



Sudbury Cyclists Union

October 24, 2014

Re: Improvements to Highway 69 from Estaire Road to Highway 17, and Highway 17 from Highway 69, Sudbury Cyclists Union

The SCU appreciates the opportunity for continued discussion about the proposed project.

We have spoken with some contacts in Sudbury who attended the PIC in September 2014. There were some statements made by your representatives at the PIC that provided additional clarification about the project. These statements include the fact that your project team anticipates additional direction from the province in regards to ensuring that cycling infrastructure is incorporated as the project moves into the detail design phase. This is good news indeed.

We were concerned that your on-line documents and your video identified accommodations for snowmobiles, yet there is no mention at all about cycling accommodations other than references to multi-use trails. Your representatives also acknowledged that there were issues with the legend and that accommodations for cyclists were not clearly identified. We now understand that some of the trails and the bridge being proposed for snowmobiles/pedestrians may be planned to also serve cyclists.

Your representatives' comments provide some level of confidence that our needs will eventually be addressed. It would nevertheless be much better if future maps clearly identify what is being planned for cyclists. Seeing proposed options on maps alongside motorized options would go a long way to assure cyclists that, as promised by the #CycleON Strategy, all roads projects will truly address the needs of all transportation traffic.

We do understand this is a long-range planning study and that you are not yet in a position to do detailed plans. We look forward to the detail design phase of the project, where we hope to see cycling options clearly identified.

We'd like to offer some comments so your project team can understand why we are concerned about the impact of this project on cyclists in the City of Sudbury. Some of these points have been previously stated in previous communications, but they bear repeating for your team.

Our concerns:

1. The SCU advocates for safe cycling infrastructure for all cyclists, all of ages and all abilities. While our responses may have given you the impression that we are focused on cycling tourism, that is not the case. We want to make our streets and highways safe for children, adults, cycling tourists, commuters, and recreational riders. We also need to address the needs of those cyclists who are nervous about cycling on our roads - with good cause in Greater Sudbury. We noted the cycling tourism aspect because we have been involved in the Lake Huron North Shore Cycling Route, and the Georgian Bay Cycling Route feasibility studies; and because we see cycling tourism as a great opportunity for Greater Sudbury. If we are to encourage cycling tourism, we must offer safe infrastructure for those tourists.

However, we are just as concerned for our other cycling populations, including our commuters who most use our road infrastructure. They cannot rely on the vast majority of trails which are unpaved, unlit, and are not plowed in the winter. Many of our trails flood in the spring and during rainy times of the year. The only reliable transportation option currently available to commuters is on-road cycling.

We therefore consider trails to be good for recreational cyclists, but not necessarily for commuters. If trails are to be the best option for commuters in this project, they need to be safe, convenient, available year-round, and have surfaces that can be used by all cyclists.

We would rather see cycle tracks than trails. In any case, we will need assurances that your solutions will meet the requirements of commuters as well as recreational riders.

2. The City of Greater Sudbury currently has a great inequity when it comes to accommodating motorized and cycling traffic on our roads. We have over 3,560 lane kms of roadway, which are always made safe for motorists but not necessarily for cyclists. We have only 24 lane kms of bike lanes, 1.2 lane kms of sharrows, a few hundred meters of cycle track, and 24 lane kms of paved shoulders. Building additional roads (whether municipal or provincial) that do not include cycling infrastructure only widens this gap.

As well, Greater Sudbury does not have the road grid structure that many cities in southern Ontario have. Cyclists are often forced to take busy roads that exceed 80 km an hour in order to reach a destination. There are no other options or choices that we can make. Very few of these roads offer safe cycling infrastructure eg paved shoulders.

3. In Northern Ontario, cities like Greater Sudbury typically only have one major provincial highway that enters/leaves the city in each direction. In our case, this is highway 17 east, highway 17 west, highway 69 south and highway 144 north. Highways 17 east and west, and highway 144 currently do not provide safe cycling infrastructure eg paved shoulders or dedicated, separated parallel road cycling infrastructure. Yet they are the only way to travel to communities outside of our city boundaries.

Highway 69 south currently allows cycling but only to Estaire Road. Beyond Estaire Road, cycling is prohibited, and while cyclists are able to travel south for a while on Estaire Road, that road ends with no options for cyclists to continue cycling south. The implementation of these prohibited sections has already meant that certain areas of the province like Killarney are inaccessible to Sudbury cyclists.

We do not want to see this trend continue and are currently lobbying the government to provide alternatives to reopen closed areas to cyclists. We do not want to see additional prohibited sections implemented without safe provisions being made for cyclists.

4. We question the need to build prohibited roads in Northern Ontario when other divided highways in the southern Ontario and in other provinces allow cycling on wide paved shoulders. In particular, the Trans-Canada Highway in the prairies and in parts of British Columbia allows cycling. In the North, building such roads is a great disservice to cyclists, in particular because other “options” that are offered as alternatives are already too dangerous for cyclists, and there are never any plans included in the scope of these projects

to retrofit the offered alternatives. If each prohibited road in Northern Ontario were to include a paved, parallel cycle path as part of all designs, then we would not be having these discussions.

5. It is unclear to us exactly what the intent is to accommodate cycling traffic coming from Highway 69 South wanting to get to Highway 17. The design map for the Highway 17 bypass shows a snowmobile/pedestrian bridge on a new multi-use trail that parallels highway 17 and then branches off to the Lake Laurentian Conservation Area via a "snowmobile culvert". Will the new multi-use trail be paved and safe for cyclists? When the trail ends at the snowmobile culvert, will cyclists be allowed to continue onto the new 4 lane highway in order to get to Coniston and beyond?

Information on the map indicates that existing lanes will accommodate westbound traffic, so our assumption is that there will be no alternate options for cyclists unless you allow them on the divided highway or you provide separated cycling infrastructure to the Bancroft intersection. If you ban cyclists on this road, cyclists will be forced through the city core in order to eventually get to Highway 17 via the Bancroft bike lanes. This forces cyclists to navigate unsafe streets that do not have cycling infrastructure, in particular Regent and Paris Streets. It's also a very roundabout and inconvenient route for cyclists who want to bypass the city core.

We want to see accommodations for cyclists on this bypass, whether that's wide paved shoulders or separated, paved cycling infrastructure. Currently, cyclists are not prohibited on this bypass. Access should be preserved or a safe option running alongside the 4-lane highway should be provided.

6. Beyond Bancroft Drive, you have indicated in your email that the existing Highway 17 road will have lower traffic volumes and fewer trucks. This is therefore the route that should be taken by cyclists as the alternative to the new realignment that will eventually reach Markstay.

That "existing Highway 17" does not have paved shoulders and is currently dangerous to cyclists. The new alignment will certainly reroute long-distance traffic, but local traffic, including trucks and rush-hour traffic, will continue to pose a danger to cyclists on the existing route. This needs to be addressed before you can state that the existing Highway 17 is a safe alternative to building cycling infrastructure along the new alignment.

7. In regards to the highway 69 portion of this project, you mention providing safe cycling infrastructure between Regent St. and Pioneer Rd. in the form of service roads and a trail. This is great. However, as previously noted, trails need to address the needs of all cyclists. If this trail is to be the only option to travel this section of Highway 69, it needs to be a lighted paved trail wide enough to handle two-way cycling traffic and pedestrians. It also needs to be accessible at all times of the year. In other words, it needs to be a plowed cycle track. Otherwise, you are creating a situation where cyclists will in effect be prohibited from travelling along this road during certain times of the year and certain times of the day.

As well, the section between Regent St. and Pioneer Rd. is only half of the section of highway 69 that is identified in your project map. A strategy needs to be implemented that addresses all of your scope (to Estaire Rd).

8. We are concerned that even though you have stated that the new highways will not see development, this may change in the future. Building safe cycling infrastructure now is much more cost-effective than having to retrofit in the future. This is extremely important if you will not be able to ensure that there will never be development or access to services on these roads.
9. Lastly, we have some concerns about the roundabout that you have identified as a possibility for the first phase of the project at the south ramp terminal of the Highway 17 interchange (intersection and entrance consolidation phase). You show a multi-lane roundabout. Current studies indicate that multi-lane roundabouts are proving to be dangerous to cyclists. We would want to see safe cycling options presented when and if you begin designing this intersection.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide additional input into your preliminary designs.

Sincerely,

Rachelle Niemela
Chair, Sudbury Cyclists Union