

Journey prompted by tragedy

SATURDAY, 20 JULY 2013 02:00 SCOTT TRUDEAU

An Alberta man who embarked on a cross-country cycling campaign after his wife was killed on a bicycle was in Penticton on Friday to talk about his petition against the B.C. government.

Edmund Auger's wife, Elizabeth Sovis, was killed on the first day of their cycling holiday in Prince Edward Island, but he says the same thing could have occurred just as easily in British Columbia.

Auger, 63, is calling his campaign "Ride the Trail for Elizabeth," and is asking for the government to put in place an action plan that would not only complete the Trans Canada Trail but also provide safe cycling trails for everyone.

Auger wants immediate action on those parts of the trail that sit on dangerous highways near Malahat, Nanaimo River, Coquihalla Canyon, Summerland, Cranbrook, Fernie and Sparwood.

Although she was very dedicated to the Trans Canada Trail, Auger noted his wife wasn't a "confident cyclist," and preferred to ride off-road on well-groomed trails as opposed to the streets, which she felt were suited for vehicles.

"For my wife, the most important element was safety," he said. "We wanted someplace we could go where we could be safe."

On July 14, 2012, they'd made arrangements to stay at a bed and breakfast in the Hunter River area, but they couldn't find any way of cycling to their destination, which was four kilometres away with no accessible cycling path.

They were forced to travel on a two-lane highway, and that's when Sovis was struck and killed by a drunk driver.

"It seemed so improbable for someone who never rode on the roads," said Auger, 63, who met his wife when he was 12 years old. "It's been devastating for me, for my family and for my friends."

The two of them were professors at the University of Alberta at the time. Shortly after the incident, Auger retired to pursue his cross-Canada ride.

The government promised to complete the trail by July 1, 2017, in time for Canada's 150th anniversary celebrations. Without any significant plans, Auger doesn't think the trail will be ready in the next four years.

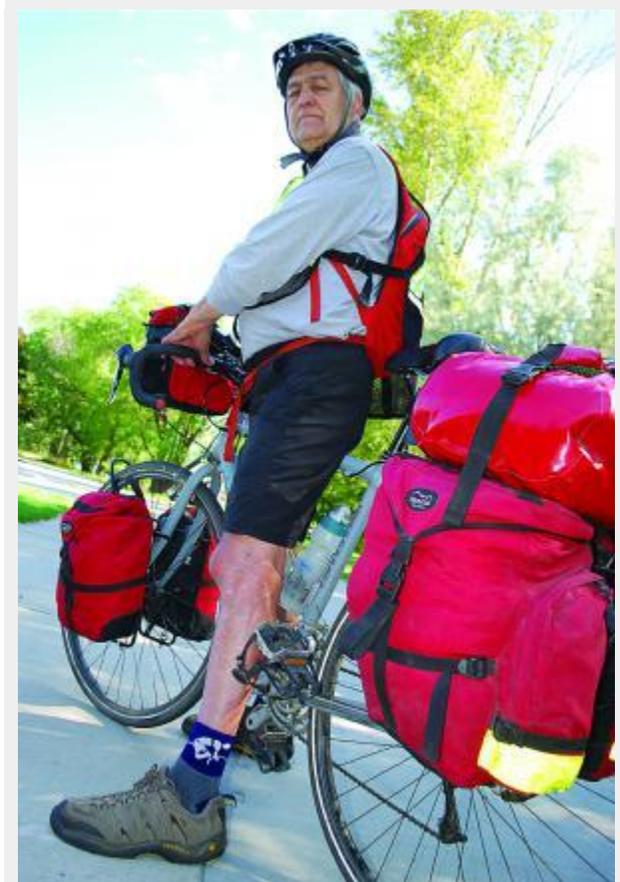
He's written to Premier Christy Clark, and has about 600 names on a petition calling for an action plan for completion of the trail.

He calls the trail - which consists of about 18,000 kilometres of greenway plus about 5,000 km of waterway - a link from one community to the other that unites the country.

He's going to be cycling the trail from Victoria to Charlottetown, in five stages, beginning this month and finishing in July 2017. He's hoping to promote the trail by increasing awareness, rallying support and raising funds.

Auger left Penticton and is heading towards the Kettle Valley Railway Trail towards Chute Lake.

Detailed information on the ride, the petition and Auger's campaign are posted at ridethetrail.ca.



Edmund Auger is biking across the country on the Trans Canada Trail as part of a campaign to ensure B.C.'s sections of the trail are completed by July 1, 2017. Auger was inspired to make the ride after his wife, Elizabeth Sovis, was killed last July while the couple was on their first day of a cycling vacation in Prince Edward Island.