the Heart & Stroke Foundation, Manitoba Healthy Living, Full Contact Sports, Mountain Equipment Coop, the Winnipeg Trails Association, the Manitoba Medical Association, Resource Conservation Manitoba, Mike Carroll of the Winnipeg Free Press, Anders Swanson, and Wheely Green.

Infrastructure examples

Following are examples of the many sorts of bicycle infrastructure found in other cities around the world.

Mini traffic circles

Traffic Circles force motorized traffic to slow down, and can be used in place of a stop sign.



Photo by Richard Drdul



Slower speeds mean fewer accidents, fewer injuries, and fewer fatalities

Scott Street
Victoria, BC

Photo by John Luton



Cost: \$150,000+

Vancouver, BC

Photo by John Luton

Reducing traffic on bicycle boulevards

Reducing traffic volume makes a street more comfortable and appealing for cyclists.



Full diagonal diverter stops through traffic, but allows pedestrians and cyclists to continue.

Photo by Richard Drdul



Right turn in, right turn out: includes gaps for pedestrians and cyclists

Photo by Richard Drdul



Semi-diverter prevents through traffic or right turns

Photo by Richard Drdul



Diverter at crossroads restricts through traffic and left turns

Intersection pavement markings



Hook turn

Burrard Street
Vancouver, BC

Photo by John Luton



Left turn bike lanes connect
bike route along jog in route

Photo by Richard Drdul



In-line bike box makes left
turns easier

Photo by Richard Drdul



Bike-activated traffic signal

Photo by Richard Drdul

Raised bike lanes



Berlin, Germany



Carral Street
Downtown Vancouver, BC

Photos by John Luton



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Multi-use path intersections



Raised crossing at yield

Photo by Richard Drdul



Mid-block crossing, raised with medians

Photo by Richard Drdul



Mid-block crossing, offset at median

Photo by Richard Drdul



Waterfront trail transition to roadway

Vancouver, BC

Photo by John Luton

Grade-separated crossings



Pedestrian/bicycle overpass

Portland, Oregon

Photo by John Luton



Underpass beneath arterial road

Davis, California

Photo by Jeff Tolentino



Spiral ramp bridge crosses highway

Route Verte, Quebec



Galloping Goose Trail

Greater Victoria, BC

Photo by John Luton

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Separated bike lanes



Separated bike lane next to parking

Melbourne, Australia



Contra-flow bike lane

Madison, Wisconsin



Separated bike lane

9th Avenue

New York, New York



Separated bike lane

Rue Maisonneuve

Montréal, QC

Photo by John S. Allen

Bike lanes



Bike lane next to parking

Naito Parkway
Portland, Oregon

Photo by John Luton



Bike lane on congested street

Finlayson Street
Victoria, BC

Photo by John Luton



Bike lane next to parking

Glasgow, Scotland



Bike lane next to parking

Fort Street
Victoria, BC

Photo by John Luton

Why not Winnipeg?

See you next year!

Manitoba 

