

Open letter to the Chief, Sudbury Regional Police and to the Mayor, City of Greater Sudbury
cc: Northern Life; the Sudbury Star, CBC Radio

Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you on behalf of all of the cyclists who cycle in Sudbury. I am requesting that the city and our police force implement actions to change dangerous motorist driving behaviours on our roads in order to make them safer and to encourage more cyclists to share our roads.

I am an avid cyclist who regularly cycles on Sudbury roads. I am a recreational cyclist, as well as one who uses her bike for active transportation. I am also a driver who owns her own car. As someone who is semi-retired and wishes to live an active and healthy lifestyle, my dream is to see bicycles and cars safely and happily co-exist on Sudbury roads.

I joined the Sudbury Cyclists Union in order to effectuate change in Sudbury and work towards developing a safer and healthier city. My experience with the SCU has brought untold advantages to me. Through the Rainbow Routes Association, I was trained in Can-Bike 2, which is a 2 day advanced course on defensive cycling and which teaches participants how to cycle safely in an urban environment. Theory and on-road practice provide a cyclist with excellent skills like proper lane positioning, effective and efficient cycling in heavy traffic and collision avoidance.

Also through the RRA, I recently took Can-Bike instructor training, and will be a certified instructor within the next few weeks. The Canadian Cycling Association's CAN-BIKE program is a series of courses on all aspects of cycling safely and enjoyably on the road and it provides a nationally standardized set of courses that can be taught through a variety of organizations who are interested in education, safety and health. For the first time, Sudbury will have 6 Can-Bike instructors who will be teaching a variety of Can-Bike courses in Sudbury. We are already planning how we will begin training Sudbury cyclists to legally and safely cycle in this city.

As a result of Can-Bike training, I have adopted what I believe to be good cycling practices. I always ride on the right side of the road, and obey all traffic laws. I signal when slowing down and prior to turning, I stop at all stop signs and traffic lights, I use front and back lights, I use proper lane positioning, and I practice courteous and safe cycling techniques.

Because of the cycling education that I received, I went from being a nervous cyclist who often cycled on the sidewalks and on boulevards to someone who can confidently cycle in the heaviest of Sudbury's traffic. But I am in a minority in this city. Every day, I see cyclists cycling in an unsafe way, whether it's riding on the wrong side of the street, or riding at night with dark clothing and no lights, or riding on the wrong way on a one-way street, or riding on the sidewalk. And so many of our adults do not use helmets. Through cyclist education, I hope to assist in changing that.

However, educating cyclists is only one side of the equation. Most non-cyclists tell me that they would never cycle in Sudbury because of the danger on Sudbury roads. Many cyclists persist in cycling on sidewalks because they perceive that they are safer there. Cyclists in Sudbury feel that they are risking

their lives on our roads because of Sudbury drivers who are intolerant towards cyclists or who lack the knowledge of how to safely drive with cyclists on the road.

Recently, the Greater Sudbury Police began handing out tickets for riding illegally on sidewalks. While I agree that cyclists don't belong on our sidewalks, this type of action will not change cycling habits until cyclists feel safe cycling on the road.

I would like to ask the GSPS what they are doing to make our roads safer for cyclists. Cycling on roadways like Lasalle, Barrydowne, Notre Dame, the Kingsway, and others is currently unsafe. Cyclists get honked at by drivers, yelled at and gestured at. This causes anxiety and has the potential of causing serious accidents. Cyclists are passed too closely, and cut off by drivers who are impatient and angry that we're on the road. Cyclists are told to ride on the sidewalk or to get off the road. I've even had one young driver yell at me to move over or he would run me down. Drivers who speed, drive aggressively and unsafely, and who alarm and scare cyclists, certainly don't encourage us to get off the sidewalks and onto the roads.

I understand that budgets don't exist to provide separate cycling facilities like bike lanes on all Sudbury roads, and that building a Sudbury-wide cycling network will take some time. If you can't magically create such an infrastructure and yet still want cyclists to get off the sidewalks, the city needs to proactively change Sudbury motorists' habits. If you do this, I believe that in Sudbury, like in many other cities, we should be able to safely share the road.

I would encourage you to cycle down one of our main arteries in order to personally experience the harassment and danger of cycling on these roads. And I would like to ask you what you are doing to change the dangerous practices demonstrated by some Sudbury drivers. Our Can-Bike instructors and cyclists who have been trained by them will soon be helping to change dangerous cycling habits. But we also need to change dangerous motorist driving habits as well.

Members of the SCU would be very pleased to meet with you to discuss how we can assist in fostering safe driving campaigns and strategies. As cycling advocates, we want to make Sudbury safer for cyclists. We look forward to your response and to dialogue with the police and with the city on how we can effectuate change that will be beneficial for cyclists and motorists alike.

Sincerely,

Rachelle Niemela
Citizen of Sudbury
Member of the Sudbury Cyclists Union
rmniemela@hotmail.com