

Better bike infrastructure would make Edmonton safer for pedestrians and cyclists in winters

Study finds bikers choose sidewalks in the winter because lanes aren't cleared.

By: Jeremy Simes Metro Published on Fri Dec 09 2016



Pedestrian Deb Woudsma, who's had a few run-ins with cyclists, says more cycling infrastructure would make Edmonton safer.

Mark Butt says walking along Stony Plain Road as it turns into 104 Avenue near Oliver made him nervous — cyclists would narrowly swerve around him on the sidewalk.

They were “nearly forcing me onto the road itself on many occasions,” Butt said.

He added that most of the cyclists, “did not even use their bells to notify me they were coming up.”

Butt's comments come in light of a leaked Edmonton Police email, in which an officer says “undesirables” are cycling on sidewalks along 118 Avenue, in the city's northeast near Wayne Gretzky Drive.

The force had launched an operation in the area, ticketing those who've been breaking the law — which includes cyclists riding on sidewalks.

Police had ticketed Jorg Schlagheck for cycling on the sidewalk. He intends to fight the ticket because he believes the sidewalk was the safest option.

Edmonton police didn't provide comment Thursday on the email or biking on sidewalks by press time.

Though the Edmonton Bicycle Commuters Society has said it generally doesn't condone cycling on sidewalks, some riders have argued 118 Avenue is too busy and fast, and that the sidewalk is the safest option.

But as Metro is discovering, the issue of cyclists riding on sidewalks extends past 118 Avenue. It's city-wide.

Research by **Manish Shirgaokar, assistant professor in urban planning at the University of Alberta**, shows Edmonton cyclists ride on sidewalks or the road because bike lanes are often covered by snow in the winter.

“The cyclists reported that sometimes vehicle drivers harassed them, did not obey the traffic rules, and were generally unaware of how to share the road with cyclists,” according to Shirgaokar's research paper.

Shirgaokar's research found that some experienced cyclists also rode on sidewalks or multipurpose trails because they were wary of the lack of space on main roads during the winter.

But when riders choose the sidewalk, they can conflict with pedestrians.

Pedestrian Deb Woudsma has had a few run-ins with riders cycling on the sidewalk along University Avenue from 109 Street to 104 Street.

“I'm amazed and annoyed when cyclists, heading east, get upset when you do not move out of their way — they are riding on the sidewalk,” she said. “Edmonton is not a cyclist-friendly city.”

More bike lanes would help reduce such conflicts, Woudsma said.

“When one considers the environment, financial, and even health issues, cycling infrastructure is imperative for all citizens in a city that I assume is progressive,” she said. “It's about safety, too.”

Edmonton is geared to install a new cycling grid by next summer. There will be lanes along 104 Avenue, 102 Avenue and 100 Avenue, and on 106 Street, 103 Street and 99 Street. Planters and small curbs will separate traffic.

As for 118 Avenue, which is outside the downtown network, the city has identified a need for a route around the popular road. Edmonton will provide a report that details a potential track for that area in late 2017.

Butt changed his route once the 102 Avenue bridge opened — the extra-wide sidewalk meant ample room for pedestrians and cyclists to share.

“Introducing similar, wide sidewalks or separate bike lanes would be a good start,” he said. “In areas that it's not fiscally feasible, introduce rules surrounding best conduct by cyclists, perhaps banning them from sidewalks in some neighbourhoods.”

Source: **Metro News**

URL: <http://www.metronews.ca/news/edmonton/2016/12/09/clash-edmonton-sidewalks-better-bike-infrastructure.html>