

Editorial

Making our roads safer for cycling

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The provincial government has heard some passionate pleas to improve safety for cyclists over the years, but few have been as poignant as the one expressed this week by the husband of a woman killed while cycling here last month. It merits thoughtful consideration by the province.

Edmund Aunger and his wife, Elizabeth Ann Sovis, of Edmonton, Alta. were pedaling along the Confederation Trail from Borden-Carleton in July when they had to leave the trail and ride on the side of a highway to get to their bed and breakfast in Hunter River. It was along Route 13, a two-lane highway with no paved shoulders, that Sovis was struck by a vehicle. In a victim impact statement posted online, Aunger recalled leading his wife along the road when he heard a loud band behind him and noticed cars stopping. He turned back to see his wife lying on the side of the road, a deep gash on her forehead, eyes glazed, blood running from her mouth.

He grappled with guilt - he typically rode behind his wife on such trips, but this time took the lead to guide her to their bed and breakfast destination - but he says the province also bears some responsibility for his wife's death. It was Tourism P.E.I.'s Cycling Guide 2012 that "heavily influenced" his and his wife's decision to travel to the province for a bike tour, he said. The guide describes how cyclists can serenely traverse the province via the Confederation Trail, yet "nowhere in the guide does the province warn that Route 13, like other suggested highways, has no paved shoulders and presents a serious danger for cyclists."

Aunger has sent copies of his victim impact statement to government officials urging them to build a transportation network that is safe not only for motorists, but cyclists. Specifically, he suggests paved shoulders on its highways, lanes for cycling and more dedicated cycling paths.

These have been recommended before by cycling groups and others interested in promoting cycling for fitness and as an alternative means of transportation. But the appeal by Edmund Aunger is a particularly powerful one that must not be ignored. As a tourist destination, the province invests heavily in marketing the province. If it intends to promote the Island as a welcome place for cyclists, then it must ensure that reasonable safety measures - paved shoulders, more cycling lanes and dedicated cycling paths - are in place to accommodate them. Government can't undo the tragic events of last month or lessen the loss or pain of the loved ones of Elizabeth Ann Sovis, but it can heed their suggestions for change that may well spare others their grief.