

COMMENTS FROM NEWMARKET EAGLES CC (NECC) ON SHARE THE ROAD's (StR) STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL PLAN

1. METHODOLOGY

NECC had 252 members in 2010. Members mostly reside in the northern part of the GTA. Club rides take place on roads throughout York, Durham and Simcoe.

The 3 questions proposed by StR were sent to 43 members (17%), of whom 12 (28%) provided written comments (available from NECC). This report is not intended to summarize all comments but to integrate them in an overall commentary on the future direction of StR.

2. SUMMARY RESPONSES TO StR QUESTIONS

- How do you see the cycling movement developing in the next 1-3 years?

A complete response would require a comprehensive discussion and definition of “the cycling movement” which is almost certainly not a homogenous entity – and this reality underlies essentially all of this commentary. In brief, as a result of population changes and shifts in societal values, there will be continued expansion of “sport/competitive road cycling” on the open road, continued activism - as well as some progress -for initiatives that are directed at creating “bike friendly cities” and increasing conflict between the objectives of these segments and the actions and perceived rights of other road users.

- What role do you see for the Share the Road Coalition?

In the most general sense it could be expressed as effecting a change in the attitudes and behavior of drivers regarding the cyclists with whom they share the road. StR was created out of a tragedy and could elect to focus on issues directly related to reducing the risk of such tragedies in the future. There is a significant opinion within NECC that this is the appropriate direction for StR. StR appears to have extended its vision beyond these immediate goals and opinion varies within NECC on whether this is appropriate. The emphasis of StR on “Bike Friendliness” and “Active Communities” can be seen as embodying a wider perspective than is consistent with a primary objective of improving Cyclists’ Safety.

- What do you think should be Share the Road's main priorities?

Advocacy and education regarding the obligations of motorists for the safety of cyclists, including penalties and enforcement for dangerous and careless drivers (Greg’s Law and beyond), ensuring passage of the Cheri DiNovo 1 metre passing legislation (Bill 174) and the 1 metre paved shoulders (Norm Miller) Bill 100, plus the parallel requirement for education of cyclists on their rights and responsibilities.

3. THE “CYCLING MOVEMENT” - WHICH CONSTITUENCY SHOULD StR PRIMARILY SERVE?

It is possible to divide the cycling population into subgroups – at least for the purpose of discussion of the various issues that could be addressed by StR :

Sport/Competitive Cyclists: mostly ride on the “open road” outside urban areas; ride racing bikes; wear colorful spandex; almost all wear helmets; often ride in groups (some large); interested in fitness, training and often competition. This group has increased in size dramatically as charities have embraced road cycling for fund raising events.

Past-time Cyclists: more likely to ride suburban streets; prefer bike paths to roads; ride various styles of bikes; adults less likely to use helmets; ride solo or in small groups.

Urban Cyclists: primarily cycle alone on city streets either because they live there and need to use the streets to exit the city and/or use bikes primarily for transportation within the city; bike couriers are a further sub-group.

NECC opinion includes “lumpers” who would argue that StR should advocate for the needs of all sectors and “splitters”, who would argue that StR arose in the context of Sport Cycling and should focus on the needs of that sector.

All of these sectors are expected to grow under the influence of forces such as: growth in road bike sales as the “mountain bike revolution” transfers to the road; municipalities becoming increasingly committed to creation of bike lanes and bike paths; the response of the population to the “carbon neutral” message; and the greater level of interest in activity in the aging boomer population.

4. WHAT SHOULD BE THE ROLE OF SHARE THE ROAD

There is a reasonable consensus within NECC that StR’s primary role should be to advocate for measures to improve the safety of cyclists who share the road with motor vehicles. This encompasses the framework of enforcement and penalties for dangerous and careless drivers (Greg’s Law), Cheri DiNovo’s 1 metre passing legislation Bill 174, Norm Miller’s paved shoulder Bill 100 and a large component of advocacy and education regarding the rights and behavior of both cyclists and motorists.

In this view there would be a lesser role for StR in supporting initiatives such as bike paths, rails to trails initiatives, rental bike programs, cycling as a “wellness” activity etc. While no one would disagree that cities/communities should be more “Bike Friendly” by implementing these measures, as advocated by StR, this places an emphasis on infrastructure that risks diverting attention from the immediate and pressing safety problem created by the behavior of motorists on the open road.

StR has the potential to become the major cycling safety advocacy group in Canada. It would be worthwhile to reflect on why the Toronto Cyclists Union seems to have the ear of the media in the GTA (at least on CBC) and how StR can take its place. The vast majority of cyclists are not well served by this organization with their irrational approach to such issues as helmet wearing.

Some side comments on helmets: Most if not all cycling clubs require helmets to be worn on all club rides and very few Sport/Competitive cyclists would ever consider riding without a helmet. Helmet use may be less prevalent in the Past-time and Urban cyclist subgroups but NECC would not advocate making helmet use a focus of StR’s attention. It should simply be regarded as a “given”, since excessive focus may divert attention from the cyclist’s responsibility to ride in a

safe manner and could reinforce in the mind of motorists that the cyclists “know” they are at risk and may “deserve” what happens to them when they “dare to share the road” with motor vehicles.

5. WHAT ARE THE ISSUES FACING CYCLISTS AND CORRESPONDING PRIORITIES FOR StR

First priority group

Careless and aggressive drivers – cases of carelessness, aggression and abuse to members of the club are very frequent. The most effective process leading to a change in this culture of road rage is unclear but it will clearly take a massive educational campaign in addition to some of the specific steps noted below.

An essential goal has already been achieved through Greg’s Law but still 5 cyclists in Quebec were killed recently, with impunity. Additional legislation and/or better enforcement are needed to prosecute and convict drivers who injure cyclists whether a result of carelessness, recklessness, or aggression.

The key next step is ensuring passage of the Cheri DiNovo Bill 174, 1 metre safe passing law. This must be accompanied by widespread public education by government and advocacy groups around the intent of the law, how it will be enforced and implications for motorists and cyclists.

Specifically, it would be important to investigate the following points:

- In US States where a 3ft rule was implemented, what is known about its effect on road safety for cyclists?
- In those States, what were the elements of any publicity campaign surrounding its introduction (just as one example, did it make it clear that the rule is 3ft from the bike, not the edge of the roadway)?
- What is known about any changes in enforcement procedures that were introduced in those States following implementation?
- The applicable section of the Ontario HTA that it would replace or modify would appear to be 148(6). This requires passers to move as far left as possible and the vehicle being passed to move as far right as possible. It would be interesting to obtain a legal opinion of how a 3ft amendment would alter rights and responsibilities of vehicle operators and detection and prosecution of offenders.

The Norm Miller Bill 100, 1 metre paved shoulders for “certain highways”, is also critically important and, beyond that, we need a province-wide commitment to building paved shoulders on all roads.

A practical initiative that could be pursued by StR in parallel with these initiatives would be to promote Sign Planting as discussed in the following document:

How_to_plant_Share
_the_Road_signs_in_

Antiquated bike laws and draconian enforcement. Our laws date from a bygone era. Enforcement and penalties for not having a bell or reflective strips on the bike in daylight and prohibition of flashing red lights on bikes, serve no public good and are simply the basis for

harassment by police, as is enforcement of a rule for “foot on the ground” at stop signs. Rolling stops should be permitted under the Highway Traffic Act – as they are in some US States, such as Idaho. With these changes in place, police would be able to focus on the real problem of the truly “rogue” bike rider.

An interesting related issue that may need clarification, is double-file riding. Rides organized by cycling clubs have an explicit policy or practice of riding double file. There is reason to believe this can be safer than single file in that it may “prevent” motorists from “squeezing past” when traffic is approaching from the other direction. The Highway Traffic Act does not explicitly prohibit double file riding but can be interpreted to preclude it. Certainly the public and police often act as if it is a breach of the law, while many cyclists regard it as a necessary safety tactic.

Second Priority Group

Careless and aggressive cyclists – these behaviours range from those resulting from simple incompetence to those involving confrontational activism. If the above measures are implemented, the credibility of the “cycling community” will only be maintained if there is an improvement in the riding practices of cyclists.

This was well captured in a recent (Nov 1, 2010) Globe and Mail essay – “I’m afraid of cyclists” (<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/facts-and-arguments/im-afraid-of-cyclists/article1778691/>). Some members of NECC would go so far as to support testing and licensing of bike riders as a way of achieving this. StR could have an important role in this educational process.

Bike Friendly Infrastructure – there has been an evident recent acceleration in development of bike paths, multiuse trails and bike lanes in Ontario communities and planning of such facilities. This is to be encouraged and could benefit from guidance from StR.

Casual observation identifies a number of problems with the developing cycling infrastructure:

- Bike lanes on roads that sport cyclists would not normally choose to use. Ultimately, the solution on such roads may have to be physical separation between bike lanes and the roadway
- Bike lanes that start and end in an unpredictable way and -at least at the moment - do not interconnect
- Bike facilities at public transit stations that have no “bike friendly” connection to residential areas
- Cycling-related road markings that have an uncertain and unexplained purpose (a current issue in Newmarket)
- Drains that run parallel to the road
- Sensors at stoplights that do not respond to the presence of cyclists – a problem in rural areas, in particular
- Rural roads that are re-paved or re-built without provision for a paved shoulder
- In general, a situation in Ontario that lags behind Quebec’s Route Verte.

6. CONCLUSION

The Mission Statement on the StR website could be argued to underemphasize the issues that are considered to be of primary importance in this commentary – specifically those measures that have the potential to reduce the risk to cyclists from aggressive and incompetent drivers. While all the initiatives undertaken by StR so far have been valuable, there is perhaps an opportunity through a strategic review, to identify those that should be given the highest priority. Points for consideration, when examining and/or revising the organization’s mission statement, to reflect its priorities, are given in the Appendix.

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APPENDIX – COMMENTS ON THE MISSION STATEMENT ON THE SHARE THE ROAD WEBSITE

Our Mission (*NECC comments*)

To make Ontario bicycle friendly for everyone by:

“Bicycle friendly” seems like too innocuous a term to use when the real issue is prevention of harm

Enhancing access for bicyclists on roads and trails

What does access to roads mean? – surely they are accessible now – the point is they are not safe because of the way in which motorists interact with cyclists.

Does access to trails simply mean availability i.e. increased number of trails? If so, perhaps it should say so, if that is indeed a priority for the organization.

Improving safety for all bicyclists

Reference to safety from harm due to motor vehicle accidents would be more explicit

Educating citizens on the value and importance of safe bicycling for healthy lifestyles and communities.

Seems to miss the point – the issue is how to achieve safe cycling, not telling people that it is important.

The meaning of the phrase “value of safe cycling to communities” is murky. The value of safe cycling is readily apparent and primarily benefits the cyclist who avoids injury.

Our Mandate:

The Share the Road Cycling Coalition will represent all cyclists - children, tourists, commuters, recreational riders, mountain bikers and racers.

Well OK but do you really mean it – what initiatives have been undertaken for mountain bikers, for example?

To provide safe and effective cycling facilities throughout Ontario and across the country.

“Effective” does not seem to serve a useful purpose here

“Facilities” implies infrastructure other than existing roads and overlooks the role of legislation and enforcement in cycling safety on “normal” roads.

Our Values:

The Coalition will work in partnership with other non-profit organizations, the business community and local, provincial and federal governments

Our Vision:

To make Ontario the most bicycle friendly place in the world.

Why not simply say the “safest place in the world for cycling”
