



WINNIPEG TRAILS ASSOCIATION

December 30th, 2015

ATTN: Susanne Parent

Subject: South Manitoba Legislative Building Grounds - Bicycle Infrastructure Alignment

Dear Ms.Parent,

Winnipeg Trails thrives on connectivity. For more than a decade, we have been working cooperatively with our partners to fill gaps and create a growing network of all-user trails and on-road bicycle facilities. Our vision is to see a continuous network that is well-designed, reliable and predictable for all users, regardless of age, mode, skill level, or ability.

As anyone familiar with walking/cycling around Winnipeg knows, our trails system still contains a bevy of functional gaps. The intent of this letter is to highlight one small portion located on provincial property just south of Manitoba's Legislative Building - and to look for a solution. We would like to ensure that this particular corridor is not encouraging illegal behaviour, is well maintained, is properly signed and provides protection for people on bicycles from motor vehicles. We believe that this is an opportunity for an easy, but important, fix and a great way to put forth a modern, healthy and sustainable image of the province of Manitoba.

The Site

The area in question is the linkage between the the Osborne/Granite intersection and the east terminus of the Assiniboine protected bike lane at Kennedy. Its importance as a transportation and recreation corridor stems from lying along a river at the junction of three of Winnipeg's highest density neighbourhoods: downtown, Osborne Village and the West End...also one of Canada's "Top Ten" neighbourhoods for walking and cycling commute share (StatsCan). A key bicycle commuting route to/from downtown, this corridor has long been an important recreational cycling link between trails and parkways. For example, it is critical for families traveling to Winnipeg's most popular tourist destination (The Forks). Due to heavy motor vehicle volumes on all of the available parallel streets (Broadway, St.Mary's, River, Stradbrook, York, etc.) few safe alternatives exist for the growing number of people wishing to travel downtown by bicycle.

In the last few years, numerous new bicycle-related projects in the surrounding area (the Osborne bridge rehabilitation, the Assiniboine bikeway, the Forks' bicycle network, etc..) have increased the feasibility of cycling to/from this section. As such, its importance has risen and the volume of people riding bicycles has increased dramatically. Our own 2015 traffic counts showed found peak June cycling traffic on Assiniboine (near Edmonton) higher than 300 people on bicycle per hour in the afternoon rush!

In the near future, two additional barriers to cycling in the vicinity (condominium construction near Donald St./Assiniboine and a Main Street crossing) will be removed, further adding to the usage levels.

This very well-used corridor through the south grounds of one of Manitoba's most important landmarks is clearly both strategically and functionally significant.

The issue: compliance, wrong-way and sidewalk cycling

Often, observing user behaviour is the best indication of the success of the underlying infrastructure. Even a brief visit to this site is revealing. On one morning site visit to collect data in the fall, we counted just 12% of westbound people on bicycles using the path meant as the "prescribed" route. Most importantly, the vast majority (63%) chose instead to cycle contraflow on the road. Another 25% chose to ride on the sidewalk, thereby avoiding the contraflow risk but risking conflict with pedestrians.

Such compliance issues always indicate an underlying design problem, and in our view, it is undesirable to see it happening on provincial property when a simple design fix would rectify the issue. The reasons for these behaviours are numerous: poor sightlines near the bottom of the stairs next to the statue of Louis Riel, perceived CPTED issues under the bridge, passability and reliability issues related to flooding, the desire to avoid unnecessary climbing or backtracking, improper turning radii, and simple practical necessities like the desire to take the direct route to the southbound left turn to Osborne Village. Relying on enforcement to "rectify" the behaviour would be impractical, counter-productive and unsuccessful.



The brief data collection effort confirmed years of ongoing observation and anecdotal evidence from our users: that people wish to travel directly via the easiest, shortest most obvious way.

In short, the majority of westbound people on bicycles are traveling in the wrong direction against the flow of traffic (or riding illegally on the sidewalk) through faulty design on provincial property, whereas eastbound users are being encouraged to mix with traffic unnecessarily. Importantly, this also means that a significant number of *potential* users - those who would feel least comfortable taking any risks at all - are likely still avoiding the area or cycling less than they otherwise would. All of this could be solved with continuous, predictable infrastructure.



fig. 2 Contra-flow. The end of the Assiniboine bikeway from the perspective of a westbound person on a bicycle. According to a brief Winnipeg Trails site visit to document behaviour, 62% of westbound bicycle traffic chose to ride against the flow of traffic along the most direct route.



fig. 1 Sidewalk riding. After observing traffic, Winnipeg Trails found that 25% of westbound bicycle traffic chose to ride on the sidewalk - a common behaviour in the area.

A potential solution

This scenario represents a significant opportunity for a permanent fix and a chance to showcase best practices. The right-of-way has few physical or traffic volume constraints that might otherwise limit realignment. There is ample space around trees/in medians and low automobile traffic volumes. The road surface quality has already deteriorated significantly and is clearly in need of rehabilitation.

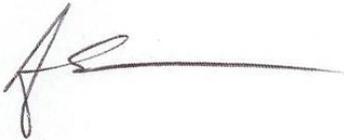
In our view, it is advisable to revisit this site with a goal of providing a preferred, safe and continuous route westbound and eastbound for all bicycle users along the current desire line. There would be opportunities to make pedestrian improvements in the area at the same time.

From our experience with similar projects, the potential changes here are straightforward and will be effective so long as the goal of offering predictability and a design that matches user behaviour is followed.

There are a few options to choose from. Shared space principles could be considered to continue alleviating conflicts between automobiles and pedestrians in the currently traffic calmed area between the pond and statue popular with tourists. Construction of a new direct route designed specifically for bicycles seems feasible without undue effect on the surroundings. The need to resurface the roadway could be an opportunity to both enhance the beauty of the surroundings and improve safety with aesthetic and functional paving.

This is a priority for us and we would like to offer our help. Our expertise could enable you to move quickly to a functional design, should you wish to use it. We would be happy to provide best practice examples, sit down to review site plans with staff, or suggest qualified the professional planning, landscape and engineering firms who would be up to the task. Our hope is to see a plan in place in anticipation of yet another Manitoba bicycle boom in the spring of 2016. We welcome a meeting, site visit or phone call anytime to discuss, at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Anders Swanson

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CC: Hon. Jennifer Howard (MLA for Fort Rouge), Mr. Rob Altemeyer (MLA for Wolseley), Hon. Deanne Crothers (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors), Councillor Jenny Gerbasi (Councillor Fort Rouge - East Fort Garry, City of Winnipeg), Councillor Janice Lukes (Chair, Infrastructure and Public Works, City of Winnipeg), Mr. Mark Cohoe (Executive Director, Bike Winnipeg), Ms. Katy Walsh (Province of Manitoba Active Transportation Coordinator), Ms. Stephanie Whitehouse (City of Winnipeg Active Transportation Coordinator), Mr. Jean Dorge (Grounds Manager)