



Bike to the Future

By Jackie Avent

Imagine this scene in the not too distant future: A middle-aged man rides his bicycle along Donald Street towards downtown. He is riding on the newly paved designated bike lane separated from the rest of traffic by a wide curb painted bright yellow for visibility. It's early spring, and it snowed a heavy sticky snow the night before. Thankfully, the bike lane has been plowed before the street, leaving him able to pass by the string of single occupancy vehicles tied up by the deep and slushy snow in the driving lanes.

When he comes to the red light at River Avenue, he is thankful for the opportunity to catch his breath before the gradual climb over the Midtown bridge. Beside him, a woman pulling a bicycle trailer with a bundled toddler stops too, and they share pleasantries about the weather and longer days.

Although the marked bicycle route is no longer physically separated by a curb when it goes over the bridge, the lines have been repainted to give the cyclists more room to manoeuvre around the curb lane. The public education "share-the-road" campaigns and the emphasis on cycling in Manitoba driver's education classes have increased the awareness of cycling in the city, so as the cyclist crosses the bridge the cars that pass give him a wide berth.

Cyclists become a priority

Just on the other side of Broadway he turns into the back lane and stops behind his workplace where his employer has just installed a bike cage due to the increased number of employees that are cycling to work. He secures his bike and, panniers in hand, ascends the elevator. As he gets ready for his day, he is already looking forward to the ride home. As a cyclist, the time on his bike before and after work are his favourite times of the day.

Sound too good to be true, especially here in Winnipeg? A group of committed and energetic Winnipeggers would like

to make this a reality. Bike to the Future, a non-profit organization started after summer 2006's intense focus on cycling, is a voluntary, inclusive group of concerned cyclists working to make cycling in Winnipeg a safe, enjoyable, accessible and convenient transportation choice year-round. Those involved envision a city where cycling is embraced as the preferred mode of transportation, where cycling is integrated into urban design and planning, and where Winnipeg is recognized as a leader in cycling infrastructure and programs.



Winnipeg cyclists rode to raise awareness during the fall civic election. Photo by Ian Mauro

The formalized organization came out of the Bike to the Future Forum held on Wednesday September 20th, 2006 at the University of Winnipeg. Over 100 Winnipeg cyclists came together to discuss their vision for cycling in Winnipeg and to share their ideas about what is needed to make cycling better and safer in our city. The evening was organized in two parts—the first where the participants had the opportunity to hear presentations about Cycling in other Canadian Cities, the City of Winnipeg's

Parkway System, and the City of Winnipeg's Active Transportation study. The second half of the evening was participatory in nature and provided working stations where attendees could discuss various issues about cycling in Winnipeg.

After the forum, the municipal election provided an ideal opportunity to raise the awareness of cycling in the City of Winnipeg. Bike to the Future created a questionnaire that was distributed to all municipal candidates asking for their vision of cycling in the city and what they were going to do to improve infrastructure for commuter cyclists in Winnipeg. This process helped Winnipeg cyclists to be named "Most Effective Lobby Group" during the election.

An ambitious agenda over the coming year

Since the civic election, Bike to the Future has been busy meeting with city and provincial leaders to advance recommendations made in the Bike to the Future Forum Report and getting organized to pursue an ambitious agenda over the coming year, including a membership drive and continued advocacy for infrastructure improvements. The organization has also been a strong participant in trail-development groups for Marconi (new trail in River East—Transcona), WinSmart (new trail phase one from Forks to Pembina), and Bishop Grandin Greenway

Inside This Issue	
Climate Champions	Page 3
SPIN Urban Farming	Page 5
Small Farm Challenge Winners	Page 7
Poplar-Nanowin Rivers Park	Page 10
100 Mile Manitoba	Page 11

Bike to the Future

continued from page 1

(new trail along Bishop Grandin that will eventually connect to Fort Whyte), as well as on a stakeholder committee for public consultations about the redevelopment of the Disraeli Bridge and Overpass. While the focus of the group is on cycling as transportation, this is seen as including bike lanes, designated routes on public streets and also multi-use pathways as part of an interconnected bike route network.

At this point, Bike to the Future is in the process of becoming incorporated as a not-for-profit, member-based organization in Manitoba. Individuals can purchase a membership for \$10, or

families can become members for an annual fee of \$20. The membership fees will go towards the coordination of activities and lobbying for better cycling infrastructure in Winnipeg.

We hope the ride described above isn't that far away after all.

People interested in becoming involved with Bike to the Future can visit our website at www.biketothefuture.org or e-mail biketothefuture@gmail.com. An e-mail list is used to regularly communicate information to interested Winnipeg cyclists and regular monthly meetings are held at the Manitoba Eco-Centre, 3rd Floor, 303 Portage Avenue from 5:30 pm—7:00 pm on the second Tuesday of every month. For more information call 925-3773. We look forward to seeing you there!

ECO

Recommendations from the Bike to the Future Forum included:

The City and Province should:

- Encourage and celebrate cycling as a healthy form of transportation
- Recognize the diversity of citizens who cycle for various reasons, from recreational to commuting, in summer and winter.

The City should:

- Adopt the recommendations of the Active Transportation Study, which include:
 - Hiring an Active Transportation coordinator
 - Forming an Active Transportation

Advisory Committee

- A detailed action plan for active transportation with time frames
- A comprehensive active transportation network citywide
- Dedicated funding, at least 3% of Public Works—Streets capital budget for roadways, reflecting the number of cyclists using roads.
- Develop a detailed plan for a citywide network of commuting routes
- Integrate cycling needs into all road construction
- Integrate transit with cycling.

The Province should:

- Re-examine the Highway Traffic Act to meet the needs of cyclists
- Build on the low cost helmet program and offer other incentives to encourage cycling
- Develop a bicycle policy in the Ministry of Transportation like the government of Québec.

Manitoba Public Insurance and partners should:

- Educate drivers and cyclists on safety and mutual respect.



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