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By Sonya Hull

Share the road – it's the law

This week is Bike to Work Week in North America, so it's an opportune time to focus on our "Share the Road" mentality in Fredericton - for both cyclists and drivers.

"Share the Road" is not just a suggestion; it's the law. The New Brunswick Motor Vehicle Act Section 176 states: "Every person riding a bicycle upon a roadway has all of the rights and is subject to all of the duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle by this Act, except those provisions which by their very nature can have no application."

But as is human nature, laws get broken in little ways every minute: we go too fast in a slow zone; we do a U-turn; we park in a no-parking spot.

However, many don't consider that honking and crowding a cyclist off the street is breaking the law. Well, it is. But more than that, it's dangerous and anti-social behaviour.

Of course, cyclists must do their part in upholding Section 176. If they have all the rights applicable to a driver of a vehicle, then they too are subject to all the duties and responsibilities.

This means the rules of the road apply equally to cyclists as drivers, and because cyclists aren't protected by metal, an airbag and a seatbelt, they should be doubly cautious of the rules of the road.

Riding too close to the side of the road and curb puts a cyclist at risk for many hazards - sewer grates, debris, potholes, gravel and parked cars. In fact, it's safer to ride at least one metre from the curb.

Most motorists don't realize that cyclists have a right to be in the right-hand lane with them. And when cyclists ride too close to the curb, motorists are tempted to pass them even if there's not enough room to share the same lane. Motorists should wait for oncoming traffic to clear, then pass using the other lane, giving the cyclist space just like they'd give another vehicle.

Given that many large urban centers are vehicle-commuting nightmares, the bike is now a major component of urban transportation. Cities that are bike-friendly generally follow the "5-E" philosophy:

* Engineering (bike parking, designated lanes, etc.);

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- * Encouragement (events and campaigns);
- * Evaluation and planning (political bodies that make changes to existing laws and plan for the future);
- * Education (bike maps and awareness campaigns);
- * and Enforcement (ensuring that both motorists and cyclists obey the rules of the road).

We still have some Es to go, but Fredericton is moving along the 5-E spectrum: bike racks and secure bike parking is being expanded; the trail system is expansive and well-maintained; and bike lanes continue to be installed on appropriate city streets.

This year they're being installed on part of Sunset Drive, between Clements Drive and Main Street. Last week, a local cycling blogger rated the Douglas Avenue bike lane as four out of five stars (maybe he will do York Street next). The one star was lost due to some gravel and several cars parked in the lane. Remember, drivers, that it's illegal to park in a bike lane.

In part due to the Princess Margaret Bridge closure, our cycling numbers have been growing, so it is critical that our community adapts and evolves towards being a more a bike-friendly city - in all the 5 Es.

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