

Cycling on rural roads poses dilemma for Region

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where they're going. Dubbed "The Road to Change", the plan is the subject of public meetings next week.

In the past year, the Region has moved to a new standard for cycling infrastructure on its roads within urban areas. Halton is currently planning to include 1.5 metre bike lanes on Derry and Tremaine Roads in Milton when it widens them this year.

However, it hasn't included such dedicated bike lanes in rural areas.

Drawn by the hilly and scenic Niagara Escarpment, cyclists, including large training groups, from across Halton and outside the region have for years used low traffic roads in north Burlington, Milton and Halton Hills for exercise, competition and fun.

Both Regional roads like Tremaine and Derry as well as roads under the responsibility of the local municipality like Appleby and Bell School Lines are famous amongst the cycling community.

Cycling within Halton's urban areas hasn't been as successful, at least as a source of transportation rather than simply pleasure.

An average 7 per cent of all trips made in the morning peak period by

travellers in Oakville, Burlington, Milton and Halton Hills were by walking or bicycling, compared to 81 per cent by automobile, according to the University of Toronto's Transportation Tomorrow Survey of 2006, data that is used by municipalities like Halton Region to develop transportation master plans.

By comparison, perhaps due to the benefit of working where they live, 29 per cent of people in central Toronto walk or cycle, slightly less than the 32 per cent who use automobiles. Across Toronto as a whole, including the suburban areas of Scarborough, Etobicoke and North York, 11 per cent walk or cycle while 60 per cent go by car, the TTS survey shows.

Being successful in attracting cyclists hasn't always meant Halton's rural roads are safe, however.

Lauren Cooper, 18, was struck and killed by a pickup truck while Rollerblading just metres from her Second Line home in north Milton the night of July 13, 2006. Last June, a judge found Stephen Alchin, a Halton Hills resident, guilty of leaving the scene of an accident causing death.

A month prior to Cooper's death, Burlington's Greg Stobbart, an off-duty OPP officer and triathlete, was taking a midday bike ride as part of



The lack of designated bike lanes on rural roads, especially in north Halton, has raised safety concerns for Region officials. Most Regional rural roads are too narrow and not meant to be designated cycling areas, according to the Region's 2004 Cycling and Pedestrian Infrastructure Plan. *File photo*

his training. Stobbart, 44, was riding north on Tremaine Road, near Derry Road, in Milton when he was clipped by the side mirror of a truck as its driver attempted to overtake the cyclist. Stobbart died as a result of his injuries.

Stobbart's widow, Elanor McMahon, has since started both the annual memorial Greg's Ride, held in rural Milton for the past four years, and Burlington-based Share the Road Coalition, a bicycling issues think tank.

Share the Road has recently released a green paper, found at www.sharetheroad.ca. One of the paper's recommendations is for the Province to create a \$20 million fund for encouraging cycling infrastructure, policies and programs in Ontario.

"The amount represents the provincial component to the HST which...

will be applied to bikes, bike parts and products, and is based on data from the Bicycle Trade Association of Canada," the paper states.

The paper adds provincial investment in cycling infrastructure, including in rural areas, can have an economic benefit. It states Quebec has invested over \$200 million in cycling initiatives including the 4,300 km cycling route, "La Route Verte", launched in 2007. That province is earning an estimated \$130 million a year as a result of this initiative, the paper states.

Share the Road believes more cycling infrastructure is necessary to help combat two of the reasons it says were cited in a survey on why people don't cycle more often— concern for safety on the road and not enough bike routes to where people want to go.

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